

THAT DEMANDS EFFORT

by Rabbi Label Lam

If you will go in My decrees and keep My Mitzvos and perform them; then I will provide rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. (Vayikra 26:3)

If you will go in My decrees...if you follow My decrees by engaging in intensive Torah study, with the intention that such study will lead you to observe ... (Rashi: Sifri)

I have always wondered how going in the ways of My decrees translates to engaging in intensive Torah learning. Going means going; "Telechu" not studying! If it means keeping and doing Mitzvos that is mentioned in the second part of the verse. Why is "going" equated with "intensive learning"?

The word for Jewish Law is called "Hallacha" which comes from the root word, "holech" which means "go". Why is Jewish Law called "Hallacha"? What does it have to do with going? We might mistakenly think of as ridged and dogmatic. Just the opposite is true. Life is ever changing and conditions are always in flux. Two situations although similar are never exactly the same. Man is called a "holech" as he goes from station to station but is anything but stationary. He is not a static being.

There are three general dimensions that are always varying; 1) Olam -Space 2) Shana-Time 3) Nefesh -Person. These three are always shifting in every scene in life. Even if the same two people meet in the same place, the time has changed, and therefore perhaps the application of Hallacha. One minute before Shabbos is a different reality than one minute after the onset of Shabbos. There is nothing monolithic about Hallacha. It is as dynamic as life is active. Therefore the study of Torah with intensity is really an expression of the desire to know with precision what HASHEM- The Creator optimally expects from us in a given moment.

It's the art and science of calibrating the balance point between all the competing values and principles, between man and G-d and between man and man. I need to wash my hands in morning and ideally not walk 4 cubits without washed hands. I dare not take another's cup and inconvenience him. What if I can replace it before he awakes?! What do you say Rabbi? Every piece of life requires toil and mental rigor just to do or to be prepared to do the right thing.

The Chovos HaLevavos in Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh, the Gates of Introspection provides a suggested list of 30 things a person could and should contemplate regularly. Here is #5: To bring oneself to an accounting for delaying coming to understand the book of G-d's Torah, and his being contented not to grasp its matters. And one would not do this for a book that was sent to him from a

king. If he had a doubt as to its meaning due to its unclear handwriting or words, or due to the depth of its matter, or its subtlety, or confusing mix of subjects or its enigmatic words. Rather, he would apply his whole heart and mind to understand its meaning, and would greatly pain himself until he understood its intent.

If he does this to understand the words of a weak, mortal man like himself, how much is it his duty to do many times more than this until he understands the book of G-d, which is his life and his salvation (from eternal death), as written "For it is your life and the length of your days" (Devarim 30:20). How did you permit yourself, my brother, to hide from it, and to content yourself from it with that which is readily familiar of its matter and revealed of its surface meaning, and you were lenient with (knowing) the rest.

If we had that kind of clarity and we understood that we were engaged in the book of granted to us by HASHEM it would drive us to another type of clarity. We wouldn't sleep till we discover what is it exactly that HASHEM expects from us now, and **that demands effort!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.