

# CLASS 49 - BECHUKOSAI

*by Rabbi Heshy Grossman*

Here in Jerusalem, thousands of young men devote the best years of their life to the single-minded pursuit of Torah study. Ignoring the varied pastimes and interests that occupy much of modern society, Torah learning is their reason for living.

This dedication to full-time Torah study is little understood by the general populace, and even many religious Jews cannot fathom why learning should continue forever. How much, after all, can one learn? Haven't they read those books already?

In our shiur this week, we will explain why Torah study, indeed, means life in another dimension.

1

"Im B'Chokosai Telechu" - One might assume that this refers to Mitzva performance, yet, when the verse mentions subsequently 'V'Es Mitzvosai Tishmeru....Mitzva performance is clearly stated. How then are we to understand 'Im BeChukosai Telechu? To toil in Torah." (Rashi, VaYikra 26:3)

The Parsha attributes an abundance of blessing to the merit of Ameilus - the toil and effort of the Torah scholar. At the opposite extreme, the harsh rebuke and warning which closes the book of VaYikra is the direct result of complacency and insufficient effort, and the man who fails to devote himself to Torah study brings tragedy upon himself and his family.

Why is Ameilus the sole determinant of reward and punishment? Granted that without work and exertion man would never amass the skills and knowledge to excel in Torah study, but a similar argument can be made for many other worthy traits, such as diligence, concentration, or memory recall.

Apparently, the efforts one expends in pursuit of Torah is not a means to an end, but rather, this exertion is a goal unto itself.

Let us explain.

Torah is generally perceived as a body of information, repository of Divine wisdom and instructions for life. Torah study is the method by which man assimilates this vast material, acquiring the tools to live his life in accord with the Divine will.

It is this notion that renders full-time Torah study unfathomable to the common man. If the purpose of Torah study is the ability to lead an observant life, one can get by with a modicum of basic

knowledge, covering up his ignorance by mimicking the actions of his neighbors.

But, this very premise is mistaken. The observant life is a function of Torah study, not its goal. Observance of Mitzvos cannot be divorced from the Torah that defines and regulates their performance, and the physical actions are merely external expressions of an inner consciousness.

The common man sees the physical world as his only reality, and spiritual conceptions of holiness are esoteric ideas that can be understood only in the world-to-come. Hence, to him, the highest value in existence is the practice of good deeds, adhering to G-d's rules and regulations.

In truth, the true substance of existence lies elsewhere, in a dimension above our own. The Torah we study creates a bridge to a higher domain, and through it man attaches himself to the world of the spirit, giving inner meaning to his physical life.

Perhaps, we can express this idea thus: The Torah is an alternative reality. More than a guide of rules and a compass for moral living, the Torah is the material embodiment of holiness, and the foundation of the physical world. The Torah is solidly substantive, not merely a system of beliefs; it harbors an independent existence, not merely defining it.

Man must strive to grasp a hold of this exalted pedestal, elevating himself from the physical and mundane, and cleave to a subtle and sublime reality that towers above our own. It is only the toil and effort of diligence and contemplation, and the dedication of Ameilus BaTorah, that provides the opportunity to rise above the humdrum affairs of daily life. Without this, even the observant Jew is mired in the drudgery of a world that swallows him alive, anchored to the physical demands of material life.

2

*"...this question was asked before them: What is greater: Study or deed? ....they all answered: Study is greater, for study leads to deed." (Kiddushin 40b)*

If good deeds are the goal, then why should study be considered the greater of the two?

The reason we learn Torah is not only to acquire needed information, and not merely to recognize right from wrong, but to connect our minds and thought to the Divine, merging our consciousness with His word. In this manner, the Torah we study is all-encompassing, enveloping the totality of man with an aura of sanctity. For this reason, learning is greater than deed. True Torah study demands and begets good deeds, for the actions of man are a natural by-product of his inner self. The deeds of the Torah scholar are not independent measures of character, but rather, expressions of the Torah that lies within.

Let us understand this: It is obvious to all, that to serve as a Dayan in monetary affairs, one must be proficient in the laws of Choshen Mishpat, and fluent in all Seder Nezikin. But, to be an observant Jew, we believe that bare familiarity with common practice will suffice, and when in doubt, one can

always imitate his neighbor.

This is a mistake.

Much as we strive to fathom Mesechet Baba Kamma and decipher Baba Metzia, discovering their hidden truths, similarly, all of Seder Moed and Zeraim likewise wait to be studied, for the daily rituals of a religious lifestyle are arrived at only after swimming the Talmudic sea.

In our familiarity with the basic observances, we are prone to forget that each and every Mitzva is a function of the Torah we study. Because we have severed the worlds of thought and deed, we have lost touch with the unifying nature of Torah, a force that harmonizes all existence.

It is precisely this problem that Ameilus BaTorah hopes to counter.

*"...One who studies in order to practice, is given the means to study and to teach, to observe and to practice." (Avos 4:6)*

Proper study results in good practice, and "Lilmod Al Menas L'Assos" reflects the ideal of an immersion in Torah that reverberates through every fiber of one's being, in thought and deed, in body, mind, and soul.

While the inconsistent student learns when he has the chance, and concentrates when he has no distractions, the man who toils in Torah finds his body drawn to the call of G-d's word, humbly obedient to the rule of His law.

*" 'I considered my path, and my legs returned me to the guarding of Your law' (Tehillim 119:59). Said David: Master of the World: each day I would consider going to a particular place, or a certain house. I would go, yet, my legs would bring me to the synagogues and Batei Medrashos." (VaYikra Rabbah, 35:1)*

Unwittingly, the legs of David HaMelech carry him to where he needs to be. Though his thoughts may be elsewhere, his head has long ago tamed every sinew and limb, and his legs take him to where they are accustomed.

This is the goal of Torah study, and the purpose of existence. It is study that actualizes the Torah and brings it to life.

This is Kabbalas HaTorah, and as a result, man's physical self expresses to all the world the binding nature of His absolute truth.

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