

**Rav Asher Weiss**

on

**The Ways of Torah Study**

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# Rav Asher Weiss

on

## The Ways of Torah Study

### One: Learning Torah in Yeshiva

The primary form of Torah study takes place in a Yeshiva. The Gemara (*Yoma* 28b) relates:

*Said Rabbi Chama b'Rabbi Chanina, 'Since the days of our forefathers, a Yeshiva was ever-present. When they were in Mitzrayim, there was a Yeshiva among them, as the Pasuk states: "Go and gather the elders of Yisrael". When they were in the desert, there was a Yeshiva among them, as the Pasuk states: "Gather for me, seventy men of the elders of Yisrael". Avraham Avinu was a Zaken (man of Torah wisdom) and dwelled in a Yeshiva, as the Pasuk states: "And Avraham was a Zaken, advanced in years". Yitzchak Avinu was a Zaken and dwelled in a Yeshiva, as the Pasuk states: "And it was when Yitzchak became a Zaken". Yaakov Avinu was a Zaken and dwelled in a Yeshiva as the Pasuk states: "And the eyes of Yisrael became heavy when he became a Zaken". Eliezer, the slave of Avraham was a Zaken and dwelled in Yeshiva, as the Pasuk states: "And Avraham said to his servant, the Zaken of his household, who managed ("haMoshel") all that he had". Said Rabbi Elazar, "He ruled over ("Moshel") the Torah of his teacher".*

Likewise, when *Yaakov Avinu* descended to Mitzrayim in search of provisions he dispatched Yehuda to make arrangements with Yosef before he would arrive (*Bereishis* 56:28). *Rashi (ad. loc.)* explains that Yehuda's mission was to prepare a *Beis Talmud* – a

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place to learn. Yaakov did not wait until he arrived in order to make this arrangement for he did not wish to even enter a city that did not contain a *Beis Talmud*, the living soul of the Jewish people.

Our holy Yeshivos, where scholars toil in Torah together and sharpen the minds of their students, there one will find the great *Roshei Yeshiva* – the transmitters of knowledge, and Torah scholars who thirstily drink the words of their teachers representing the very soul of the Torah and guaranteeing the eternal existence of the Jewish people.

When the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed *Rabbi Yochana ben Zakai* made one request of Vespasian, the Roman Caesar: “Give me *Yaveh* and its Sages” (*Gittin* 56b). He knew that *Yaveh* and its Sages were the only guarantee that the Torah would not be forgotten.

Our ancestors consistently fulfilled the dictum of *Chaza”l* (*Avos* 4:14), “Exile yourself to a place of Torah”. The Gemara (*Megila* 16b) likewise notes that *Yaakov Avinu* was not punished for failing to attend to his father and mother during the years he spent in the Yeshiva of *Eiver*. for “*Torah study is a greater Mitzva than honoring one’s parents*”.

*Chaza”l* (*Midrash Mishlei* 31:14) similarly expound:

*“She is like a merchant’s ships, from afar she brings her sustenance (“Lachma”).” Said R’ Shimon ben Chalafta: “If a person does not exile himself for words of Torah, he will never learn Torah. For Lechem is a reference to Torah as the Pasuk states, “Go battle for my bread”.*

The *Chasam Sofer* (*Responsa, Choshen Mishpat* sec. 9) discusses a case of a person who allotted a large sum of money in his will to sponsor a talented young man to travel to Yeshiva, learn with great dedication until the age of 25 and develop into a great Torah scholar worthy of issuing rulings for the Jewish people. A youth that fitted this

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description was found, but his father, who was an important Rabbi and Torah scholar insisted that his son remain at home so that he could fulfill his obligation of teaching Torah directly to his son.

The *Chasam Sofer* ruled that if the youth was to remain at home, he could not lay claim to the money, as a person must exile himself to a place of Torah as did our ancestors in every generation. He adduces proof for this from the conduct of *Yaakov Avinu* who exiled himself to the Yeshiva of Shem and Eiver and did not suffice with studying Torah at home with his father Yitzchak. (See *Minchas Asher, Bereishis, Mahadura Tinyana* 60:6 for further elaboration.)

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The Gemara (*Kesubos* 62b) relates:

*Rabbi Chananya ben Chachinai was due to travel to the Yeshiva during the week of the Sheva Brachos of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai requested, "Wait for me until I can join you" but Rabbi Chananya did not wait for him. He went and learned for twelve consecutive years in the Beis Hamedrash and by the time he returned, the roads of his town had changed and he did not know how to reach his home. He sat down at a river-bank and heard a young maiden calling out, "Daughter of Chachinai, daughter of Chachinai, fill your jug and let us go". Rabbi Chananya then said, "This must be one of our daughters," and so he followed her. At his house, his wife was sitting and sifting flour. She looked up and saw him and her heart stopped and her soul left her. R' Chananya said, "Master of the World, this poor woman – is this her reward?" He prayed for mercy for her and she came back to life.*

The *Maharim Schiff* (*ad. loc.*) wonders why the initial exchange between *Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* and *Rabbi Chananya*, which appears at the beginning of this episode,

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was recorded by the Gemara at all. He does not seem to consider it to be of any particular note that *Rabbi Shimon* requested of *Rabbi Chananya* to wait for him until after *sheva brachos*, which the latter did not do. Set against the incredible ideas contained within this story, *Rabbi Chananya's mesirus nefesh* in learning Torah for twelve years, his wife's *mesirus nefesh* in remaining alone during all those years, the power of *Rabbi Chananya's tefillah* to bring his wife back to life. Next to all this, contends the *Maharam Schiff*, the question of whether *Rabbi Chananya* originally waited for *Rabbi Shimon* seems hardly worthy of mention at all!

I believe, however, that in this detail lies a remarkable *Chiddush*. Let us consider, *Rabbi Chananya ben Chachinai* is recorded in *Pirkei Avos* (3:4) as saying: "One who stays awake at night, or who travels alone on the road, but turns his heart to idleness – he bears guilt for his soul". The *Bartenura* (*ad. loc.*) explains: "For the night is a time of dangerous spirits, and a person who travels alone is in danger from bandits and other mishaps; and if he had been thinking Torah thoughts, the Torah would have protected him". With this in mind, surely it would be preferable for two people to travel together. For when a person travels alone he is unable to fully occupy his thoughts with Torah as he needs to concentrate on the road so that he doesn't fall into a pit or veer into thorns and thistles, whereas when he is accompanied by a companion, one can occupy himself in Torah while the other concentrates on the road ahead. For this reason, *Rabbi Chananya ben Chachinai* decried a person who travels alone on the road for he, by definition, will need to abandon his Torah thoughts, and will thus bear responsibility for any mishap that occurs.

Yet, the very same *Rabbi Chananya*, who was due to travel alone to the Beis Hamedrash was not prepared to wait a few days for *Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* to travel together with him. That is indeed a *chiddush*! And why, in fact, did he not wait? Presumably, while still at home he was learning with extraordinary diligence as befits one of the *Tana'im*. Would it not be worthwhile to defer his trip for a few days so that *Rabbi Shimon* could travel with him?

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The answer is that he **refused to miss out on even one day of Torah study in a Yeshiva**, for there is no comparison between learning alone at home and learning in Yeshiva. *Rabbi Chananya* was willing to brave the risk of traveling alone on the road, in order to gain an extra day in Yeshiva!

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*Rabbi Nehorai said: "Exile yourself to a place of Torah – and do not assume that it will come after you – for it is your colleagues who will cause it to remain with you; and do not rely on your own understanding" (Pirkei Avos 4:14).*

The Gemara in two places discusses the identity of "*Rabbi Nehorai*":

*It was taught: His name was not Rabbi Meir but Rabbi Nehorai. Why then was he called Rabbi Meir? It was because he would illuminate ("meir") the eyes of the Chachamim in matters of Halacha. And in fact, his name was not Rabbi Nehorai but Rabbi Nechemia, and some say it was Rabbi Elazar ben Arach. Why then was he called Rabbi Nehorai? For he illuminated ("manhir") the eyes of the Chachamim in matters of Halacha. (Eiruvim 13b).*

The names *Meir* and *Nehorai* both have a connotation of "light", the one in Hebrew and the other in Aramaic, for this sage – the great disciple of *Rabbi Akiva* – would enlighten the *Chachamim* of his time. The Gemara elsewhere, in *Maseches Shabbos* (147b) cites *Rabbi Nehorai's* exhortation to "exile oneself to a place of Torah," and likewise comments that this sage was either *Rabbi Nechemia* or *Rabbi Elazar ben Arach*.

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Now, even if *Rabbi Nehorai* was *Rabbi Meir* or *Rabbi Nechemia*, his exhortation to exile oneself to a place of Torah is apt and praiseworthy. But if he was in fact the *Tanna Rabbi Elazar ben Arach*, his words take on added significance, as we will explain.

The Mishna (*Avos* 2:8) relates that *Rabbi Elazar ben Arach* was the greatest student of *Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai*, concerning whom the Mishna stated, “*If all of the other students of Rabbi Yochanan, including Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkenas were to be on one side of the scale, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach were to be on the other, he would outweigh them all.*” And yet, in contrast to *Rabbi Yochanan’s* other students whose statements grace the six orders of the Mishna, very little appears from the teachings of *Rabbi Elazar ben Arach*.

*Avos d’Rabbi Nasan* (ch. 14) recounts that when *Rabbi Elazar ben Arach’s* contemporaries went to study Torah in *Yavneh*, he instead went to *Damasis*, where he waited expectantly for the other sages to join him as he was the “*lion of the group*”. However, they failed to do so, preferring instead to remain in *Yavneh* which was a place of Torah. Ultimately, *Rabbi Elazar ben Arach*, who was never joined by the other *Chachamim*, turned his attention instead to bathing and other physical luxuries and never reached his full potential in Torah.

The *Midrash (Koheles Rabah, 7:2)* further relates that *Rabbi Elazar ben Arach* realized he had been mistaken and wanted to join the other Sages in *Yavneh*. However, his wife did not permit him to do so, arguing that it was beneath his dignity and that they should instead join him in *Damasis*. In so doing, she caused her husband’s name to be diminished and that of the other sages to be greatened.

In the wake of that tragic episode, *Rabbi Elazar ben Arach* – who was *Rabbi Nehorai* – exhorted: “*Exile yourself to a place of Torah, and do not assume that it will come after you, for it is your colleagues who will cause it to remain with you; and do not rely on your own understanding*”.

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I was delighted to see that this connection was also made by the *Machzor Vitri* (427):

*Rabbi Nehorai said: "Exile yourself to a place of Torah – and do not assume that it will come after you – for it is your colleagues who will cause it to remain with you; and do not rely on your own understanding". He would also say: "It is not in our power either to explain the tranquility of the wicked or the suffering of the righteous". Rabbi Nehorai is Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, as the Chachamim explain in Tractate Shabbos. And he was dubbed "Nehorai" for he lit up the eyes of the Chachamim in matters of Halacha. Yet it occurred that he was drawn after wine and forgot his Torah. But [his colleagues] begged for mercy for him and his wisdom returned. And it was **as a result of this** that he used to say, "Exile yourself to a place of Torah" – not as I did. For I exiled myself to a place of the scoffers of the time, who drank from wine basins, and the Chachamim refrained from following me. Rather, exile yourself to a place of Torah, to a place of Torah scholars. "And do not assume that it will come after you", in other words that your students will follow you and your wisdom will return through them and that you will increase your teachings – as the Chachamim said "I learnt much from my teachers etc. but from my students more than everyone".*

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*"Exile yourself to a place of Torah"*

*A student who goes into exile - we exile his Rebbi along with him, as the Pasuk states "And he shall live," [meaning], make arrangements for him so that he will have life. (Makkos 10a)*

*A student who is exiled to a City of Refuge – we exile his Rebbi along with him, as the Pasuk states 'And he shall live,' [meaning,] we must make arrangements for him so that he will have life. And for people of wisdom and for*

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*those who seek it, life without Torah learning is like death. And similarly, a Rebbi who is exiled – we exile his Yeshiva with him. (Rambam, Hilchos Rotzeach 7:1).*

These words of our master, the *Rambam*, illuminate the eyes regarding the preciousness and exalted value of Torah. It is the essence of life, so that its absence is “like death”. Therefore a *Rebbi* must exile himself to join his errant student and likewise take up residence in the City of Refuge.

However, the entire matter seems very puzzling. What about the Rebbi’s other students? Are not they all obligated to guard their lives? Why do we compromise the life of these righteous students, sending their revered Rebbi to the City of Refuge to vouchsafe the life of that one student who blundered and committed an accidental murder?

We can only conclude that the Rebbi’s other students are also instructed to join their Rebbi in exile. “*If you desire life*” we tell them, “*join your Rebbi in exile and fulfill the dictum of ‘Exile yourself to a place of Torah’*”. “*Journey to Bnei Brak to study under Rabbi Akiva, to Lod to study under Rabbi Eliezer, and to the City of Refuge to continue to study under your Rebbi!*” After all, “*For people of wisdom and for those who seek it, life without Torah learning is like death.*” *A man dying of thirst will search for water in all manner of places – scaling mountains, descending into the valleys, searching high and wide until he can revive himself. So, too, must one who seeks Torah exile himself to a place where he can revive his soul.*

However, not every person who learns Torah finds “*life*” within it, for there is a proviso attached. The *Yerushalmi* (*Pe’ah* 2, *Shavuos* 3, *Shabbos* 11 and *Kesubos* 51) asserts: “*When is it your life? When you toil in it*”, for only toil in Torah grants a person life. The deeper explanation of this idea is that only when one invests with one’s soul is he able to bestow life to his soul. This is likewise the intent of the *Ramban* (*Parshas Acharei-Mos*) when he writes that, “*The life that a person derives from the Mitzvos is in accordance with his preparation for them*”.

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The essence of Torah study that takes place in Yeshiva is summed up in the sixth chapter of *Pirkei Avos* which discusses the forty-eight means through which one acquires Torah, among them: “*Attending to the Sages, closeness with colleagues and sharp discussion with students*”. These three were alluded to by *Rabbi Chanina (Ta’anis 7a)* who stated: “*I learnt much from my teachers (“Attending to the Sages”), and from my colleagues I learned more than from my teachers (“Closeness with colleagues”), and from my students I learned more than from anyone else (“Sharp discussion with students”)*).

In fact, *Rabbi Chanina’s* assertion that he derived more from his students than he did from his teachers is utterly astounding when we consider that he was one of the students of *Rabbi Yehuda haNasi!* The *Yerushalmi (Nidah 9a)* relates that *Rabbi Chanina* claimed that he never issued any ruling that he hadn’t heard innumerable times from his *Rebbi* – he was clearly profoundly devoted to his great teacher. Nevertheless, he sensed that he derived more from his colleagues than from *Rabbeinu haKadosh* – and yet more from his students!

## Two: *Iyun* and *Bekius*

We are fortunate, through Hashem's kindness, to live in a generation where tens of thousands of young *Bnei Torah* aspire to Torah greatness and eminence. These young men long for instruction as to how they should conduct themselves in order to merit the crown of Torah and know its essence.

The institutions that produce these *Bnei Torah*, the holy Yeshivos, each have their own approach to success in Torah, advocated by their *Roshei Yeshivos*. Some advocate studying "*b'lyun*" – learning in great depth. Others praise the method of "*Shinun*" or "*Bekius*" – fluency in the breadth of Torah accompanied by constant review.

I thought therefore that I would relate some of my thoughts on the subject of the various methods of Torah study, based on the words of the *Gedolim* throughout the generations, from the sages of the Mishnah and Gemara through to the giants of recent generations.

Clearly, in order to rise to greatness in Torah and become a Talmid Chacham, one needs to learn a great deal, filling one's stomach with *Shas* and *Poskim*. One also needs to plumb the Torah's great depths so as reach a complete understanding and to unearth the principles upon which the various *sugyas* in *Shas* are built. Neither one of these without the other is sufficient.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 30a) states: "*V'Shinantem*" – this teaches us that, "*the words of the Torah shall be sharp in your mouth*". Rashi (*ad. loc.*) explains: "**Review them, and explore their profundity** such that if somebody asks you a question you will not stutter and will be able to answer immediately".

We see that there are two requirements to ensure that words of Torah remain "*sharp in one's mouth*". Firstly, one must review them constantly until one is thoroughly familiar with them. Secondly, one must explore the profundity of the Torah's words so as to understand them correctly. That way, they will not just be "familiar" but also

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“sharp”. It is to these two requirements that *Rashi* – the first and foremost of the Rishonim – refers in his words, “Review them, and explore their profundity”.

Consistent with this approach, *Rashi* explains the Gemara in *Shabbos* (88b) which states:

*Said Rav Chananel bar Papa: What is the meaning of the Pasuk, “Listen for I will speak noble thoughts (“Negidim”)” Why are words of Torah compared to a ruler (“Nagid”)”? To teach you the following: Just as a ruler has the authority to put to death or to acquit, so do words of Torah have the ability to kill people or to grant them life. This is what Rava intended when he said, “For those who go to the right in Torah, it is an elixir of life. For those who go to the left in Torah, it is a potion of death”.*

*Rashi* elucidates: “For those who go to the right in Torah” – [this means] that they occupy themselves with it with all their strength, and trouble themselves to understand its profundity – just like a man uses his right hand, which is his stronger hand.

Here too, *Rashi* alludes to two different facets of Torah learning. A person must at once “occupy himself with it, with all his strength” but also, “trouble himself to understand its profundity”. These two facets demand toil from both the physical body which must be involved in Torah night and day, as well as the intellect and understanding of the heart which must endeavor to understand the Torah’s profundity and infinite depth.

This dual approach was the basis of the success of some of the greatest men in our history. For example, the Gemara says concerning Rabbi Meir:

*Said Rabbi Acha bar Chanina, it is known to the One Who Uttered and the World Was Formed that there was nobody in Rabbi Meir’s generation who was his equal. Why then is Halacha not in accordance with him? For his contemporaries were unable to fully fathom his reasoning. (Eruvin 13b).*

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Clearly, even *Rabbi Meir's* contemporaries, the great sages and fellow students of *Rabbi Akiva* were unable to penetrate the depths of the Torah as he was. It is only natural for us to wonder: how did he come to be so much greater than them? The answer is revealed by the Gemara earlier in that *sugya* (13a):

*Originally Rabbi Meir came to [study before] Rabbi Akiva. But when he saw that he was unable to follow him, he came instead to Rabbi Yishmael and learned Gemara [he acquired a breadth in learning]. He then returned to Rabbi Akiva and learned Sevara [the logic of Torah learning].*

In his younger years *Rabbi Meir* could not understand the profound arguments of *Rabbi Akiva*. He realized that without a broad knowledge of *Shas* he would not be able to plumb the Gemara's depths and so he switched to the Beis Hamedrash of *Rabbi Yishmael* where he acquired some *Bekius*. Then he was able to return to *Rabbi Akiva*.

It was later said of *Rabbi Meir* (*Sanhedrin* 24a): "Anybody who would witness *Rabbi Meir* in the Beis Hamedrash – it was as though he uprooted the highest mountains and ground them against each other." He had realized in his youth that in order to "grind mountains against one another" he needed to first acquire "mountains of *Halachos*" which he did under the instruction of *Rabbi Yishmael*.

This approach is also alluded to by the Gemara in *Sukkah* 46b. The Pasuk states, "v'Hayah Im Shamo'a Tishme'u" – "and it will be if you surely listen," on which *Chaza"l* expound: "If you will listen ("Shamo'a") to the old – you will hear ("Tishme'u") the new". *Rashi* (*ad. loc.*) explains: "If you will listen to the old – this means that you review that which you have learnt. You will hear the new – you will become wise in it, formulating new ideas from established ones.

Every accomplished *lamdan* (analytical Torah scholar) will attest to the truth of the above. If one reviews one's learning, dozens of proofs, questions, challenges or resolutions suddenly emerge from the page of Gemara, and through review the *sugya* attains greater clarity and its words are understood with greater profundity.

## Three: Delighting in Torah

Many of those who haven't experienced in-depth Torah learning believe that the only way to achieve a broad *Bekius* is through constant review, and that the only way to acquire a deep understanding of Torah is through a focus on *Iyun*. But this isn't the case. Above, we proved that review of Torah is a great aid to *Iyun* and in the following paragraphs we will demonstrate how toiling and delighting in Torah lead, not only to an appreciation of the profundity of Torah, but also to recalling it.

Recalling one's learning is a crucial element of the study of Torah. Today, young men who occupy themselves in the Beis Hamedrash and who strive every day to attain the crown of Torah, ask how they can possibly remember all that they have learnt. Is there a tried and tested method to remembering one's learning?

In fact, there are several things recommended by *Chaza"l* to help recall one's learning:

1. Fear of Heaven (*Shabbos* 31b).
2. Humility, for words of Torah only endure in the modest of spirit (*Ta'anis* 7a).
3. Exemplary character traits – “Without *Derech Eretz*, there is no Torah” (see *Rabbeinu Yona* to *Avos* 3:17).
4. Prayer. The Gemara in *Temura* (15a) relates that *Asniel ben Kenaz* prayed that he wouldn't forget his learning. See also *Rashi* to *Avoda Zara* (8a).

But above all, a desire for Torah and a delight in its words ensure that a person cannot forget it. The *Chafetz Chaim zt"l*, when asked for an aid to retain one's learning would cite the Pasuk, “But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem” (*Tehilim* 1:2). One might also cite the Pasuk, “I will delight in Your statutes, I will not forget Your word” (*ibid.* 119:16) which the *Radak* explains to mean: “When I ponder them, I delight in them. Therefore I cannot forget them for they are a joy and gladden the heart”.

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Man does not forget that which is engraved upon his heart. That which he loves, he remembers – he cannot forget it. To the degree that a person delights in the words of the Torah, enjoying his understanding of it, so will those words of Torah remain familiar to him always.

*Rabbeinu Yona* likewise writes (*Mishlei* 2:4):

*If you search for it like silver, and seek it out like precious treasure... according to the enjoyment in the effort and in the search [for Torah], the eyes of the intellect will be opened and the matter will be lodged in the person's heart. As the Pasuk states, "I have inherited Your statutes forever, for they are the delight of my heart"... And Chaza"l say, "A person only learns the Torah that his heart desires". We see that success in learning depends upon the desire.*

Indeed, "**success in learning depends upon the desire**", or, in the words of the *Chafetz Chaim*, "*But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem*". To the degree that a person desires Torah and delights in it, so will it be engraved upon his heart.

The *Yerushalmi* (*Brachos* 5:1 – 37b) asserts: "*One who applies reasoning to his learning - he will not be soon to forget it*". What is the reason? As the Pasuk states: "*Lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld*".

From all of the above it is clear that review and "*Shinun*" are not the only methods to remembering one's learning. Depth of understanding and clarity also aid recall and to the degree that a person truly understands the Torah, so will it remain engraved upon his heart and be remembered.

## Four: Integrity of *Sevara*

One of the most important facets of Torah learning is “*Yosher haSevara*” – integrity of reasoning. This idea is attested to by two trustworthy witnesses – Rav Chaim of Volozhin *zt”l* and Rabbi Akiva Eiger *zt”l*.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin (*Eitz Chaim* 36 - printed at the back of *Nefesh haChaim*) wrote:

*If you examine this matter carefully you will find that all of the great Rishonim and Acharonim were only praised with regards to their ability to formulate “Sevara Yeshara”. Whoever’s ability to formulate Sevara Yeshara was greater - he was greater than his colleagues.*

Rabbi Akiva Eiger wrote likewise: (Cited in the introduction to Rabbi Akiva Eiger’s commentary on *Chullin* by Rav Chaim Yaakov Naftoli Zilberberg *zt”l* in the name of his Rebbi, Rabbi Simcha Rafish who was one of the greatest of Rabbi Akiva Eiger’s students and from whom he received *Semicha*. This letter was printed in Warsaw in 5692 and is also cited in *Igros Rabbi Akiva Eiger*, p217 in a footnote):

*A person’s main focus in his toil in Torah shall be to acquire Yosher haSevara even if he will thereby lose some time for Bekius as he hasn’t the time for both. For a person whose power of Sevara is straight, his intellect will protect and prevent him from deviating or G-d forbid disputing the Gemara, Tosfos or the Ramban etc. For all of their holy words are utterly straight and deviating from them is inherently crooked. A person of Sevara Yeshara will not G-d forbid drown in crookedness.*

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The trait of *Sevara Yeshara* was one through which all of the *Gedolei Yisrael*, from the times of the *Rishonim* until the latest of the *Acharonim*, were praised. “Whoever’s ability to formulate *Sevara Yeshara* was greater - he was greater than his colleagues.”

The primary focus when toiling in Torah is to understand the *Sevara*. The *Toras Chaim* (*Bava Metzia* 33a) thus writes:

***And he is rewarded for it [the study of Mishna]:*** *The reason for which a person who occupies himself in Torah is rewarded is mainly due to his sevaros – as he explains the reasoning and compares one thing to another. For this he toils in Torah, laboring mightily, as the Gemara says, “The reward of a sugya is the sevara”. This applies when a person learns Mishna, and certainly Gemara, but not if one [only] learns Mikra. Therefore, one isn’t rewarded as greatly for learning Mikra.*

## Five: Setting Aside Time for Torah (“*Kevias Itim*”)

*Said Rava: When they bring a person in for [Heavenly] judgment, they ask him: Did you deal honestly in business? Did you set aside time for Torah study? Did you occupy yourself with procreation? (Shabbos 31a)*

We see that every person is obligated to set aside time for Torah study. This is similarly ruled by the *Shulchan Aruch* (Y.D. 246:1):

*Every Jewish person is obligated in Torah study. Whether he be poor or rich, healthy or suffering, young or elderly. Even the poor person who goes from door to door soliciting aid, even a person who is married with children – all are obligated to set aside a time for Torah study during the day and at night as the Pasuk states: “And you shall ponder it day and night”.*

The Halacha is in accordance with *Rabbi Yishmael* who rules (*Brachos* 35b) that one may work for a living and one is not obligated to learn all of the time. Nevertheless, one’s Torah learning must be one’s prime focus. The *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 156:1) writes:

*And after that he shall go to attend to his affairs. For Torah that is not accompanied by work will ultimately be lost and will be a cause of sin, for poverty will cause him to disobey the instructions of his Creator. Nevertheless, he shall not make his work his principle focus. Rather he shall consider it secondary, while his Torah shall be fixed. That way, both will endure.*

Every person, even one who is occupied in earning a living, is obligated to set aside times for Torah study during the day and at night. And if he has no need to work he must set aside all of his hours for Torah study, as the *Magen Avraham* (*ibid.*) writes.

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In our generation, we have merited to witness two extraordinary and joyous phenomena. Firstly, tens of thousands of *Bnei Torah*, *Yeshivaleit* and *Yungerleit* devote their lives to Torah study in Eretz Yisrael and around the world. Secondly, ten of thousands of *Balabatim*, of all different professions, set aside fixed times for Torah study every day. In those treasured hours they toil and delight in the Torah despite that fact that their days are almost entirely consumed by earning a living.

At first glance, the former group are greater than the latter, for they devote themselves entirely Torah and merit to have “their work done by others”. However, in one respect the members of the second group are greater. The *Birkei Yosef* (O.C. 155:1) rules:

*An appointed Dayan is permitted to hear cases during his times that are set aside for learning. In fact, in judging the case he is considered to have been learning, for issuing Torah rulings is tantamount to Torah study. However, this is only the case if he isn't remunerated for judging the case.*

*For the same reason, those whose profession is to teach school children Torah – if they are remunerated, the time they spend teaching Torah does not fulfill their own Mitzva of *Kevias Itim* – this was the position of my teacher and grandfather - Mahar”a Azoulay in his written comments to the *Sefer Zichron Moshe*.*

***Therefore, those who learn in Yeshiva at a set time and receive a stipend for doing so – that Seder of learning cannot count towards the Mitzva of *Kevias Itim*, though one could distinguish between the cases.***

This is also the conclusion of the *Sha'arei Teshuva* (*ibid.*)

Based on the ruling of the *Birkei Yosef*, the *Kaf haChaim* (*ibid.* 4), contends that since *Kevias Itim* is a Torah obligation, one needs to act stringently. Therefore, although there might have been an argument to say that those who receive a stipend for learning

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do fulfill their personal *Mitzva* of *Kevias Itim* (as the *Birkei Yosef* wrote “*though one could distinguish between the cases*”), a person should nevertheless ensure to add an extra Seder of learning for which he is not remunerated.

The *Shulchan haTahor* (*ibid.* 2) disagrees. He maintains that since the remuneration received by those who study Torah is merely “*Schar Batala*” – a mere stipend and not a salary, it does not detract from the *Mitzva* of *Kevias Itim*. However, as stated, the *Kaf haChaim* rules that one should be stringent in this matter.

Therefore, the *Avreichim* who dedicate their days and nights to Torah study, are still required to set aside fixed times for learning for which they receive no remuneration. This, in today’s world, is difficult, as aside from the morning and afternoon *Sedarim*, there are also *Kolels* that operate during the evening and early morning, thus many *Avreichim* find that they do not have a Seder of learning for which they are not remunerated to some degree.

Truthfully it seems difficult to claim that those who faithfully learn at all times of the day and night do not fulfill their *Mitzva* of *Kevias Itim*! This matter requires further study. Nevertheless, one should set aside a Seder of learning for which one isn’t remunerated. Aside from anything else, this is an expression of one’s love of Torah.

## Six: Learning Gemara or *Poskim*

If a person does not have the opportunity to learn at all times, on what area of learning should he focus? Today, *Baruch Hashem* there are tens of thousands who learn *Daf haYomi* each day without fail, some of whom even take time to review the *Daf* as well. In fact, there can barely be a Jewish community in the world in which a *Daf haYomi Shiur* does not take place and indeed, not so long ago, the entire world celebrated the 13<sup>th</sup> *Siyum haShas* of *Daf haYomi* amid great joy and festivity and glory of Hashem's name.

However, at face value, this practice would appear to be not in accordance with Halacha, for the *Taz* (*Y.D.* 246:2) and *Shach* (*ibid.* 5) both rule that it is better to focus on the works of the *Poskim*. The *Taz*, for example, writes as follows:

*The Derisha notes that there are some Balabatim whose custom it is to learn Gemara with Rashi and Tosfos each day rather than the Sifrei haPoskim. They adduce proof for this practice from the Gemara at the end of Tractate Nidah which states: "It was taught in the Beis haMedrash of Eliyahu: Anybody who learns Halachos each day, he is assured of being a ben Olam haBa."*

***However, in my opinion they should occupy themselves with the Sifrei haPoskim such as the Rif, Mordechai and Rosh and the like. They do not fulfill their obligation by focusing on Gemara with Rashi and Tosfos. That which was taught in the Beis haMedrash of Eliyahu refers to Halachos Pesukos [Halachic rulings and not the Halachos as they appear in the Gemara.]***

The *Shach* similarly concurs with the *Derisha*. He adds that although *Rabbeinu Tam* (cited by *Tosfos*, *Kidushin* 30a) holds that by learning Gemara one fulfills the dictum of *Chaza"l* of dividing one's hours equally between learning *Mikra* (the written law), *Mishna* and *Talmud* (as *Shas* contains each of these three elements) this is only recommended for a person who has nine hours a day to learn. *Balabatim* whose time is limited to three or four hours of learning should not only focus on *Shas*.

This is also the conclusion of the *Mishna Berura* (155:3):

*Each day a person is obligated to learn the Written Law which is Tanach, Mishna, Gemara and Poskim. Balabatim who are only able to learn for three or four hours a day should not only learn Gemara as by doing so they do not fulfill their obligation. Rather they should ensure to also learn the Sifrei haPoskim, each person according to his capacity.*

Thus, according to the *Taz*, *Shach* and *Mishna Berura*, those who are not occupied in Torah studies throughout the day, should give precedence to the *Sifrei haPoskim* over that of Gemara and its commentators. They recommended studying the *Rif*, *Rosh* and the like, but today it would be more appropriate to study the *Shulchan Aruch* and *Mishna Berura* from which practical Halacha may be derived.

Nevertheless, I often say, that the most important directive in this regard is that of the Gemara in *Avoda Zara* (19a): “A person should always learn the Torah that his heart desires”. When he does so he will be dedicated and conscientious, thirsty for knowledge and delighting in the Torah. There can be no greater merit than that.

The *Aruch haShulchan* (246:17) comments:

*Indeed we have seen, that if we instruct them as such, they will not learn at all as their desire is to learn a page of Gemara every day. Therefore, one should not dissuade them – if only they will keep to that! Any words of Torah are a balm for the soul and bring a person to pure fear of Hashem.*

This notion is borne out of the collective experience of many thousands of people. Only the study of Gemara, and particularly *Daf haYomi* confer the sweet taste, enjoyment and satisfaction of Torah study on the masses. For Gemara contains the structure of every *halachic sugya*, is the source of the great battles of Torah, the foundation of all facets of the Torah – *Halacha*, *Agada*, discussion and debate, *Kabala* and philosophy. The *Chachamim* of the *Mishna* and *Gemara* are the fathers of Torah, wisdom and fear of Heaven and their words should be our main focus of study.

The *Birkei Yosef* (246:4) greatly praises the study of Gemara with *Rashi* and *Tosfos*, citing Rav Sheftel *zt”l* (the son of the *Shlah haKadosh*) who wrote in his Ethical Will (cited at the end of

the *Sefer Yesh Nochalin*): “The study of Gemara, Rashi and Tosfos is an obligation akin to that of putting on Tefilin”!

And even the *Drisha*, *Taz* and *Shach* did not mean to preclude the study of Gemara but to add that studying the *Sifrei haPoskim* is also vitally important.

Therefore, it would be praiseworthy for those who give a *Shiur* in *Daf haYomi* or Gemara to *Balabatim* to also include a little practical Halacha, and excerpts from the *Sifrei haPoskim* that are relevant to the *sugyas* at hand. This is particularly important when the *sugyas* being studied are those that are relevant to practical Halacha that is applicable today. In doing so they will be granting all concerned the best of all worlds.

## Seven: The *Tefila* of *Rabbi Nechunya ben haKaneh*

In recent times, with the advent of the Coronavirus, Shuls and *Batei Medrash* around the world have been sadly shuttered and Jews everywhere have been learning Torah in their homes. Many have asked, therefore, whether there is any obligation to say the *Tefila* of *Rabbi Nechunya ben haKaneh* (*Brachos* 28b) which is usually recited when first entering the *Beis haMedrash* and when leaving it.

Regarding the nature of these *tefillos*, the *Rambam* (*Peirush haMishnayos ibid.* 4:2) writes that they are obligatory. This view is cited by the *Mishna Berura* (110:36). The *Ritva* and *Shita Mekubetzes* (*Brachos ibid.*) disagree, ruling that they are optional.

The *Aruch haShulchan* (*ibid.* 16) writes that the custom is not to recite these *Tefilos* upon entering or exiting the *Beis haMedrash* as they were enacted essentially for those who issue Halachic rulings. Halachic decisors do not work principally from the *Beis haMedrash* but either from home or from a *Beis Hora'ah*.

That said, those who wish to continue reciting these *Brachos* at home may do so. This is implied by the *Taz* (*ibid.* 8) and *Kaf haChaim* (20). They should recite them before they begin to learn in the morning and after they have concluded their day's learning.

## As One Man with One Heart

*“And they traveled from Refidim and they came to Har Sinai. And they encamped in the desert. And Yisrael encamped there opposite the mountain. (Shemos 19:2)*

*“And Yisrael encamped there” – “As one man with one heart” (Rashi ad. loc.)*

In all other years, and under normal circumstances, as the *“Shloshes Yemei Hagbala”* approach we prepare ourselves for *Kabalas haTorah* by gathering together and disseminating Torah to hundreds and thousands of people. Just as our forefathers stood together around Har Sinai we similarly stand, side by side in our *Batei Medrash* to hear words of Torah.

This year, however, is not like other years, and to our great sadness, circumstances are not as they normally should be. We are still required to maintain distance between one another, and we are thus unable to do disseminate Torah in the manner in which we have done in previous years.

When *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave us the Torah, we stood together *“as one man with one heart”* and each year we try and stand similarly united when we gather together before Shavuos. However, this year, we are unable to gather together physically. Although it is true that the Shuls in Eretz Yisrael have reopened, this is only in a limited capacity, and in most communities in the Diaspora they haven’t opened at all and people are still in their homes.

However, even if we are unable to gather *“as one man,”* this doesn’t mean that we cannot stand *“with one heart”*.

Let us ask: What is the meaning of the twofold expression *“like one man with one heart”*? I believe it means the following. There are times when people stand together *“as one man”*.

Even though their hearts are not as one, they unite for a common purpose. For example, in the face of a common threat, people often band together to protect themselves, but as soon as the danger has passed they disband just as quickly.

By contrast, there are people who have **“one heart”**. They love one another and have a common aspiration. This is true even if they are unable to be physically united.

At *Har Sinai*, the Jewish people stood together both as “*one man*” and with “*one heart*”. Today, in these difficult times, as we remain in our homes, we cannot stand together as “*one man*” but I believe we still stand with “*one heart*”. During this difficult period, the Jewish people have learned to appreciate how we are all responsible for one another. No individual has been allowed to claim that he will merely ensure his own safety; rather, each of us is required to be concerned for the well-being others as well. Those who are young, strong and healthy have enclosed themselves in their homes so as not to endanger the elderly, the sick and the weak. Everyone understands that we are one people and are responsible for one another. Indeed, many have come to know their neighbors during this time, people with whom they may not even have ever exchanged greetings over the course of many years.

Indeed, there are those who stand together as one man even though they are not with one heart, and there are others who are together with one heart but cannot stand together as one man. We hope that soon, through Hashem’s mercy, we will merit to stand together “*as one man with one heart*” to accept the yoke of Torah and Mitzvos with love.