

Ki-Saytzeh

In expounding upon the laws pertaining to the disobedient and rebellious son, discussed in this week's Sedrah, the *Gemorah*¹ makes the surprising statement that, "*Ben Sorrer Oomoreh Lo Hawyah V'Lo Yehiyeh*"—the rebellious son (mentioned in the Torah and meeting all the conditions outlined in *Gemorah Sanhedrin*) never came into being and never can become a reality! Even the pronouncement by Reb Yonothan that he witnessed such a case and was at a *Ben Sorrer Oomoreh's* burial place¹ is interpreted by various commentaries as not really pertaining to the classical rebellious son.²

This chapter of the disobedient son deals with a problem which in the whole of the past and in all future time was and will remain only a theoretical "problem." It could never come to a concrete case considering all the factors which would be necessary to determine it. The *Gemorah* in *Sanhedrin* then asks "If there is no possibility of a concrete case occurring why was this chapter of "*Ben Sorrer Oomoreh*" written altogether in the Torah?"—Interpret (study and expound on these laws) and you shall be rewarded—is the remarkable answer given by the *Gemorah* to this question! For the diligent learning of all aspects of the laws pertaining to the insubordinate son, despite the fact that there is no practical relevance to this *Mitzvah*, a person will receive his just reward for the study alone.

One can deduce very clearly from this most interesting *Chazal* that the sacred obligation to perform the *Mitzvah* of "*Talmud Torah*"—Learning of Torah, which is "*K'neged Koolum*"—valued above all *Mitzvohs*, is not in "full force" only when it involves study that prepares a person with necessary knowledge and understanding for proper "practical" performance of precepts. True, "*Lilmod, Oolilamed, Lishmor, V'Laasot Ooli-kayam*"—to learn, teach (in order) to observe, to perform and to fulfill all the *Mitzvohs Hashem*, is a basic purpose of Torah studies. But, nevertheless, "study of Torah" merely for the sake of learning, even where it

doesn't afford the opportunity for practical performance of a Mitzvah, is just as fundamental and compulsory in the performance of the holy Mitzvah of Torah study and carries with it the same reward. . . . "D'rosh V'kabale Sochor"—study and you will receive your just reward!

This concept is also succinctly developed by the *Chatam Sofer*. The Mishna³ states, "Reb Maier says, anyone who studies Torah 'Lishmah'—for its own sake, merits many things. The *Chatam Sofer* comments that, had the Mishna used the masculine form "*Lishmo*"—literally for his sake, it would imply that only if a person occupies himself with learning Torah in order to be able to perform properly "His"—Hashem's Mitzvoh—he would merit many things. However, since the Mishna uses the feminine form "*Lishmah*"—literally for her sake—it clearly implies that even if the person studies Torah only "*Lishmah Shel Torah*"—for the sake of Torah (word Torah is fem.) concentrating in areas that are not applicable or relevant in our time, "*Zocheh Lidvarim Harbeh*"—he is still performing "Torah study" on the highest level and merits many things."

It is very sad indeed when one hears people involved in Torah study and oft times even good Yeshiva students, express themselves about a certain tractate of the Talmud, "Well, this Gemora is not relevant to our times or that area of Torah has no practical significance; let us study only that which is practical and germane to our times!" Unfortunately these people don't grasp the full significance and meaning of the sacred Mitzvah of "*Limud Hatorah*"—Torah study—"D'rosh V'kabale Sochor"—"study" and you will receive your just reward. Learning Torah for its own sake, aside from the practical benefits to be derived from it, is in its own right on the highest level of a true religious experience which is worthy of "*D'varim Harbeh*"—many things and great reward!

With the advent of the month of Elul, we begin a period of retrospection and introspection. The month of Elul, with its special days for *Selichot*, followed by Rosh Hashanah and Ten days of Repentance, culminating with Yom Kippur—Day of Atonement—offer us the opportunity to reflect upon and carefully examine our past thoughts and actions.

Assiduous soul-searching reveals the fallibility of all humans, even the most saintly. It is told that once, on the New Moon of

Elul, as the saintly Tzadik, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev was standing by the window, a gentile cobbler passed by and asked him: "Have you nothing to mend?" At once the Tzadik sat himself on the ground and weeping bitterly, cried: "Woe is me for the Day of Judgment is almost here and I have still not mended myself!"

Yes! We are all fallible—each on his own spiritual level. Reb Levi Yitzchok heard the call to mend one's self—on his level!

Before *Kol Nidre*, the Torah scrolls are taken from the Ark and everyone embraces and kisses the Torah scrolls, beseeching their forgiveness and pardon for having dishonored the Torah. Not only have we desecrated the Torah by our iniquities and transgressions, but on a higher plane, many have defiled and disgraced the Torah by literally relegating large segments of Torah to disuse (for example, Tractates dealing with Sacrifices and *Jaharot*—Laws of Purity) leading to the ultimate disrespectful situation of "*Torah Munahas B'keren Zawvis*"—the Torah is reposing in a dusty corner.⁴

Let us rededicate ourselves to true, proper Torah study with a firm resolve to master, to the best of our ability, all areas of Torah equally. To study with full fervor and diligence "*Kol Hatorah Kulah*"—all parts of written and oral Torah. In this way when we face the Torah Yom Kippur eve, our show of respect and love for Torah by embracing and kissing the scrolls will be genuine and the Torah itself will be a "*Maylitz Vosher*"—to intercede for us on high for the blessings of a *Shana Tova*.

FOOTNOTES

1. Sanhedrin 71a
2. See Bachya and Sefer Margoliot Hayam
3. Avoth 6:2
4. Kiddushin 66a