

And this is the law which Moshe set/placed before the Bnei Yisrael. (4:44)

Chapel suggest that the word, "sam", "placed," with the Hebrew letter "sin" alludes to another Hebrew word with a similar sound, whose meaning is completely different. *Sam ha'maves* and *sam ha'chaim*, a potion whose effects are either therapeutic or deadly in nature. That is like *Torah*. To the one who is *zocheh*, merits, it is a potion that can engender life, that can have far-reaching benefits. For the one who is not *zocheh*, an encounter with *Torah* can be fatal. Moreover, *Chapel* say that it is the actual *Torah* which is "*naasis lo*," becomes for him a deadly potion. Imagine, the *Torah* itself is transformed into a pollutant that will destroy his system.

Horav Refael Hakohen, zl, m'Hamburg explains that there are three levels of *Torah* study: The zenith of study is manifest by the individual who studies *Torah lishma*, for its sake. His love of *Torah* permeates every moment of his devotion to it. The other extreme is displayed by the who studies *l'kanter*, to dispute, disdain and find areas that he can question and ridicule. The middle level is demonstrated by the one who studies *Torah* as a medium for achieving honor and fame. His goals are personal, his intentions are self-gratifying. He realizes that one receives true esteem for *Torah* scholarship; distinction is what one achieves for *Torah* erudition. He is willing to work for that *kavod*, honor. That is what is referred to as *shelo lishmah*.

Thus, we see that one who studies for personal gain stands at a dangerous crossroads. He cannot vacillate back and forth. He must decide either to go to the right and work on his *Torah* study, so that it becomes *lishmah*, or go to the left where he will have the opportunity to scorn and disdain. Regarding him, *Chazal* say, "If he merits and decides to ascend to the level of *lishmah*, then *Torah* is therapeutic. If he does not merit, and instead chooses to go left to disparage *Torah*, then that actual *Torah* which he has studied until now becomes a *sam ha'maves*, deadly potion. We see that the *Torah* that he has studied until now, the *Torah* that was seemingly studied simply *shelo lishmah*, with intent only for personal gain, was actually motivated by the wrong reason. The end result reveals the true motive behind his *Torah* study. Better had he not studied, for he might not have fallen to such a nadir.

Horav Boruch Ber Leibowitz, zl, suggested *Chazal's* statement as an explanation for Acher, the famous scholar turned apostate, following that path. After all, why didn't the *Torah* that he had studied protect him? *Chazal* explain that when he would get up, *sifrei minim*, books expounding heresy, would fall down from his lap. In other words, he was studying *Torah* while simultaneously reading heresy. Yet, we may wonder why the *Torah* that he studied did not protect him. He was a scholar - so obviously he must have studied quite a bit. Where was the *Torah* to which he so diligently applied himself? The answer, claims *Rav Boruch Ber*, is that *Torah* study that goes hand and hand with heresy is not *limud haTorah*. On the contrary, he is in a worse situation because he had studied, for now he is manipulating that which he learned to support his distortion of *Torah*. The *Torah* has become his fatal potion in more ways than one.