

TALMUD TORAH 3:7

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

7: Perhaps you will say: "I will gather much money, then I will return to study" [or] "I will acquire what I need and then, when I can neglect my business affairs, I will return to study" - if such a thought occurs to you, you will never merit the *Keter Torah*. Rather, make your Torah *Qeva* (a fixed matter, the first priority) and your work *Arai* (temporary, secondary - opposite of *qeva*) - and do not say: "When I have free time, I will study" - perhaps you won't ever have free time.

-Q1: Is this Halakha addressing someone who is already studying and thinking about taking a "leave of absence" or someone who is making a career choice?

KS: The former. He says "return to study", not "begin study".

YF: I would think that in the first part of the Halacha R would be talking to someone who wants to sit and learn all day, but is also worried about parnasah. In the second part -make your Torah *Qeva* and your work *Arai* - he is talking to every Jew.

Q2: Does R literally mean that even entertaining such a possibility permanently disqualifies you from achieving *Keter Torah*?

KS: Realistically, yes. If that's your attitude, you will be permanently sidetracked.

YF: R is trying to tell us that once you involve yourself in making money you will never be satisfied and will not want to stop, and that at the same time you are working you are wasting precious time.

Q3: How do we understand *Qeva*? Accordingly, how do we understand *Arai*?

KS: It's a frame of mind. Qeva might be translated as "vocation" and Arai as "avocation". Qeva is what you ARE and Arai is what you DO.

YF: Qeva would mean your main goal and Arai secondary. Even if you have to work all day and only have a small amount of time to learn your learning should still be more important to you.

Q4: Note that R adds (following the Mishna in Avot) - "perhaps you won't ever have free time." - isn't it important to learn right now, even if you were assured of having free time later?

SG: We are guaranteed at least 24 hours of "free time" once a week, on Shabbat. This would seem the place to begin any commitment to a first priority of study. But, if someone cannot make the commitment to study even on Shabbat, when he does not have to work, how could he possibly make it "qeva" when he is faced with the demands of the work week?

KS: R isn't talking about average every-day type of learning. He's talking about dedication. If I were assured of having free time later, I would say, let me concentrate on something else now, and I will concentrate on Torah then, without distractions. But it doesn't work that way. Dedication means grabbing every spare moment, now and always.

YF: Even if you know you're going to have time later, it is, of course better to learn now - but what R is telling us is that, first of all, if you push it off now you will also push it off later. And that if you use the time now your time later will be better used and you will reach a higher level.

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