

SYNAGOGUE AND BETH MEDRASH

Parshas Eikev

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Reb Levi (Talmud Moed Koton 29a) extols the intensely dedicated Jew who exits the synagogue (Beth HaKneses - House of Prayer) at concluding his prayers and enters the Beth Hamedrash (House of Study); similarly exits the Beth Hamedrash and enters the Beth Hakneses. This observance, says Reb Levi, is a fulfillment of the passage "They advance from strength to strength..." (Tehilim 84:8; see also conclusion of Talmud Brochos).

Reb Levi, here promulgates the basic principle, that prayer and Torah study are intertwined. Torah study is a harbinger of Heavenly response to prayer. By the same token prayer is instrumental in comprehension of intricate teachings of Torah.

When Yaakov bequeaths a double portion of Eretz Yisroel land to Joseph's sons, i.e. one portion to Menashe and the other to Ephraim, Yaakov says "it is the land attained with my sword and my bow". Rashi interprets this as a reference to Torah study and prayer. Reb Joshua Leib Diskin (Brisker Rav) quotes the Talmud (Avoda Zoro 25) that the use of a bow requires both hands. Similarly both powers, prayer preceded by Torah study, can achieve results. "One who turns his ear away from listening to Torah, his prayer becomes an abomination" (Mishlei 28:9; see Tzidkas Hatzadik 223).

Similarly is there place for prayer before Torah study, supplicating to Hashem for success in deeper insight into profoundly complicated portions of Talmud. Reb Shlomo Heiman, Torah Vodaath, once said: "Everyone wants to become a Torah scholar over night; and on that night to enjoy a good night's sleep". The opposite, however, is true. Attaining scholarship requires deep concentration, constant delving and groping. "If you will seek Torah wisdom as silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand... and find the knowledge of Hashem" (Mishlei 2:4,5). In addition to the striving, we pray for divine assistance "Enlighten our eyes in Thy Torah" (Ahava Rabba).

Especially for retention of accumulated knowledge we need help from Above. So teaches the Talmud (Megila 6b) when one says 'I struggled to gain insight and I succeeded', you can believe him. But for retention one needs Heavenly blessing.

Turning to our Sidra we see a most intriguing phenomenon. The daily recital of Shema Yisroel, as "Vehoyo Im Shomoa" of this weeks Parsha, both mention three basic commandments, but not in the same order. In the Shema the order is a) Torah study; b) Tefilin; c) Mezuzah. Whereas in this week's portion Tefilin precedes Torah study. The reason for this discrepancy may be as follows:

In the Shema, Tefilin is mentioned second in order to juxtapose Tefilin and Mezuzah. This is imperative since writing a Mezuzah (or other writing) with the right hand or the left, determines which is considered the weaker hand to put on it the Tefilin.

In the second portion, Vehoyo Im Shomoa, the order is changed, first Tefilin, then Torah study, in order to teach the vital lesson, mentioned above, about the requisites to attain Torah wisdom. One of the four portions of the Tefilin reads: "And it shall be for you a sign... so that Hashem's Torah may be in your mouth..." (Shemos 13:9). In addition to using all faculties of mind and marrow to understand Torah in depth one must cleave to the Giver of Torah. Men express this cleaving by tightly donning the Tefilin. Women express this clinging by accepting the yoke of heaven as they read the Shema (Shulchan Aruch 70:1). Only following this binding to Hashem, the Author of this Torah, are we privileged to gain insight into its profundities. Thus Tefilin is mentioned before Torah study.

How eloquent, thus, Reb Levi's statement lauding the one who frequents both the Synagogue and the Beth Medrosh, experiencing prayer and study as a vehicle of one empowering the other. Indeed the psalmic fulfillment of "Going from strength to strength.

