

TALMUD TORAH: LEARNING FOR LIFE

by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

The Mitzvah: Every man, no matter his personal set of circumstances, has to designate fixed periods of time to the study and learning of Torah. The mitzvah of Talmud Torah, study of Torah is of paramount importance as a father is also entrusted with teaching his children its words and values.

Of all activities in Jewish life, the highest esteem is accorded to the study of Torah. To the extent that frenetic schedules are deferred. A Jew has to "make his Torah fixed and all other business secondary" - because it supersedes everything else. In the words of the Mishnah (Peah) Talmud torah kneged kulom, "Torah study is equal to all other mitzvos". Its precious words are treasured; its laws are sacrosanct; its scholars honored and revered.

In fact, Torah goes to the heart of "what it means to be a Jew". Or to quote the famous statement of Rabbi Saadia Gaon: "The Jewish nation is a nation only by virtue of the Torah" (Rav Saadiah Gaon). It is the Chosen People's timeless heritage through the ages from the time they accepted it at the foot of Sinai. And study it they have - with relentlessly passion, with personal sacrifice, with vigor and fervor. And this "addiction" to Torah, as a continuous pursuit lasting throughout a Jew's life span, has not been abandoned despite all his foes' attempts to separate him from his precious heirloom.

Rather, he has fully immersed himself in the sea of Torah. He has drunk its delicious words. And he has never been satiated. Nor has his enthusiasm waned through the generations, pledging to teach this wisdom to his children and his commitment to guarantee its continuity - whatever it takes.

And every time that a Jew studies Torah, every today, it is as if he is at that very moment experiencing the momentous Divine Revelation of Sinai and his acceptance of Torah (See Nefesh HaChaim 4).

How is this to be understood? And what can explain this lifelong obsession with Torah?

The supernatural effort to study Torah- lays stress not so much on the mastery of Torah, which is impossible because of its breadth and depth, but on the "effort" expended in its labor and toil.

This is because, as the blueprint of creation, Torah is the "soul" of existence. Moreover, it is that which defines and perpetuates existence.

And only in its continual study, is the continued sustainability of the universe assured. Were Torah learning to cease for but one moment, were the soul to be removed from the physical body, the world would collapse. This parallels Sinai, where the Jewish nation was threatened that if they would

not embrace the Torah, then everything would turn into null and void (Shabbos 88).

Torah is how mankind is able to tap into the metaphorical Divine Mind.

Its divine wisdom is the wherewithal of how to relate to G-d. There is no more powerful medium for man to attach himself to his Creator than in poring over His wisdom inscribed in the Torah. Thus, the toil of Torah learning is "itself" the glue through which man binds himself to his Creator.

It is their existence. It is their national lifeline. For Torah, as compared to water, is the embodiment of life and existence. Indeed, the Jew invests his very life force - in its entirety - in the toil of Torah. He realizes his study and observance is not optional; it is essential. And it fully justifies its ardent pursuit by Jews of all ages.

His learning is related to life itself. Learning for life indeed! Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene and **Torah.org**.