

This is the teaching regarding a man who will die in a tent. (19:14)

Chazal interpret this *pasuk* as setting the standard for how a person should learn Torah: *Ein divrei Torah miskaymin ela b'mi she'meimis atzmo alehah*; "Torah is preserved/will endure only by he who kills himself over it". In other words, one must expend utter dedication to Torah study. He must literally give himself totally to the Torah. His physical dimension should take a back seat to his devotion to Torah. His very life should be meaningless without the Torah. Without Torah, he is as if deceased. These are strong words to anyone who does not understand the meaning of Torah to a Jew. The individual who acknowledges, appreciates and values Torah – to him it is his life.

This is the simple explanation. Throughout the ages, the various commentators have supplemented this with their own individual *p'shatim*, expositions. The *Chafetz Chaim* explains that, when one learns Torah, he is dead to the world. Nothing else matters. Our illustrious *gedolim*, Torah giants, have demonstrated such devotion towards the Torah. The *Tiferes Shlomo* (Radomsk) cites the *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* that relates that, on the day that *Reish Lakish* (Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish – distinguished *Amora*, leader of Torah Jewry, brother-in-law of Rabbi Yochanan, repented highwayman who turned his life around and became one of the most illustrious Torah sages of all time) died, his friend (from the past) also died. When he observed the extraordinary honor that was accorded to *Reish Lakish* in *Olam Habba*, while he and others like him were being pushed around from one place to the other on their way to *Gehinnom*, Purgatory, they cried out bitterly. They, too, wanted to join their old friend as he received accolades and honor for his devotion to Torah. They cried out, "Why should we be deprived of such honor? He (*Reish Lakish*) was one of us". The response they received was terse and sadly to the point, "Yes, he was once one of you. He left to study Torah". "We, too, will study Torah!" they countered. "We will sit down now to study Torah and perform good deeds. Please! Give us a chance". The answer was obvious: You are too late. You had your chance when you were alive – now, the opportunity is no longer available.

This idea, explains the *Radomsker*, is alluded to by the *pasuk*, *Zos chukas haTorah*. "Study Torah diligently, with devotion". Settle your spiritual accounts by repenting when you are able. If you use your imagination, you can picture *Adam ki yamus b'ohel*, a man who dies and has left this world. Imagine if he were to be given a reprieve to return for one full day. How would he spend that day? Ostensibly, it would be with non-stop Torah learning, *davening*, carrying out acts of kindness. He certainly would not waste a minute. Treat "today" as if it were the special day that Hashem allowed you to return to this world. Do not wait, hoping that such a day might occur. Do not wait until you die-to change the past. It will not happen. Live "today" as if it was the "day" that would change your life.

How often does someone delay what he should do today, only to lose the opportunity to realize his plans? We never know when the opportunity for proactivity will be rescinded, or we will be "recalled". In the *Talmud Shabbos* 53B, *Chazal* state that one should never refrain from studying

Torah or visiting the *bais ha'medrash* – even when he is close to death. This is derived from the *pasuk*, “This is the teaching/Torah regarding a man who will die in a tent: Even when a person is in the throes of death, he should apply/think of Torah”.

The *sefer Yagdil Torah* relates hearing from a descendant of the saintly *Chasam Sofer* that his grandfather sent a letter to his close student, *Horav* Menachem Katz, asking him to come immediately. He needed to speak with him. When his revered *rebbe* summoned, he came. He arrived in Pressburg and heard the sad news that his *rebbe* was quite ill, very little time remained. Despite being a *Kohen* who should not be in the room of someone who was near death, *Rav* Katz went in. His *rebbe* had called. As soon as he entered the room, the *Chasam Sofer's* eyes lit up. His face which had been contorted in pain emitted a smile. “Good that you came,” his *rebbe* declared.

“Do you remember a *chiddush*, innovative explanation, which I taught you years ago concerning a passage at the end of *Meseches Sotah*?” the *Chasam Sofer* asked “Yes, I do,” he replied and proceeded to relate to him the entire *shiur*, lecture, that his *rebbe* had taught many years earlier.

The *Chasam Sofer* then explained the reason for the summons: “I am preparing for my final journey. Our Sages teach, *Ashrei mi she'ba v'talmudo b'yado*, ‘Praised is one who comes/arrives with his *talmud*/lessons in his hand. This refers to one's arrival in the next world prepared with his Torah erudition clear and lucid in his mind. I have been reviewing my learning, but I seem to have forgotten that one *chiddush*. I knew that you would remember it. Now you must go, since you are a *Kohen*. I feel the end is very near”. And so the holy *Chasam Sofer* left this world – *v'talmudo b'yado*.