

# TALMUD TORAH 3:6

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom*

**6:** A person who is inspired to fulfill this Mitzva [TT] properly and to be crowned with the \*Keter Torah\* should not occupy himself with other matters; nor should he imagine that he will acquire Torah along with wealth and honor simultaneously. [rather] This is the way of Torah: eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a difficult life - and labor in Torah. It is not your responsibility to complete the task; but you are not free to neglect it. The greater the amount of Torah [you study], the greater the reward -and it is all [measured] by the difficulty involved. (note that much of this Halakha is directly from the Baraita in Avot 6:4 - worth looking at on its own merit, plus to aid in understanding R here)

**Q1:** What type of "inspiration" is R referring to? The original reads: \*Mee shen'sa'o libo\* - (lit. someone whose heart lifted him) - this term shows up in several contexts: Working in the Tabernacle: Shemot (Exodus) 35:21,26; 36,2; War: Melakhim II (2 Kings) 14:10 (parallel: 2Chronicles 25:19), Prayer: Eikhah (Lamentations) 3:41. Why does R use this particular phrase here?

**KS**([Kira Sirote](#)): This question and Q4 share the answer. In R's hashkafah, Keter Torah is acquired by the few who are willing to sacrifice for it. "Mee shen'sa'o libo" refers to the inner conviction and drive to dedicate oneself to Avodat Hashem.

**YF**([Yitzchok Fishman](#)): The inspiration R is talking about is not our obligation to learn the Torah. But when we think about it and realize that the Torah comes directly from Hashem, the inspiration we have then will want to make us devote ourselves totally to Torah. On this R tells us if you wan't to devote yourself totally then don't get involved in outside things.

**Q2:** Why would someone think that he could acquire Torah along with wealth and honor SIMULTANEOUSLY?

**SG** ([Sam Goldberg](#)): Because we are taught that in following Hashem's commandments we will be granted the good things of this world which come from Hashem. We also see that our patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov) were not only close to Hashem but were also wealthy and honored in their time.

**KS:** Some people who are Gedolei Torah are honored for it, and some are even paid for it. R may be saying that if you go into learning with the expectation of being treated this way, you will not be, and you will not succeed.

Alternately, he may be saying that acquiring Torah cannot happen in one's spare time, while pursuing wealth and honor in some other employment. But that would be redundant with the previous statement.

**YF:** I know that R was strongly opposed to teachers taking money for teaching, even for teaching Torah. Could he be hinting to that somehow over here. In Pirke Avot (4:7) Rabbi Tsadok says that one should not gain from Torah, and R says that though people might not like what he is going to say it is the truth and that one is not allowed to benefit in any way from Torah. R brings proof from rabbis mentioned in the Gemara. Hillel, Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa (Taanit 10a), Karna (Ketubbot 105a), R also says that it is a Hillul Hashem to take money for teaching. If he felt so strongly about it maybe he wanted to bring it down here as well.

In Pirke Avot (4:11) Rabbi Yonasan tells us that one who keeps the Torah while he is poor, will eventually keep the Torah in wealth. So one might think that the Mishnah is telling us we can involve ourselves with Torah as well as wealth.

**Q3:** Is the description here of "the way of Torah" an ideal or an "even if" - in other words, "even if this is all you have, still study Torah"?

**KS:** It's realistic. This is what WILL happen - if you're ready to deal with it, you can do it, if not, you're in for a rude shock and you will fail.

**Q4:** Following Q3: if this is an ideal, doesn't this fly in the face of R's moderation model? Also, don't we usually associate this type of asceticism with other religions, and not with Judaism?

**SG:** I thought that that Rabbis also advocated learning "Derech Aretz" - wouldn't this underscore the importance of being involved with the ordinary world of work and commerce?

**KS:** This isn't asceticism, but it is dedication. While Judaism does not renounce material comfort, it doesn't guarantee or glorify it either. The Leviim also did not have much to call their own since they were dedicated to Avodat Hashem. Same with acquiring Torah. (R makes this analogy in an earlier Halakah, right?) This is why R uses the wording "one who is inspired" to acquire Torah.

**YF:** What R is telling us is that if we have to go to an extreme, then the extreme of poverty is better than the extreme of wealth. When living on bread and water one will not have to worry where his next meal is coming from and it will be easier for him to concentrate on his studies.

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