

# HOW DO YOU 'DO'?

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

Hashem spoke to Moshe, in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the second month...

It never ceases to amaze me how quick the seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot pass. These weeks, we are taught, were and are a time of preparation for receiving the Torah at Sinai, a revelation which we both commemorate and relive each year on Shavuot. To receive the Torah with a pure and untainted heart is no small task. We are thus granted 49 days, during which we have the opportunity and responsibility to put our lives in order, each day removing ourselves from one of the forty-nine "gates" or levels of impurity, while at the same time entering the corresponding "gate" of purity which awaits those who are truly dedicated to a life of Torah and mitzvos. Hopefully, things have progressed on schedule, and on Shabbos, the forty-eighth day, and Erev Shavuot, the forty-ninth, we will be putting the finishing touches on our new-selves, completely revamped and equipped to accept the Torah in the true sense...

However, just in case there have been a few bumps in the road, and things have not gone quite as planned, it is both comforting and encouraging to know that all is not lost! This Shabbos, we learn the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avos, the Ethics of the Fathers. This chapter is famous for its list of the "48 Ways to Wisdom" - a list of 48 qualities essential to Torah study and acquisition. Rav Aaron Kotler zt"l writes that each of the first 48 days of the Sefirah (the counting of the days between Pesach and Shavuot) correspond to one of these 48 ways. On the forty-ninth day - we review! While officially the forty-ninth day falls on Motzei Shabbos, which is Erev Yom Tov, there is certainly no time like the present to brush up on our "48 Ways to Wisdom," which are the keys to success in Torah study and its implementation into our daily lives.

While I could easily spend the remainder of this dvar Torah simply listing the 48 essential qualities, I will leave their study for the reader. To simply breeze through a list misses the whole point. The 48 ways must be studied, analyzed, contemplated, appreciated, and ultimately (hopefully!) integrated into our characters, serving as a sort of "pipeline" through which the Torah can enter us. Indeed, the forty-fifth quality is, "To learn in order to do!" Our study, particularly of the 48 Ways, should not be just another piece of knowledge and information in our brains - we must find ways to "do" what we learn, and not just know it. Indeed, the number 48 in Hebrew is written "Moach" - which means "brain." This indicates that it's not brain-power which ultimately determines one's success or failure in his studies, it's his commitment to implementing the 48 Ways!

Though I am loathe to constantly bemoan the woes of contemporary society, it is impossible not to notice that the failure to translate intellectual concepts into practical reality is a malady which comes part and parcel with the age of information-overload in which we live. There is so much to know that perhaps we spend an inordinate amount of time "knowing" and not enough time "doing." Case in point: How many different dvar-Torah papers are there on your table this Shabbos? Two, three, four? (yes - this one counts!) Gosh - it's a wonder we still find the time to daven! We all know that, "There is a time to daven and a time to learn," yet with so much to learn - who has time to daven? (You're not reading this during Kaddish or Chazaras HaShatz are you? If you are, perhaps you might consider putting it down and finishing it off later - really.)

I have often illustrated this concept to my students with the following example: Suppose you saw someone take out a sefer in the middle of davening and begin to learn. Soon, he was engrossed, completely oblivious to the ongoing prayers. As he animatedly studied, your curiosity overcame you: What could he be learning that has him so absorbed? You casually stroll over to his place, and glance across the table. He has a Mishna Berura, and it is open to siman 191, paragraph 3. What, you wonder, could be in siman 191 paragraph 3 that has so captured his attention? You look it up, and read in utter astonishment: It is forbidden to do anything else, even to look into divrei Torah, while one is davening!

This is just one example, though a poignant one, of how we fail to translate our knowledge into action. Once, while walking to shul on Shabbos, I ran into an acquaintance. As we walked together, he began rattling off numerous divrei Torah I had quoted in the Olas Shabbos in years gone by. I was astonished by his retention, and expressed my amazement at his seemingly faultless memory. "You are mistaken," he insisted, "I have a very average memory. However, these vertlach touched me deeply. I cut them out, and put them aside, and studied them over and over until they became a part of my very being. I will not forget them; they are a part of me." This person truly understood the meaning of "learning in order to do."

This is the difference between "philosophy" and "wisdom." You can study the deepest ideas, and ponder the mysteries of the Torah all day long, but if you don't apply them, it's just intellectual gymnastics.

This week's parsha begins: Hashem spoke to Moshe, in the Sinai Desert, in the Tent of Meeting (Ohel Mo'ed)... We already knew the Jews were in the Sinai Desert; they hadn't moved since receiving the Torah! Perhaps the juxtaposition of the Ohel Mo'ed with the Sinai Desert is an allusion to this very concept. We can "talk with G-d," as it were, in the Tent of Communion, and climb the heights of spirituality and consciousness, yet unless we remember to take the knowledge we have acquired with us back into the "desert" of everyday life, we may be missing the point.

Have a good Shabbos.

*This week's publication has been sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Moshe Eliyahu Rubner, in honour of their*

*son's Bar Mitzvah.*

And by the Reichmann family, for the merit of Haddasah bas Liba, that she should receive a Refuah Shleima min HaShamayim.

---

Text Copyright &copy 2000 [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **[Project Genesis, Inc.](#)**

---