

PARSHAS BEHAR



HARAV YISROEL BROG, SHLITA | ROSH HAYESHIVA, YESHIVAS TIFERES AVIGDOR

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THE ULTIMATE FRUMKEIT



EVERYTHING STARTS WITH TORAH

As it is Erev Shavuos and we are looking forward to the culmination of our *sefirah* and to be *mekabel* the Torah, it behooves us to be aware that Torah is something that is not just learned or followed, but Torah is something that a Yehudi can acquire.¹ What does it mean to acquire Torah? What's the difference between somebody who reads a *sefer* and he knows everything it says and someone who acquires it?

The answer is as follows. When you read a *sefer* and you gain knowledge, it doesn't become *niivlah* (absorbed), it doesn't become part and parcel of your essence. It goes into your brain bank and now you have information stored in your brain. Learning Torah is something totally different. My *rebbe* (HaRav Meir Halevi Soloveichik, zt"l) used to always say, in the name of his father and grandfather, that the main idea - the basis for *avodas Hashem* - is something that's not properly understood by the world anymore. There was a time when everyone understood what the greatest way of serving Hashem was and everyone understood what the *sha'ar*, the *pesach*, the doorway to that service was. If we were to ask a group of Yidden what the basis of *avodas Hashem* is, how many do you think will know the right answer?

My *rebbe* used to say, "You have to know that toiling in Torah is the greatest *sha'ar*, the greatest *pesach* (opening) for *avodas Hashem*. The whole *sefer* of *Mesillas Yesharim* is based upon a teaching of Rebbi Pinchas ben Yair, who built a whole ladder, an order, of how one grows

¹ This shiur took place on May 14, 2018 (29 Iyar 5778), five days before Shavuos.

and develops. Do you know what the first thing is? What's the first step of that growth? Torah. Everything starts with the Torah.”

It is natural for people who are idealistic to attempt to be *mechazek* themselves, from time to time, and seek different areas, whether in *tefilah*, in *kedushah*, or in *chessed* and other areas of *avodas Hashem*. And therefore, if my *rebbe* would see one of his *yungerleit* or one of the *bachurim* getting involved in *frumkeit*, he would call them in and say to them, “You have to know that if you put all *avodas Hashem* on the scale, nothing will come close to *shkeidas* and *yegias haTorah*. Direct your *frumkeit*, direct your *hischazkus*, direct your idealism, to *limud haTorah*.”

Now, of course the *yetzer hara* always gets us involved in other areas. He picks some other *mitzvah*. Entire groups of people chose a particular *mitzvah* of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, for example. They made that the *mitzvah* of all *mitzvos*. *Tzedakah* is also a very big *mitzvah*. *Chessed* is a tremendous *mitzvah* as well, and so is *tefilah*. These are *amudim*, pillars of the world, but as my *rebbe* would say, “nothing equals to the *avodah* of *limud HaTorah*.”

The *passuk* in *Shir Hashirim* (1:2) says, ²כי טובים דדיך מיין. My *Rebbi* once said in the name of the *Kotzker* as follows: through *gemilus chassadim*, through *mitzvos*, through *tefilah*, a person can definitely be *miskarev*, and become close to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. But from *talmud Torah* you could become closer to Hashem, more than anything else in the world. And that's how the *Kotzker teitched* (translated) the *passuk*. *Shlomo Hamelech* is saying: ²כי טובים דדיך מיין, the *yedidus* - the closeness to Hashem that one gets from studying Torah - the *yeinah shel Torah* - is incomparable. The *yedidus* through Torah is better than the *yedidus* from anything else in the world. The *yedidus* is good when it comes from יין, which is Torah.

My *rebbe* told me on a number of occasions that his father, the *Brisker Rov*, would say to him: “*Lernen Torah iz de greste frumkeit*” - *learning Torah is the greatest frumkeit*. That's what he would say.

² ?שקני מנשיקות פיהו כי טובים דדיך מיין

MORE PRECIOUS THAN MITZVOS

There's a *gemara* in *Moed Katan* (9b) which explains the apparent contradiction between two *pesukim* in *Mishle*.³ One *pasuk* (3:15) says, יקרה בה היא מפנינים וכל חפצך לא ישוו בה - *she [Torah] is more precious than rubies; and all of your desires are not to be compared to her*. This means that Torah is more valuable than all the worldly desires. However the second *passuk* (8:11) says: כל חפצים לא ישוו בה - *all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it*, meaning that even *cheftzei shamayim*, even any other *ratzon* of Hashem doesn't come close to *talmud Torah*. Torah is more valuable than all the other *mitzvos*, as well. So the *gemara* answers that the second *passuk* is talking about a *mitzvah* that could be done through others. In other words, when someone else can perform a *mitzvah*, *talmud Torah* takes precedence and one should not interrupt his learning to go and do that *mitzvah*. My *rebbe* used to say over from Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin, *gaon hagoonim*, as follows. Rav Yehoshua Leib would say, "Du veis vos shtait in this *gemara*? In this *gemara* shtait that התורה all *mitzvos* become *devarim bateilim*. *Mitzvos* become *devarim bateilim besh'a's Torah*." Do you hear this?!

And he said, "What's the *eitzah* when the *yetzer hara* comes to seduce a person and tells him to be excited and get involved in other ventures, in other *mitzvos*? You have to be *mechazek* yourself by learning *sefarim* that discuss the *chashivus* of Torah." There's a famous *sefer* called *Ma'alos haTorah*. There's the *sefer Kesser Torah*. There is the *sefer Nefesh Hachaim*, the five *perakim* before *sha'ar daled* including *sha'ar daled*. You have to be *mechazek* yourself and become aware of the stature of learning Torah.

MECHADESH CHIDUSHIM

My *rebbe* said another very interesting thing. When I first came to Eretz Yisrael, I was young and I was very excited to be *mechadesh* a *chiddush*, a Brisker *shtickel Torah*. I wanted to come up with a *shtickel* of *tzvei dinim* and I worked very hard on it. I arrived at the *yeshivah* for Elul. I often spoke to my *rebbe* in learning, but to have a *chiddush* and

³ הדר יתבי וקא מבעי להו, כתיב: "יקרה היא מפנינים וכל חפצך לא ישוו בה" - הא חפצי שמים ישוו בה, וכתיב: "כל חפצים לא ישוו בה" - דאפילו חפצי שמים לא ישוו בה! כאן במצוה שאפשר לעשותה על ידי אחרים, כאן במצוה שאי אפשר לעשותה על ידי אחרים.

present it to him - I didn't manage that until Chanukah. By Chanukah I had prepared a special *shtickel Torah* with *tzvei dinim* and I told it over to a number of people. They told me, "It's *devarim amiti'im*." I said, "Okay, now let me see what the *rebbe* has to say." I was very excited.

I went up to the *rebbe* and I told him, "I want to share a *vort* and get your *haskamah* on it." After I told it to him, he said, "Nu, nu." I said, "Rebbi, what does that mean? Is it good?" He said, "It's *emes*." I said, "It's very interesting. If I told you the Brisker Rav said it, then you would be excited; but if I said it, you're not excited. How come I don't feel that you are excited?" A 'nu nu' meant it wasn't wrong. There were different levels of responses he had. Sometimes it came with a *sevara* and he would say, "*Efshar fakert. Meheicha teisi, efshar punkt fakert? Amol*," he would say, "*Shtait mefurash in der Rambam un der gemara nisht azoy*." And then the best you would usually get was, "Nu, nu." But for him to say, "*Es iz gut, zeir gut*" - that was a rarity. So, I asked him, "Could you explain to me what's the *geder hadevarim*?"

He said, "The *Tatte* taught us that the *ikar ma'aleh* in being *mechadesh chiddushei Torah* is only when they come to the one who says the *chiddush be'ofen shel yegiyah v'amol* - only when someone toils and "sweats" over it. But something that comes easily, something that's said easily - אין בהם הפץ, there's no *cheifetz* in them. *Nisht dus zucht men, nisht dus vil men* (this is not what we are looking for, this is not what we want)."

I remember how disappointed I was. I said, "Did I say anything wrong?" He told me, "No. What did you do? You had a question. You found the Meiri here, you found the Meiri there, and you said apparently, it's *tzvei dinim*. I'm not arguing with you on that." *Nisht das is vas mezucht*. I said, "Where can I start?" He said, "*Nemt a Rambam* (take a Rambam) - that's where you start. Decipher it. Break it down. And then rebuild it. Rambam is a difficult *rishon*," he said. "*Un veis*, after *yegiah* and after fitting in every sentence and comprehending the sequence of events - you will come out with a *chiddush vas shtait dah*. Uh! *Azah chiddush*. That's a *chiddush* שיש בהם הפץ. That's what a person has to know."

ALWAYS THINKING IN TORAH

This is what he was always looking to do. He told me that when it comes to Torah, you always have to look for something where you have to toil. The toil itself is where it's at. The toil itself is the goal.

Somebody once told him a vort from the Chasam Sofer on the pasuk תלכו בחוקותי תלכו - אם בחוקותי תלכו - *if you will follow in My statutes (Vayikra 26:3)*. The *lashon* of תלכו בחוקותי תלכו means if you “walk” in these statutes. *Chazal* tell us that this means: שתהיו עמלים בתורה - *you shall toil in the Torah*. The question is why does it say תלכו, walk? So the Chasam Sofer says the *pshat* is, that a proper *amal baTorah* is a person who finishes learning and goes on his way, and he's *mamshich*, he continues to think about the *gemara*, to think about the Rashi, to think about the Tosfos. That's why *ameilus baTorah* is described by the term תלכו!

When my *rebbe* heard this vort, he said, “*Farshtait zach*. Someone who learns in the right way, it's not *shayach* to close the *gemara* and continue on with life without taking it with you. It's *gait memeilah mit aych*. It's not *shayach* otherwise.” He said, “If a guy finishes learning and he closes the *gemara* and goes away and he's not thinking about his learning, he doesn't take it with him, *iz der lernen zein a vitz*, his learning is a joke!” That's what he said! *Aza tzuras halimud* is a joke!

WORK ON YOUR AMEILUS, NOT CHIDDUSHIM

Now, the sad thing is all the *segulos haTorah*, all the benefits of Torah were said in *ameilus baTorah*. Today, we live in a generation where the concept of *ameilus* is *gornisht*. It's nonexistent. If a person listens to a *daf yomi* shiur and a whole *blatt* is learned in twenty five minutes, he's considered a *ben Torah*. If he learns the *daf yomi* for an hour *er ligt in lernen*. If he learns the *daf yomi* for an hour and a half, he looks at some Rashis, then, “pshhhh” [he is someone quite special.] And if he learns Tosfos? Then he's already something *mamash* out of this world.

My *zeida* was once telling me that the downside of *daf yomi* was that the whole concept of *ameilus baTorah* became *batel umevatal* because it's not *shayach* to learn a *blatt* with any *ameilus* in an hour. “It's not possible,” he said.

You have to know that's what Hashem desires: *ameilus*. Hashem does not desire that a person come up with brilliant *shticklach*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires that a person should take his brain, take his head and actually think through a *gemara*, step by step, each step of the *gemara*. *Vas shtait in der gemara?* What's the *gemara* saying? What's the *chiddush* in the *gemara*? What would I have thought before? What's the *chiddush* in Rashi? *Vus kumt arois* from the Rashi? How does the *teretz* answer the *kasha*? Not just *davening* up the *gemara* like it's *Tehillim*.

We all know Dovid Hamelech asked the Ribono Shel Olam that He should consider the saying of *Tehillim* like learning *nega'im ve'ohalos*. So the joke that I made was: Rav Chaim Volozhiner says that we don't know exactly what Hashem answered Dovid, but I think many people heard that *Chazal* and they misunderstood what Dovid Hamelech asked Hashem. They thought that Dovid Hamelech was asking, "Please Hashem let them learn Torah, let them learn *gemara* like they say *Tehillim* and get the same *sechar*." There's no *sechar* in that. The *sechar* is in *ameilus baTorah*. That's what a person has to understand.

HOW HASHEM WANTS US TO LEARN

The Rambam says a fascinating thing on the famous Mishna in Avos (5:23) *Ben He He said according to the labor is the reward*. The Rambam says: לפי מה שתצטער בתורה יהיה שכרך ואמרו: - according to your level of toil in Torah will be your reward; and they said אלא מה שתלמד, none of the *chochmah* will be retained, - שלא יתקיים מן החכמה unless you learn with a little *yirah* from your *rebbe*, with a little bit of pressure, with a little fear, not that you say, "Hey Rebs," jokes back and forth. *Gornisht*, he says. קריאת התענוג והמנוחה, if a person learns Torah with *ta'anug* and *menuchah*, אין קיום לה ולא תועלת בה, there's no *kiyum* to that Torah and there's no *toeles* to that Torah!⁴

Now, you might think that if you're just thinking about a Rashi and figuring out what's the *koshi* in Rashi, "Why did Rashi say this?" or if you are thinking about a *sevara* in the *sugya* of *chavitzah* - "Hah, it's nothing-it's *pashut pshat*." It's not. Rabosai, that's what learning is about. That's

⁴ ואמר בן הא הא לפי מה שתצטער בתורה יהיה שכרך ואמרו שלא יתקיים מן החכמה אלא מה שתלמוד בטורה עמל ויראה מן המלמד אבל קריאת התענוג והמנוחה אין קיום לה ולא תועלת בה ואמרו בפירוש מאמרו אף חכמתו עמדה לי חכמה שלמדתי באף עמדה לי ומפני זה צוה להטיל אימה על התלמידים ואמרו זרוק מורא בתלמידים (רמב"ם משנה אבות ה' כ"ג:א)

what *amal haTorah* is about, and that is how you acquire Torah. You could learn Torah without *amal*. It's definitely a *mitzvah* of *talmud Torah*, but it's not the *kavanah* and the *cheifetz* of Hashem.

To give you a little insight, I'll tell you what my *rebbe* used to always say from Rav Chaim Volozhiner. Rav Chaim writes in his *hakdamah* to the Vilna Gaon's commentary on *Safra Detzniusa*, about the *madreigah* of learning Torah that his *rebbe* had. He said his *Rebbi*, the Gr"א, felt no good about his learning, רק בעמלו, except for that which he toiled over, not deep and kabalistic things. And when they had *rachmanus* on him *min hashamayim* and they finally showed him the *emes* after his toil, he was ecstatic over it. He was overwhelmed and overjoyed about the gift he received from Hashem. You hear that? But otherwise he had no interest. Anything that he got without the toil, he had no interest in.⁵

VILNA GAON TURNS DOWN A HEAVENLY OFFER

Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes that many times they wanted to reveal to the Gr"א secrets from *shamayim*, the deepest of all the secrets. He calls it סתרי עליוני עליונים, secrets of the highest of the high. They wanted to send him *maggidim*, *malachim* to teach him, *gedolim* from previous generations to teach him Torah and share with him these secrets. You know what the Vilna Gaon said? "I respectfully decline. I'm not interested." He didn't want it. He wasn't interested in it. Could you imagine a person turning that down? Hashem says, "I'm giving you an offer. I'd like to send you Eliyahu Hanavi to teach you a couple of things." Unbelievable. He said he respectfully declines. Rav Chaim writes שמעתי מפיו הקדוש, many times *maggidim min hashamayim* came knocking on his door and their only request was that they wanted to transmit to him the secrets of the Torah. ולא הטו אזנו אליהם, he didn't listen to them, he wasn't interested! הפציר בו, ואחד מן המגידים, he says, one of the *malachim* they sent,

⁵ זו"ל בהקדמת "ספרא דצניעותא": והעולה על כולם הן הן גבורותיו ונוראותיו, כי לא הראה את נפשו טוב רק בעמלו אשר עמל בחכמה ובדעת ובכשרון, ואחר רב יגיעותיו וכאשר חסו עליו מן השמים ונתגלו לו מעיינות החכמה רד"ך וסתרין דסתרין זו היה אצלו מתת אלקים. וזולת זה נפשו לא רצה בס, אף כי רצו למסור לו מן השמים בלא שום עמל ויגיעת בשר רוין וסתרין עליוני עליונין ע"י מגידים מארי דרוין ושרי התורה, לא נשא עינו לזה עמו היתה וריחקה. כי שמעתי מפיו הק' שפעמים רבות השכימו לפתחו כמה מגידים מן השמים בשאלתם ובקשתם שרוצים למסור לו רוין דאורייתא בלא שום עמל, ולא הטו אזנו אליהם כלל. וא' מן המגידים הפציר בו מאר עכ"ז לא הביט אל מראהו הגדול, וענה ואמר לו איני רוצה שתהיה השגתי בתורתו ית"ש ע"י שום אמצעי כלל, וכלל רק עיני נשואות לו ית"ש מה שרוצה ללגלות לי וליתן חלקי בתורתו ית"ש בעמלי אשר עמלתי בכל כחי הוא ית"ש יתן לי חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה, שיתן לי לב מבין וכליותי יעשו כשתי מעיינות ואדע כי מצאתי חן בעיניו, ואיני רוצה אלא ממה שבתוך פיו, וההשגות על ידי המלאכים המגידים ושרי התורה אשר לא עמלתי ולא חכמתי אין לי בהם חפץ, עיי"ש.

מאד, *mamash* pushed him very strongly to accept the offer. “Let me teach you Torah.” He wanted to have a *talmid* like the Gr”a. כל זה, and still in all, לא הביט אל מראהו הגדול, he ignored him. I’m trying to picture this, in a little room in Vilna, where the Vilna Gaon is talking to one of these heavy-duty *malachim* and he says, “איני רוצה.” The Gaon said, “I have no interest that my knowledge of Torah should come through any means other than my own toil, in which I toil with all my *koichos*. And then הוא יתברך שמו, Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself, will give me מפיו דעת ותבונה. I want to get the *matanah* straight from Hashem, which comes for being toiling with all your *kochos*.” You hear that? Because, he says, “Then I know חן מצאתי חן בעיניו - I found favor in His Eyes.” Could you imagine that?!

I’m trying to think, if a small *malach* would come to me, the guy came to me with crutches, one of these *malachim* without hands and without wings, a broken *malach*, and he said, “I want to share with you something.” I’d say, “Wow! Bring it on! What do you want to tell me? Tell me some secrets, please!” So to say to a *malach*, “I don’t want it?” *Ich vil nisht?* He says, any *hasagah* of a *maggid* and a *sar haTorah* אשר לא עמלתי That’s what the Brisker Rav is saying. It says דברים חפץ חכמתי אין לי בהם חפץ. Unbelievable!

LEARNING TO BECOME *KLI KIBUL*

So when we’re preparing ourselves for *kabalas haTorah*, over the next few days, we want to get on Hashem’s good side. You know why? Because next week, when Shavuos comes, Hashem is going to open up the wellsprings. No question about it. And just like בשעת קבלת התורה, at the time of *matan Torah*, Hashem gave us His Torah, כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם, and He was *makneh* us with *da’as*, הוא האלקים אין עוד, מלבד, and we were *koneh* much *da’as* - you have to know that this coming week, that same, incredible opportunity presents itself once again! As the Ramchal explains, the *oros* and the *shefa brachah* that Hashem opened up on that great day of Vav Sivan, that *brachah* is now going to shine once again to the world and people can step up to get that *matnas Elokim*. But in order to be *zocheh* to the *matnas Elokim*, in order to be *zocheh* to a *shtickel neshikah* from the Ribono Shel Olam you have to make yourself a receptacle. Getting that *matnas Elokim* was called ישקני מנשיקות פיהו, a

kush (kiss) from Hashem (Shir HaShirim 1:2). You know what it is to get a *kush* from Hashem?

There's a famous story. Rav Shach once came into the *beis medrash*, and gave a *kush* to a relative of mine. He gave him a *kush* in the middle of the whole *beis medrash*! Somebody told him, "You're kissing in the *beis medrash*? You don't kiss in a *beis medrash*." He said, "I'm kissing the Torah itself." Then he took out \$100 from his pocket and gave it to him. He wanted to give it to him.

On this big day, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us the Torah and as Rashi (Shir HaShirim, *ibid*) says, ואותם דודים, that *yedidus*, that love that Hashem gave us at that time, ערבים עליהם, is so sweet and *geshmak* to Klal Yisrael, מכל שעשוע, more than any other *sha'ashua* (pleasure).⁶ And Hashem says, "I want to give you the Torah," so He gave us Chag Hashavuos. But if we are not *klei kibul*, we won't receive that *matanah* from Hashem. Today, if Hashem would come many *frumme Yidden* and say, "I want to give you a *matanah*," you know what they would say? "Can I monetize it? Is it worth money? Can I fix up my house with it? Can I buy a vacation home somewhere in Israel, Jerusalem Estates maybe, Schneller, can I buy something over there? Can I go to Greece with it?" No. What are you going to get? Hashem is going to tell the *emese pshat* in this Rashi. I guarantee I could imagine people walking away saying, "That I don't need." *Da'as* means nothing to them. It's *da'as turah*, *beheimishe da'as*. "Maybe You have a stock tip for me, Hashem? An

inside tip that no one else knows and that I'm not going to get arrested for? For that, I'm going to love You, Hashem." That's ערבים עלי מכל שעשוע. That's what I enjoy!

⁶ כי טובים. לי דודיך מכל משתה יין ומכל ענג ושמחה. ולשון עברי הוא להיות כל סעדת ענג ושמחה נקראת על שם היין, כענין שנאמר "אל בית משתה היין", "בשיר לא ישתו יין", "והיה כנור ונבל תף וחליל ויין משתייהם". זהו באור משמעו. ונאמר דגמא שלו על שם שנתן להם תורתו ודבר עמהם פנים אל פנים. ואותם דודים עודם ערבים עליהם מכל שעשוע. ומבטחים מאתו להופיע עוד עליהם לבאר להם סוד טעמיה ומסתר צפונותיה, ומחלים פניו לקים דברו. וזהו: "ישקני מנשיקות פיהו".

THERE IS STILL TIME LEFT

We're in a good position. The people that are working and running around, they're not opening their *gemara*, they're not even beginning the program. They're not even in the *sugya* of *kabalas haTorah*. They are not *shayach* to the *sha'ar* of *frumkeit*, to the *avodas Hashem* of Torah, because they're not able to, or not interested in it. But for those of us who want it, we can be *zocheh*. When there aren't so many takers, Hashem is not picky about who you are and what you are. When there is a whole Klal Yisrael asking for Torah, then Hashem starts to say, "Nu, are you *אהד בלב אהד*? Do you mean it sincerely? Are you really the kind of guy that *mamash* has a *geshmak* in Torah and *ameilus baTorah*?" But today, it's slim pickings. So you're in a very, very good position today. Today, a guy just has to put his hand out with a cup and say: *אני רוצה א ביסל דעת תורה, א ביסל אהבת התורה*. Hashem, I'm ready to be *meyageh*." You're going to get *chafeitz Hashem*.

Today, everybody is looking for *segulos*. But in today's generation, there's no bigger *segulah* than if a guy would sit down and open a *gemara*, put his hands over his forehead and block the world out and stay focused. You know what would happen? His world would change. He would be on Hashem's good side. This is the greatest thing Hashem is *chafeitz*. Hashem will say, "You're trying to get close to Me through learning Torah?! That's the way I want to get close to you! That's the biggest way I want to get close to you. You're *mekayem* the *velt*." There's nothing that arouses *ahavas Hashem* more than this. Let us be *zocheh* to do this, Rabbosai, in preparation for and on the day of Shavuos.