

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
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Table of Contents

Torah Wellsprings - Voeschanon

<i>Shabbos Nachamu</i>	4
<i>Shema</i>	5
<i>An Extension of לא תרצה</i>	10
<i>Shirah</i>	12
<i>Kabalas Hatorah</i>	15
<i>Everyone Can Be a Talmid Chacham</i>	17
<i>One Equals One Hundred</i>	22
<i>Kevias Ittim for Torah</i>	24
<i>Only the Torah Remained</i>	27
<i>Simchas Chassan v'Kallah</i>	29

Torah Wellsprings

Voeschanon

Shabbos Nachamu

נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלקיכם,
"Console, console, My
nation, says your G-d."

This Shabbos is one of the most special Shabbosim of the year. On this Shabbos, Hashem consoles us and gives us hope for the future.

There's an ancient Sefer called *Minhag Tov*, which writes, "It is a custom *not* to take a haircut before *Erev Shabbos Nachamu*, but on this Friday, one *must* take a haircut. One should be joyous and greet the Shabbos in good spirits."

The Maharil teaches, "The Shabbos after Tisha b'Av is Shabbos Nachamu. The entire nation should rejoice and trust in the coming of the redemption."

This Shabbos heralds a new era. The sorrows of the past are over, and now

we believe that better times are coming.

יאמר אלקיכם is written in the future tense. This implies that in each generation, Hashem consoles for the issues and hardships that people deal with. It's not about the past. Every year, no matter what we are going through, Hashem tells us to be heartened and be consoled, for better days are coming.

The Gemara (end of *Taanis*) tells us that the happiest days of the year are Yom Kippur and the fifteenth of Av. The Gemara gives several explanations why this day is joyous – but who celebrates it? Why was the joy of this holiday almost forgotten? It seems that the answer to this question is found in the *Ritvah* (end of *Taanis*). The *Ritvah* writes, "There weren't Yomim Tovim for

Yisrael like Yom Kippur and the fifteenth of Av... and therefore they have the custom to make a meal on Shabbos after Tisha b'Av." So, Shabbos Nachamu is when we celebrate the fifteenth of Av.

The month of Av is called *Menachem Av*. The Chasam Sofer (*Parshas Masay*) explains that the month of Av has two names. Up until Tisha b'Av, it's called Av; after Tisha b'Av, it's called Menachem. When the Chasam Sofer wrote a letter after Tisha b'Av, he would date it "The month of Menachem." The month acquires a new name after Tisha b'Av because we are no longer in mourning.¹

כאב חמישה עשר באב is *gematriya* כתיבה וחתימה טובה. In a certain sense, the High Holy Days begin now. Some tzaddikim would start wishing their

Chassidim כתיבה וחתימה טובה from this day on.

Shema

The *Iglei Tal* writes, "To perform the mitzvah בן יכבד אב, 'a son must honor his father,' I will write [in this introduction]...a *vort* I heard from my father *zt'l*..."

His father's question is on the first Mishnah in *Brachos*, which states, "At what time can one begin saying *Shema* at night? From the time that the *kohanim* come in to eat their *terumah*."

This time is *tzeis hakachovim*, when the stars come out at night.

The Ra'v Bartenura explains, "*kohanim* who were *tamei* and went to the *mikveh*, may still not eat *terumah* until *tzeis*

1. The Chasam Sofer writes that this is the meaning of the *passuk* (*Yeshaya* 66:23) והיה מדי חודש בחודשו, which implies that there's a month that starts in the middle of the month. That's the month Menachem.

hakochavim" That's the time that *kriyas Shema* is read at night.

It seems strange, though, that the Mishnah connects the laws of Shema with the laws of *kohanim* coming home to eat *terumah*. It could have only said that one reads Shema by *tzeis hakachovim*.

The Iglei Tal writes, "My father explained that a *kohen* who went to the *mikveh*, did not become pure until nightfall. That's because he became *tamei* that day, and the *tumah* remains with him throughout the day. He needs to wait until nighttime, which is technically a new day, and then he is pure. The rules that apply to *tumah* also apply to holiness. When one accepts the yoke of Heaven in the morning while saying the Shema, even if he thinks about other things afterward, nevertheless, the impression of that moment remains with him

throughout the day. When nighttime arrives, a new day begins again, and the influence of the previous day has worn off. Therefore he needs to say Shema once again."

In other words, the Shema of the morning affects the entire day, imbuing it with *Emunah*. Nighttime is a new day, and therefore one needs to replenish his belief in Hashem by repeating Shema. The Mishnah compares it to the laws of *tumah* and *terumah* because there too, we see that the influence of a day lasts the entire day until nighttime. Similarly, holiness creates an impression that remains throughout the day.

The Iglei Tal added proof to his father's commentary. The Arizal teaches that we don't say *kriyas Shma* by *Minchah* because there still is an impression (רשימי) from the Shema he said in the morning. "And this is a

backing for my father's explanation."

There's a similar commentary by the Dubno Magid *zt'l*. He teaches that before one goes to work in the morning, he is obligated to say Shema. Shema is his reminder that everything that will happen in the workplace is from Hashem. He may see people being successful, but he will remember that it's only because of Hashem's decree. At nighttime, after a day of work, he davens *Maariv* and repeats Shema to affirm that everything that happened in the workplace was indeed Hashem's will.

The Dubno Magid *zt'l* writes that this is alluded to in the *passuk* **אני ראשון ואני אחרון ומבלעדי אין אלקים**. This can be translated, "Remember Me the *first* thing in the morning (**אני ראשון**) and remember Me by nighttime (**אני אחרון**). If you do so, **אין אלקים**, you will know that it isn't nature (**הטבע אל-הים** is *gematriya*, nature).

When we say Shema, we declare that Hashem is **אחד**, One. What will our reward be? The Rabbeinu b'Chaya teaches that we will merit Gan Eden, and we will be saved from Gehinom. He explains that **אחד** is *gematriya* thirteen. **גן** (Gan Eden) is written thirteen times in *Bereishis* and **אש** is written thirteen times in *Va'eschanan*. This indicates that by saying **ה' אחד** one merits Gan Eden and is saved from the fire of Gehinom.

The words of the Rabbeinu b'Chaya are as follows: "Gan Eden was made for the people who pronounce that Hashem is one. This is the reason **גן** is written thirteen times in *Bereishis*, the *gemtariya* of **אחד**. In *Va'eschanan* **אש** is written thirteen times. This implies that when one says that Hashem is **אחד**, he is protected from the fire of Gehinom, and he will merit Gan Eden."

Saying Shema is so powerful that when one

says it, he has a part in the destruction of Esav (and his nation). The Yaaras Dvash says that this is the meaning of the *passuk* *בית עשו לקש*, "Esav's house was like straw." *קש* is *roshei teivos* for *קריאה שמע*. This implies that Esav is destroyed with the Shema. He disintegrates like straw in a fire.

It is written in *Shulchan Aruch* (61:26) "Some say the Shema in a loud voice; others say it silently. Nevertheless, the first *passuk* should be said out loud, and that is the custom."

In contrast, *Shemonah Esrei* is uttered entirely in silence. The reason for this difference is that when one goes to a king to ask for his needs, he pleads in soft tones. But when a thief enters the house, the owner will shout and holler so that the thief will run away. When we say Shema, we announce that Hashem is King. At this time, we are also shouting at the *yetzer hara*, "You must know that

there is only Hashem, and there is none other! Don't disturb me with your schemes! Don't distract me from serving Hashem! Don't have me forget Hashem!"

A thief in the forest captured someone, and the thief offered to grant him his last wish. He said that he wanted to say Shema, and permission was granted. He said Shema with immense concentration. When he reached the words, *ה' אלקינו*, *אמת* he opened his eyes and saw that the thief wasn't there anymore. He ran out of the forest with joy. He went to his rebbe, Reb Yehudah Asad *zt'l*, and told him what happened. The student asked, "But what does this story mean? Why did it happen? What was Heaven showing me?"

Reb Yehudah Asad asked him, "Did you ever say *kriyas Shema* like that before?" The student said that he hadn't.

"Then that's your *Shema* should be said. answer. Heaven was Now say it that way every showing you how *kriyas* day."²

2. The Saraf of Novarduk *zt'l* was once in the forest meditating on *mussar*, when he got bitten by a fierce dog and he fainted. When he came to, he said that he wasn't afraid of the dog, but when he saw the dog's fiery passion, he asked himself, "Do I serve Hashem with such fervor? Did I ever say *kriyas Shema* with so much passion? And that's the reason he fainted.

The Ohev Yisrael *zt'l* teaches that the six words in the first *passuk* of *Shema* are like the six *ערי מקלט*, cities of refuge that atone and that protect. The forty-two words of *ואהבה* are like the additional forty-two *ערי מקלט*. The difference between the six *arei miklat* and the forty-two is that the forty-two protect when the person knows that he is in a refuge city, while the six *arei miklat* protect, even when the person isn't aware of where he is. This indicates the first *passuk* of *Shema* should be said it with so much concentration, until he almost doesn't know where he is. He should lose focus on himself, as he is totally absolved in the awareness of Hashem's presence. *ואהבה* onwards should be said with full wisdom capacity.

In *Shema* we say "ודברת בם", You shall speak Torah, *בשבתך בביתך*, when you are sitting at home; *ובלכתך בדרך*, when you are traveling on the way; *ובשכבך*, when you go to sleep; *ובקומך*, and when you wake up." At every time, and at every opportunity, one should speak Torah. When travelling, and when one relaxing in his home; when lying in bed, before he falls asleep, and upon awakening, Torah should always be on his lips.

Tzaddikim explain that doing so will help understand Torah, because there are parts of Torah that one understands best while traveling, and there are parts of Torah that one understands when he is sitting at home, etc. (People actually feel this: there are times when a person is learning a deep subject, and he tells himself: "I need to think about this while walking. Then I'll understand.")

An Extension of לא תרצה

The Gemara (*Avodah Zorah* 25) calls *Chumash Devarim* ספר הישר because of the *pasuk*, stated in this week's parashah (6:18), ועשית הישר, והטוב, "You shall do the upright and the good." The fact that the entire *Sefer Devarim* is based on this *pasuk*, shows us the importance of this *pasuk*. There are nearly two hundred mitzvos in *Chumash Devarim*, yet the whole *Chumash* is called ספר הישר because of this one mitzvah! What is the significance of this mitzvah? We must grasp the spirit of the laws and understand Hashem's will, even when it isn't explicitly stated.

As the Ramban (6:18) writes, "After the Torah tells us to keep all the mitzvos, the Torah requires us to do הישר והטוב, 'the correct and the good.' ... This is an essential principle because the Torah can't teach each detail, such as: How to deal with friends and neighbors, how to do business, and how to establish community laws. But after the Torah tells us many laws, such as the prohibition against speaking *lashon hara*, taking revenge, holding a grudge, to stand get for the elderly, and the like, the Torah tells us in general terms: ועשית הישר והטוב, everything one does should be correct and upright, according to the principles of the Torah."³

3. The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 44.) states, "The One who punished the generation of the Flood will punish the one who doesn't keep his word." The Gemara is referring to someone who paid money for a product, and before he makes a *kinyan* [legal acquisition] he changed his mind and he wants to back out of the deal. It might be technically permitted to back out of an agreement, but it is improper – it isn't *hayashar vehatov* – and therefore he receives the curse.

An example of this principle is in one of the Ten Commandments: the prohibition of לא תרצה. It has its literal meaning, but it also has its sub-sections that we should derive from studying the spirit of the law.

As the Bnei Yissaschar *zt'l* (*Derech Pikudechah* 34, *dibbur* 4) writes, "A derivative of murder is to eat and drink ... without considering whether it's healthy for you or whether it will harm you. [This is an extension of murder

because the foods weaken you, and that is like a partial death. As *Chazal* say, מה לי קמלא פלוגא מה לי קמלא כולא, what's the difference whether it's a total or a partial murder].

"Also, if a person is worried and distressed when it isn't a mitzvah to feel that way, that also weakens him. [Therefore worrying is an offshoot of the prohibition of *retzichah*, because he is weakening himself with his worries]..."

Instead of worries, we'd be wise to follow the path

Once again, the curse is: "The One who punished the generation of the Flood will punish the one who doesn't keep his word." Why is the generation of the Flood used as an example? It is because they also acted according to law, yet they acted corruptly.

As the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 31) states, "This was the ways of people in the era of the Flood: When they saw someone carrying a basket filled with beans, someone came along and stole less than the value of a *prutah*. Then another person came and took less than a *prutah*... The court couldn't obligate anyone to pay for it because each person took s`lo little..."

They found a loophole in the law, but what they did was corrupt.

Likewise, when one backs out of a deal, it is technically permitted, nonetheless he is acting improperly. It isn't *hayashar vehatov*.

of *Emunah* and *bitachon* and to live worry-free, with trust in Hashem.

Dovid HaMelech said (*Tehillim* 131:2), אִם לֹא שִׁוִּיתִי וּדְוַמְתִּי, "I am like a nursling who nurses from his mother..." The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* taught from this *pasuk* that one should trust in Hashem like an infant who trusts his mother. The baby is sure that his mother will feed him and care for all his needs. This is the feeling of security we should have as we put our *bitachon* in Hashem.

One translation of פִּקְדֵי is salvation (as in ה' פִּקְדֵי אֶת שְׂרָה). The letters פִּקְדֵי, in the *alef beis*, come before the letters צִרָה. The Shlah HaKadosh *zt'l* says this implies that before every צִרָה there's a פִּקְדֵי, salvation. As the

Gemara (*Megillah* 13:) says, "Hashem doesn't smite Yisrael before He creates the *refuah* first." Therefore, there's no reason for worries. For every problem, the solution is already in place. Trust in Hashem, and you will see it.⁴

Trust in Hashem, avoid worries, and as the Bnei Yissaschar tells us, this is part of keeping the mitzvah of לֹא תִרְצַח.

Shirah

The Baal HaTurim writes, וְאֶתְהַנֵּן is *gematriya* שִׁירָה, since Moshe said שִׁירָה to Hashem, so his *tefillah* would be answered."

Before we state our requests, we sing praises to Hashem. This is the reason why we say *Pesukei DiZimrah* before we say *Shemonah Esrei*. Similarly,

4. Reb Yechezkal Levinstein *zt'l* said, Hashem supports animals, and gives them their food. Certainly, Hashem will provide for human beings, and certainly for Yidden. There's no reason to be worried.

the first three *brachos* of *Shemonah Esrei* are praises, before we ask our requests.

One of the purposes of praising Hashem before requesting anything is because we should never lose sight of all the good that we receive. Even in times of hardships, *chas veshalom*, don't allow these struggles to dull your awareness of all the good you have. There's always so much good in our lives, and we should remember them, and praise Hashem for them. Afterward, we can ask for what we need.

Reb Zalman Brizel *zt'l*, one of the *tzaddikim* of Yerushalayim, said to his son, Reb Nota, "Don't even ask what happened to me today. I had such a hard day."

"What happened?"

"I awoke in the morning [at two a.m. as was his daily schedule], and when I wanted to put on my shoes, I found them without

the shoelaces inside! Apparently, the grandchildren who visited yesterday took them out and hid them somewhere."

"So, what did you do?"

"Don't ask. I looked all over the house for the shoelaces, and I found one of them. I thanked Hashem for that, but I still couldn't go anywhere with just one shoelace. I searched through the house some more, which isn't an easy feat for an older man like me until I found the other one. Then I went to the *mikveh*. When I came out of the water, my clothes weren't where I left them! Someone took them! I considered sending Reb Kalman [a Rav who would often help Reb Zalman] to bring me another set of clothes, but then I decided against it. Because if your mother heard that someone stole my clothes, she would come and make a commotion."

"So, what did you do?"
Reb Nota asked.

"What I did? I woke up in the morning, and my shoelaces were in the shoes. I went to the *mikveh*, and my clothes weren't stolen, and everything was fine and well."

This story is a reminder for us to stay focused on all the good things in life. There are always issues; no one is exempt from life's challenges. There's always something to daven for, always something that lies heavily on the heart. But these issues shouldn't stop us from remembering Hashem's kindness, because there is so much *chessed* as well.

Reb Zalman Brizel sold glass milk bottles for his *parnassah*. (In those days, people had their own glass milk bottles, which the milkman would fill each morning.) One day, Reb Zalman didn't make any sales. He knew his wife would be upset, so before he went up the stairs

to his home, he wrapped his hand in a towel (which he left downstairs from after the *mikvah* in the morning). His bound hand looked like he was wounded, and he came home with a pained expression on his face. His wife looked at his bandaged hand and asked, "What happened?!"

Reb Brizel said, "The streets of Yerushalayim... they are so steep. If I slip with my wagon filled with milk bottles, everything can topple over and break."

"So, what happened?!"

He took off his bandage, "I didn't slip, my hand isn't hurt, and the wagon didn't turn over. And although I didn't make a single sale today, it's also not the end of the world..."

This story illustrates how we should never lose focus on the good we have.

Reb Zalman Brizel's children and grandchildren came to his home on the night of Pesach to wish

him a *gut yom tov*. One of the children knocked over the matzos, specially prepared for the seder, and they all broke. Reb Zalman raised his hands and said, "Baruch Hashem, You gave me children and grandchildren..."

Moshe Rabbeinu knew this principle, and therefore before he prayed to go to Eretz Yisrael, he first praised Hashem, as implied by the word *ואתחנן*, which is *gematriya* *שירה*.

Kabalas Hatorah

The Yerushalmi (Brachos 9:5) states *אם תעובני יום יומיים* *אעיבך*, "If you leave Me for one day I will leave you for two days." This means: If you don't learn Torah for one day, you are two days distant from Torah. The Beis Yisroel zt'l says that since we didn't learn Torah on Tisha B'Av we are at risk that we will become distanced from the Torah. That one day can become like two, and two can

become like four, and so on. Therefore, we read the Aseres Hadibros in this week's parashah, thereby making a renewed commitment to study the Torah.

It is known that before a seed sprouts, it rots first, in the ground. Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz zt'l taught that on Tisha b'Av we sit on the floor. We resemble a seed that's rotting. And then, on Shabbos, we read the Aseres HaDibros, symbolizing a new birth and growth, which happens immediately following the rotting.

In this week's parashah, we are told to study Torah, always. As it states, *ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך*, "Study Torah when you are seated at home, when you are going on the way when you lie down, and when you get up." The Chidushei HaRim zt'l explains that one should study Torah in every situation because there are parts of Torah that one can

only understand while "going on the way" or "when you get up," etc. Therefore, one should always study the Torah, so he can properly acquire it.

The 15th of Av is approaching, which is one of the happiest days in the Jewish calendar. On this date, the nights start becoming longer, and it is during the nighttime Torah knowledge is best acquired. Therefore, Chazal say about this date *במאן דיוסף יוסף*, someone who learns more will be granted a longer life.⁵

Chazal (Taanis 26:) say that the most significant holidays for the Jewish nation were Yom Kippur and the 15th of Av. Several explanations are given to explain the joy of the 15th of Av. One is that on this date, people completed cutting the wood for the mizbeiach. The Rabbeinu Gershom (Bava Basra 121) explains that the great joy was that the completion of the cutting meant that they had more time for Torah study. We learn from here how important it is to strengthen oneself in studying Torah this time of year.

5. Someone asked Reb Zundel Kroizer zt'l, "I want to make a kabbalah to improve my ways, what do you recommend that I take on?"

Reb Zundel replied, "Whenever you have a time to study Torah, and the time is up, add one more minute of Torah study."

Reb Zundel's chavrusah was present, and he was surprised that he recommended such a small kabbalah. Reb Zundel told him, "How much longer is the night of the 15th of Av more than the night before it? Just one minute longer. Yet, Chazal call it a very joyous day because we can study more Torah. This shows us the joy and the worth of Torah, even if it is just for another minute.

Everyone Can Be a *Talmid Chacham*

The people of Alexandria asked Reb Yehoshua ben Chininah (Nidah 70:): If a person desires to be wise in Torah, what should he do?

Reb Yehoshua ben Chininah's reply was that he should spend a lot of time in yeshiva, and less time doing business. This formula should enable him to grow in Torah.

The people of Alexandria said, "Many people tried that and didn't succeed. It seems that just studying more and doing less business isn't enough."

Reb Yehoshua ben Chininah advised that one should pray. As he expressed it: "He should pray to Hashem - the One that wisdom is His - that Hashem should grant him success in Torah."

The Gemara asks: If the counsel is to daven, why did Reb Yehoshua initially

tell them that his advice is to study a lot of Torah?

The Gemara's response is, *הא בלא דהא לא סגי*, "One without the other isn't enough." One needs both: One must immerse himself in Torah, spending many hours studying Torah, and one must pray for *siyata dishmaya*. With *hasmadah* and with prayer, one can succeed in Torah.

A renowned askan thought of a plan (which, at the time, was innovative), to open yeshivos that would be geared specifically for bachurim with weak minds, who found Torah study extremely challenging. The plan was to have the bachurim learn less, but at least all the students would be able to keep up. (Today, there are many such yeshivos, but at the time, it was unprecedented.) When the askan asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l*, the Chazon Ish didn't approve. He felt that it would prevent many bachurim from succeeding in Torah. He said, "A

bachur with a weak mind crossing the street, may very possibly reach the other side with a sharp mind, capable of understanding Torah. This is because his grandmothers prayed for him every week when they lit the Shabbos candles. At that moment, their tefillos were answered, and now he can understand Torah. If he is in a yeshiva that isn't geared for extraordinary growth, he will never be able to reach his true potential."

The Chazon Ish believed that everyone could become great in Torah. The combined recipe of tefillah and hasmadah could produce success to one and all.

Reb Menachem Rikanti (who lived in the era of the Rosh and the Rashba) is an example of someone who reached very high levels in Torah due to the combination of tefillah and hasmadah. His story is written in the hakdamah of his Sefer, the "Rikanti":

"Reb Menachem Rikanti loved Torah, but he was born with a very weak mind (גם השכל מאוד). He prayed a lot, and he fasted that Hashem should open his heart and mind to understand Torah. Once, on one of his fast days, as he prayed to be able to learn Torah, he fell asleep in the beis medresh. In his dream, he saw someone holding a bottle of water in his hand. This man woke up Reb Menachem Rikanti and told him to drink from the water. Before Reb Menachem finished drinking, the man disappeared. Reb Menachem returned to his studies, and he saw that his mind was sharp. He had become a new person. That's when he wrote his commentaries on the Torah..." This occurred when Reb Menachem Rikanti was approximately eighty years old – two years before his petirah. All the tefillos of his life paid off, and in the last two years of his life, he wrote

wondrous sefarim, studied by scholars.

The Steipler Gaon zt'l (Chayei Olam vol.2, 12) brings this story and writes, "Even if one has a weak mind, if he places all his strength in studying Torah, he will receive *siyata dishmaya* and become a *gadol* in Torah, even if it is beyond his natural abilities."⁶

A seventeen-year-old bachur came to the Chasam Sofer's yeshiva in Dreznitz and told the Chasam Sofer that he wants to join the yeshiva and begin learning Torah. The bachurim who heard him say this, laughed because they knew that this bachur had never learned Torah before. The Chasam Sofer rebuked them, "Why do you laugh? Whoever wants to learn can join the yeshiva."

The Chasam Sofer asked several bachurim to contribute one hour of their day to learn with the new bachur, which they did. However, the bachur still wasn't learning well because, in addition to having no background in Torah, the bachur had a terrible memory. Even if he reviewed something a hundred times, he forgot it by the next day. But the bachur so much wanted to succeed in Torah, so he didn't give up. He kept learning with *hasmadah* with the *chavrusos* that the Chasam Sofer arranged for him. Chazal say, *הבא לטהר מבייעין אותו*, "When one wants to be pure, Heaven helps him" and indeed, this bachur became a great talmid *chacham* and was renowned for his *yirei shamayim*. He held

6. The Steipler explains that people think people stop learning because they have a weak mind. Actually, it's the opposite: They have a weak mind because they stopped learning. Had they persevered they would have succeeded in Torah.

rabbanic positions, and was one of the rabbanim in the Mattersdorf beis din (under the auspices of the Chasam Sofer). Later he was the rav of Shleining, and then the head of the beis din in Neizetz.

As the Chasam Sofer predicted, if one studies Torah with hasmadah, he will have siyata dishmaya, and he can succeed.

The Maharam Shi'k is another example of someone who strived with all his strength to grow in Torah until he became one of the Gedolim. The Maharam Shi'k said the following to his students at the beginning of the zman:

The Gemara (Yoma 35:) says, "Reb Elazar ben Charsom obligates the wealthy and Hillel obligates the poor." The Gemara explains, if someone says that he was wealthy, he had many businesses to run, and he didn't have time to learn Torah, the court of Heaven will reply,

"Were you wealthier than Reb Elazar ben Charsom? He found time for Torah; why couldn't you?"

If one will say that he couldn't learn Torah because he was poor, and he was always occupied earning a living, Heaven will reply, "Were you poorer than Hillel? He was able to find time to learn Torah, why couldn't you?"

The Maharam Shi'k added, "And I obligate all people who say that they can't learn Torah because they have a weak mind." In this drashah, he told his students that there were times when he had to learn a Gemara forty times until he understood it. But it wasn't that he just studied it again and again. Before each time, he prayed with tears and begged Hashem for success. He would say, "I too am obligated to learn Torah, although my mind is weak and poor. Therefore, compassionate Father, give me intelligence so I can understand Torah..." Each

time he said this prayer, and studied the sugyah again, he saw some improvement. He understood it better than he had before. But if he didn't understand it perfectly, he would pray again and study again. This is how he studied Torah every day, and for a very long time, that is the only way he could understand Torah.

"Therefore," he said to his students, "I obligate all those who claim they can't learn Torah because they have a weak mind. Please, don't say that. Instead, pray to Hashem every day that you should understand the shiur of that day, and review the shiur until you know it by heart. If you do so, Hashem will help you..."

Reb Shaul Brach zt'l (Rav of Kashau) writes, "I knew a family of many boys, most of them had minimal intelligence. But the brothers who studied Torah became very sharp and wise. I also heard that

the Mahara'm Shi'k zt'l had a weak mind in his younger years, but his mind became sharpened through the study of Torah. The Maharam Shik's wisdom and teachings are now studied throughout the world."

He writes that this is the explanation of the Mishnah (Avos 6:2), כל מי שעוסק, בתורה הרי זה מתעלה, "Whoever studies Torah will be elevated." He will become wise because Torah is מחכימת פתי, 'makes fools smart.'"

The Chayei Adam writes, "Chazal (Avodah Zara 3.) say, אין הקב"ה בא בטרוניא עם בריותיו, Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't request from a person more than he can do. Therefore, a student who has a poor mind and studies Torah and understands to the extent he can, he has fulfilled his obligation. This person is precious to Hashem like the greatest gaon... As Chazal (Menachos 110.) say, אחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט בלבד שיכין לבו לשמים, 'One who does a

lot is the same as one who does little, as long as the heart is for Heaven.' The Torah of those who have weaker minds may be even more significant than the Torah of the wise Torah scholars, because when one has a sharp, open mind, he enjoys studying Torah, and he finds pleasure from the Torah's vast wisdom. At the same time, those who have weak minds find learning Torah a burden. Chazal (Avos 5:2) say, *לפום צערא אנרא*, 'The reward is according to the difficulty.' Therefore, those who study with a weak mind will earn an even greater reward..."

And as stated, if they follow the program of hasmadah and tefillah, be'ezras Hashem, they, too, will eventually become great in Torah.

One Equals One Hundred

If it's hard for you to study Torah, then your Torah study becomes even more precious to Hashem.

As Chazal say, "Better once with hardships than a hundred without hardships" (Avos d'Reb Nosson 3:6).

A bachur once came to the Chofetz Chaim complaining that he has a weak mind, and after a month of learning Torah, all he accomplished was one page of Gemara. The Chofetz Chaim asked him what page he was up to, and he replied that he studied *דף ב'*, and he was up to *דף ג'*. The Chofetz Chaim corrected him, "You are up to page 103) *ק"ג*."

The bachur thought the Chofetz Chaim didn't hear him well, so he repeated that he is on page *ג'*. The Chofetz Chaim said, "no, you are on page 301) *ק"ג*." The Chofetz Chaim explained, "Chazal say, 'Better once with hardships than a hundred without hardships'. So, if you studied one page, and it was difficult, that's equivalent to studying one hundred pages with ease.

Therefore, we can say that you are up to page 103)!"

We can add that Chazal, therefore, say, *חש בראשו יעבוק*, בתורה, "If your head hurts, study Torah" (Eiruvin 54.). You shouldn't stop learning when your head hurts or when you are enduring some other kind of hardship, because these are the moments your Torah is most valuable. One hour of learning Torah when it is hard is equivalent to studying for a hundred hours when everything is going well.

A man bought an expensive pair of shoes, but they were uncomfortable. He called the store owner and told him that the shoes hurt.

The store owner explained, "It takes a couple of weeks to break into the shoes and for them to become comfortable."

"So, you are saying that in two weeks, the shoes won't hurt me anymore?"

"Exactly."

He was relieved. He paid so much for those shoes, and he didn't want the money should go to waste.

So, the man stored his shoes in his closet for two weeks. But when he put the shoes on again, they were still hurting. He called the shoe store once again, and said, "I kept the shoes in the closet for two weeks, and they didn't become any better. They still hurt."

The store owner replied, "I meant that if you wear the shoes for two weeks, they will become comfortable. It doesn't help just to leave them in the closet."

The *nimshal* is, when a person begins studying Torah, it is hard. As there is a saying, *כל ההתחלות קשות*, "all beginnings are hard," and he isn't accustomed to studying Torah. However, if he studies every day, he will learn to love Torah,

and Torah study will become easy and pleasurable. But that will only happen if he learns Torah every day, and he continues to study, even when it gets hard. But if whenever it gets hard, he gives up and stops learning for a couple of weeks, he might never get accustomed to studying Torah.

Kevias Ittim for Torah

Even those who work many hours a day, they can also attain erudition and expertise in Torah. If they devote time to Torah each day, they will be surprised by how much Torah they will acquire. One's age notwithstanding, as the following story demonstrates:

There were two bachurim who were both very successful in their Torah studies. The Beis Yisrael zt'l once said about them, "It will be interesting to see which one of them

will end up being a greater talmid chacham."

Years later, these two men met. They reminded one another what the Beis Yisrael said. One of them said, "Nu, so which of us ended up being more successful in Torah?"

The other replied, "We aren't finished yet. We're still in the middle." Because regardless of one's age, with a good Torah program, one can make great strides in acquiring Torah knowledge.

Tzaddikim of Slonim zt'l described the importance of designating times for Torah study. They would say: Each hour of the day that passes without Torah study is a zero. Each hour of Torah study is a one. If you place the "one" before all those zeros, it becomes a huge number.

How does one place the one before the zeros? Perhaps the zeros will come before the one? The

tzaddikim of Slonim *zt'l* said, if the hour you designated for Torah study is the most important hour of the day for you, then that hour is counted first, and all the zeros come after it, and it is like you have a vast number. But if you find your financial pursuits to be the primary part of your day, you are left with many zeros, and then the "one" comes at the end.

The Gemara debates whether the Torah was given on the 6th or the 7th of Sivan. But all opinions

agree that the Torah was given on Shabbos. This is hinting that just as no one would consider desecrating Shabbos, *chalilah*, so one mustn't desecrate the times set aside for learning Torah. No financial gains should draw us away from the times designated for Torah study.⁷

The Ramchal *zy'a* says one should consider his set times for Torah as though he is in the middle of *Shemonah Esrei*. He simply cannot interrupt. (Similarly, when you see others learning

7. Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zy'a* is renowned for his love and passion for Gemara. He would say: "Someone who doesn't study Gemara, is *נישט קיין מענטש*, "He isn't a Yid, and he isn't even a human being."

He explained that this is the reason the *brachah* *השיבנו* in *Shemonah Esrei*, which requests for success in doing *teshuvah*, begins with a request for Torah. As we say, *השיבנו אבינו לתורתך*. This is because without Torah one is *נישט קיין מענטש*, "not a Yid, and not even a human being." It is impossible for a person to succeed in doing *teshuvah* without dedication to Torah study.

It is written: *והיה ראשית ממלכתו בבל* (*Bereishis* 10:10). Rebbe Mordechai Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l* would say that implied in this *pasuk* is, *והיה ראשית ממלכתו בבל* "One should begin with Talmud Bavli." That is the first step in the process of *teshuvah*.

Torah, don't interrupt them, as you wouldn't interrupt someone who is davening Shemonah Esrei.)

Reb Binyamin Rabinowitz *zt'l* was the rosh yeshiva of Toldos Aharon. On Shiva Asar b'Tamuz, a student saw Reb Binyamin Rabinowitz learning for hours straight, without interruption! Generally, on a fast day, people are weaker, but he was learning with *hasmadah* the entire day, without taking any breaks. The student was amazed,

and he asked Reb Binyamin how he did it. He replied:

"I didn't begin studying eight hours straight. I started with a kabbalah that I wouldn't interrupt my learning for five minutes. I kept this kabbalah for several months. Then I added another five minutes. A few months later, I added another five minutes. Now I'm an old man. Those five minutes have accumulated. Now, I'm up to learning eight hours straight, without interruption."⁸

8. As we say in the morning, *שתרגילנו בחורתיך*, "Make us accustomed to Your Torah," because to a large degree *hasmadah* in Torah is a matter of becoming accustomed.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* said that although being accustomed to something has a negative side, for then he doesn't have the freshness and newness as someone starting to study Torah for the first time, nevertheless, we request *שתרגילנו בחורתיך*, that we should be accustomed to learning Torah. This is because it is possible to be accustomed to Torah and yet daily study Torah with a new, refreshed vigor. An example of this, he said, is eating. People eat every day, yet they never become bored. When a plate of food in front of them, they eat it with gusto, like it was the first time. We should similarly be accustomed to learning Torah, yet it should always be like it is new to us.

The father of the Shlah Hakodesh, Reb Sheftel Ish Levi zt'l, teaches that just as we daven each day, and we wear tefillin each day, studying Gemara, Rashi, and Tosfos each day is no less of an obligation. A day shouldn't pass when one isn't involved in Torah study.

Sometimes people feel that they need every minute of their day to earn money, and they don't have time for Torah study. We remind them of the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 19) that says, "Whoever studies Torah, Hakadosh Baruch Hu fulfills his desires.... Whoever studies Torah, his assets prosper." Thus, Torah study is mesugal for wealth and success.

Only the Torah Remained

The Yaaras D'vash writes, "Strengthen yourself in the study of Torah. Recognize that due to our sins, we don't have prophecy, a Beis

HaMikdash, the aron, the urim vetumim, the mizbeaich that would atone, the cohanim's service, kingship, sanhedrin... and we lack so much more. All that remains is the Torah, which is really the source and origin of all the above... We lost the details (פרטים), but we were left with the source (כלל). We should, therefore, pay attention to Torah, exalt it, study it, and rejoice in it. Compare it to someone who lost all his children and is left with one child. He will be thinking about his love for this child constantly. The child will never leave his embrace. He will sleep in his room. This is what we should do with Hashem's Torah, for this is the only matter that remained..."

The Chofetz Chaim (Ahavas Chessed 2:11) writes, "I heard from גאון אהרן, a certain talmid chacham, that a person should think the following three thoughts [and he will

surely devote himself to Torah study]: (1) One should think that he has only one more day to live. (2) He only has this one page of Gemara (or just this chapter of Mishnayos) to study. (3) He is the only person in the world whom Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded to study Torah, and the existence of the entire world is dependent solely on him. [These contemplations will cause him to devote himself to Torah because] (1) By thinking that he only has one day to live... he won't push off studying Torah for tomorrow. (2) Also, by thinking that he only has a small amount to study, he will not be lazy. Whereas when the yetzer hara gives him the notion that he still has a lot to accomplish, and that it will be a long time, and a lot of toil, until he finishes the seder Mishnayos or the misechta, it will discourage him and take away his motivation. (3) When he thinks that the survival of the entire world

is dependent on his Torah study, it will cause him to be swift [to do Hashem's service and to study Torah]... In my opinion," the Chofetz Chaim concludes, "these ideas are hinted to in kriyas Shema. *וואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך*, 'Love Hashem your G-d with all your heart...' How does one reach that level? *והיו הדברים האלה*, 'These words...' think that you only have to learn these few words – just this chapter, or just one page – and nothing else. *אשר אנכי מצויד*, 'that I am commanding you.' Consider it as though Hashem commanded you, and there is no one else in the world who can do it. *היום*, consider your obligation is only for today. *על לבבך*, keep these thoughts always in your mind," and you will devote yourself to the Torah.

One shouldn't think that he is sinful and that Hashem doesn't want his Torah. He should remember how the Jewish nation was

on the forty-ninth level of impurity, and just fifty days later, Hashem gave them the Torah. This demonstrates that even if you are at a very low level, Torah is for you.

The Or HaChaim (Shmos 3:8) teaches that the measure of the depths of one's impurity becomes the height of one's spirituality when he repents. The Jewish nation reached the forty-ninth gate of impurity when they were in Egypt, and therefore, when they rose from that contamination, they attained the forty-ninth gate of holiness. Had they fallen to the fiftieth gate of *tumah*, they would have risen from there up to the fiftieth gate of holiness. Why did Hashem rush them out of Egypt? Why didn't Hashem permit them to reach the fiftieth level of *tumah*? Wouldn't that be better for them, so they could afterward rise to the fiftieth gate of *Kedushah*? The answer is

that generation didn't receive the Torah yet, and if one reaches the fiftieth level of impurity, there is no way to leave that mire without Torah. "However," the Or HaChaim writes, "in the later generations, since they have Torah, they are able [to fall into the fiftieth level of impurity and afterward] attain the fiftieth gate of holiness, and all the *tumah* will be totally obliterated."

Simchas Chassan v'Kallah

At weddings and during the week of Sheva Brachos we say *שהשמחה במעונו*, that the joy is in Hashem's chambers in heaven. The Rabbeinu b'Chaya (*Terumah*) writes that *מעון* is the highest chamber in heaven. We quote, "Some kabbalist say that there is an eighth heaven, above the seventh heavens, and it is called *מעון*... As we say, *שהשמחה במעונו*, the joy is in *מעון*." This tells us just how great the joy of a chasunah is. The

joy reaches the highest heavens.

Reb Yaakov Emdin *zt'l* was planning the celebration for his 400th *siyum* on *Shas*, and at the *seudah*, he was planning to say, *שהשמחה במעונו*. He figured, "What could be a greater joy than finishing *Shas* four hundred times?"

His father, the Chacham Tzvi *zt'l*, came to him in a dream and told him, *שהשמחה במעונו* should only be said at a wedding." It seems that this extraordinary joy is exclusive for chasunos. Although *simchas HaTorah* is enormous – especially when the joy is about learning *Shas* four hundred times – nevertheless, *שהשמחה במעונו*, that the joy reaches the very highest heavens, is reserved solely for a chasunah, because the joy of a wedding is unique.

The Yesod HaAvodah of Slonim *zt'l* said, "Also when a non-Jew makes a wedding, he is happy. But his joy doesn't compare to

a Yid's joy. A Yid is happy *שהשמחה במעונו*, that the joy is also in heaven, and the result of this joy is many *berachos* for all Yidden.

When the Vilna Gaon *zt'l* went to *galus* (self-imposed exile, to travel from place to place, as a form of purification), he would go to weddings, and eat there, as the paupers do. At one wedding, someone stole silverware. As they didn't recognize the Vilna Gaon, they suspected him and called the police on him. The police beat and bound the Vilna Gaon in chains to bring him to the police headquarters for interrogation. As the Gaon was being led out by the police, the Gaon looked up at the *chassan*, and he saw that the *chassan* was enjoying watching the commotion. The Vilna Gaon said, "My going into exile, the shame, and the beatings, were all worthwhile, just so the *chassan* would give a bright smile (א לעכבאונע שמיביעל)." ¹

The mother of Rebbe Elimelech of Rudnick *zt'l* was lying on her deathbed. Rebbe Elimelech sought a minyan so that they would be present by the petirah. He found ten people who were celebrating *simchas chassan and kallah*, so he asked them to continue their simchah near his mother's deathbed, so there would be a minyan at her demise. In honor of the *chassan*, Rebbe Elimelech began to dance happily before the *chasan*. As he was dancing, his mother started feeling better, and in a short while, she recovered from her illness! Rebbe Elimelech of Rudnick said, "Today's *yungerleit* don't appreciate the power of *simchas chassan and kallah*. *שהשמחה במעונו*, the joy that is in heaven can bring *techiyas hameisim*, resurrection - literally."

One evening, the Imrei Emes *zt'l* went to a *sheva brachos*. He didn't know the families, but he went there all the same. He

explained, "Chazal say that when one brings joy to a *chassan* and *kallah* he merits Torah... I was learning a *Tosfos* and was having a hard time understanding it, so I came here to gladden the *chassan* and *kallah*. In this merit, I hope that now I will understand the *Tosfos*."

Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zt'l* wouldn't be *mesader kiddushin* until he saw the *chassan* crying (Because before the chuppah, the *chasan* and *kallah* must daven with tears that they have a successful life together. After the chuppah, we dance with bitachon that it will certainly be so. Also, it is a time of teshuvah, and therefore, Rebbe Naftali wouldn't begin the *chasunah* before the *chasan* cried.)

Once, Rebbe Naftali was at a *kabalas panim* before a chuppah. An entertainer (גראמער) rhymed inspirational thoughts to rouse the *chassan* to *teshuvah* and *tefillah*, but the *chassan* wasn't crying. Rebbe Naftali waited. He wouldn't

go to the chuppah before the *chassan* cried. Finally, Rebbe Naftali got up on a chair and said, 'My dear *chassan*, let me tell you a story: Once a deer and a doe met in the forest and fell in love. Suddenly, the deer jumped up and was about to run away.

"What happened?" the doe asked. The deer pointed to the distance. There was a hunter there, and his rifle was aimed at them.

"When will we meet again?" she asked.

"The next time we meet will be in the butcher shop. My hide will be lying

beside your meat..." and then the *chassan* cried. Rebbe Naftali called to the musicians, "Play joyous music! Let's bring the *chassan* to the chuppah!"⁹

My father expended a lot of energy in the mitzvah of *simchas chassan v'kallah*. He would dance with all his might, as though he was the father of the groom. He did this even in his older years when he was weak. He also encouraged other people to join in the dancing and not just sit on the side.

There was an orphan who was close to my grandfather, Rebbe Moshe

9. My father *zt'l* would repeat this story to *chassanim* at the *kabalas panim*. Once, he was at a *kabalas panim* where the speaker was passionately rousing everyone to tears, but the *chassan* wasn't crying. When my father saw this, he went over to the *chassan* and explained to him that these are very important moments of his life, and he must bring himself to cry. My father told him the *mashal* of the deer and the doe, who knew they wouldn't meet again until they got to the butcher's shop. In the end, everyone meets up there, in heaven. My father spoke to him until the *chassan's* eyes filled with tears and couldn't stop crying.

Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l*. My father was his *shadchan* and arranged the entire wedding. On the day of the chuppah the *chassan* expressed his concern that there still wasn't a plan for the *sheva brachos* for the

following night. My father offered to host the *sheva brachos*. At the wedding, my father danced with the *chassan* until my father didn't have any strength left. It was genuine *simchas chassan v'kallah*.¹⁰

10. As a *bachur*, I learned in Ponevizh. There was a very special *talmid chacham* there, who came from the Mirer yeshiva in Poland. He said, "In Mir, the *bachurim* wouldn't get married before thirty-five or forty years old. Before this, they wouldn't even consider marriage. When someone would get engaged, the questions people asked resembled the questions people ask when they go to a *beis avel*, a mourner's house: (1) How old was he when it happened? (2) Did he suffer for a long time? (3) Was he lucid until the last minute?"

Note the third question "Was he lucid?" When one gets married, it's essential that he doesn't lose his peace of mind. Many financial responsibilities begin after one's *chasunah*, but this shouldn't cause one to lose his peace of mind. One must be strong with his *emunah* and *bitachon* that Hashem will help him, and everything will work out. There is no reason to worry.

My father *zt'l* noticed that one of his students was waking up late after his *chasunah*. The week of *sheva brachos* had already passed, but this newlywed was coming into the *beis medresh* around eleven o'clock in the morning to daven *Shacharis*. My father rebuked him. "This is not how one builds a *bayis ne'eman beYisrael*. Now that you are married, you should serve Hashem with a fresh spirit, even better than before. You should awaken early like a lion, to daven and to serve Hashem..."