

# TALMUD TORAH 3:8

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom*

**8:** In the Torah, it says: (Devarim 30:12-13) "It [Torah] is not in heaven...it is not across the sea...". "It is not in heaven..." means that [Torah] can not be found among the haughty; ["...it is not across the sea..." means] it is not found among those who travel across the sea. Therefore, our sages said: Not everyone who is involved with business becomes wise. And the sages commanded: Minimize your business activities and involve yourself with Torah.

**Q1:** The source text used here - It [Torah] is not in heaven...it is not across the sea...- seems to be referring either to Mitzvot in general or the Mitzva of Teshuva (repentance/return). See Ramban on Devarim 30:11. Why is it applied to Torah study, which is certainly not mentioned in that context?

**YF**([Yitzchok Fishman](#)): "Kasuv Ba-Torah" can be translated as "It is written \*about\* the Torah"; maybe R uses this lashon to argue with the Ramban and those who say otherwise. The Gemara in Eruvin (55a), which the Kesef Mishna mentions, also seems to be talking about Torah.

**YE** ([Yitz Etshalom](#)): This \*Derasha\* (exegesis) first appears in BT Eruvin 55a, along with many other praises of Torah study. So, the question is not so much a challenge to R's understanding of the verses, as much as that of the Gemara. In addition, the phrase "it is not in heaven" is directly aimed at Torah study and application of law in the famous story of Achnai's oven (Bava Metzia 59a). So, why do the Rabbis understand this string of verses (Devarim 30:11-14) as applying to Torah study and mastery? First, let's take a look at the verses:

\*\*\*Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us and impart it to us that we may observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us and impart it to us that we may observe it?" No, the thing is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.\*\*\*

RaShBA - R. Shlomo ibn Aderet (Responsa 1:94) - explains as follows: All Mitzvot depend upon three components: the mouth (teaching and instructing how to fulfill them); the heart (understanding the meaning and intent - and aims - of the Mitzva) and the hands (i.e. - the "acting" parts of the body - which fulfill them.)

Now, at the conclusion of the series of verses in question, we are told: "No, the thing (?) is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe." (v. 14) Since this verse concludes that section and sums it up, once we identify the subject of this verse, that will enlighten us about the

subject of the entire section.

The "mouth" is both teaching and learning (since, as our Rabbis teach, it is much more productive to learn out loud, as opposed to silent reading) - and the "heart" is understanding. Therefore, it is clearly \*possible\* to understand the entire string of verses as referring to Torah study.

In addition, in both the "heavens" case and in the "sea" case, we are told that we have no excuse for not learning it, "and impart it to us" - so clearly, Torah study/teaching is an underlying theme of this section.

**Q2:** What is the connection between haughtiness and excessive involvement in business - that R links them together?

**YF:** One who spends excessive time in business may come to think that it is he and the time he puts in that is making him successful - and come to forget about Hashem.

**YE:** Successful and appropriate Torah study demands total immersion - as R taught in the previous Halakha - make your Torah \*Qeva\* and your work \*'Arai\* (see previous posting). Immersion in anything else prevents this. There are two types of "obsessions" which can get in the way of proper study - internal and external. R (based on the Gemara in Eruvin - and the link within the verses) is teaching us that either type is destructive - immersion in self (arrogance) or immersion in business (of any type). Now, we can look back at the verses in Devarim and reevaluate: (comments in parentheses)

\*\*\*Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today (Mitzvot and their instruction/study) is not too hard for you (no excuses!), nor is it too far away (meaning->). It is not in the heavens (among people who are in their own "heaven" - self-obsessed), that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us and impart it to us that we may observe it?" (these are not the type of people who should be imparting to you - as they themselves are not learned) Neither is it beyond the sea (among people who are always busy with other things), that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us and impart it to us that we may observe it?" No, the thing (Torah - study AND, THEREFORE practice) is very near to you (only if it is near to you - that you are always near to it); it is in your mouth (learning and teaching) and in your heart (thinking and reflecting) for you to observe.(doing).\*\*\*

**Q3:** Following Q2, R's use of "Therefore" is odd - the premises are that Torah is not absorbed by haughty people or people with a lot of other involvements. The conclusion is that therefore we should minimize our business involvement - what does this have to do with haughtiness/pride?

**HH (H.H.):** A person who travels across the sea (e.g., as an explorer) acquires worldly knowledge, but does not find Torah. Therefore, not everyone who acquires worldly knowledge (by successful business involvement) becomes wise.

**YF:** If one lessens his time in business and realizes that everything is from Hashem, he will not come

to haughtiness.

**YE:** Following the answers above, it plays out as follows: Since we need to avoid self-obsession AND outside obsessions, the advice and command of the Rabbis is equally valid regarding business AND arrogance.

**Q4:** Why the two pieces of sagacious advice? Isn't it enough to tell us that we should minimize our business activities - or that serious involvement in business may preclude our intellectual growth?

**YF:** I think that what R is telling us when he says "not everyone involved in business becomes wise" is that we see that some people do become wise even though they are involved in business. What is the secret to those who do? Minimize your business and trust in Hashem which will make you a more humble person and then you will have more free time and will also be able to absorb the Torah easier.

**YE:** The first statement is a "fact" about time usage and Torah - but it doesn't instruct us in a direct fashion. Someone might think that mastery of Torah is an option - but not a command. Therefore, the second statement, which R properly introduces as a command, corrects that misunderstanding.

**Now, why the first comment? Because, from the second alone, I might have thought that I can fulfill the Rabbis' advice by "limiting" my business just a bit and studying just a bit - therefore we are told, factually, people who are seriously involved in business do not, as a rule, gain wisdom.**

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