

It shall be on Aharon's forehead... and it shall be on his forehead always, to bring them favor before Hashem. (28:38)

The *Tzitz*, Head-Plate, was a unique addition to the *Kohen Gadol's* vestments. When the *Kohen Gadol* wore it, the two words that were engraved on it: *Kodesh l'Hashem*, Holy to Hashem, served to gain Heavenly favor for blood or sacrificial body parts that were offered on the *Mizbayach*, Altar, while in a state of *tumah*, ritual contamination, allowing them to be accepted by Hashem. *Tzitz meratzeh*: the *Tzitz* caused ineligible offerings to become accepted. Whether this was only when Aharon/*Kohen Gadol* wore it on his forehead is the subject of a debate in the *Talmud* (*Yoma 7b*). One *Tanna* takes the position that the *Tzitz* itself was always *meratzeh* – whether the *Kohen* wore it or not. The other *Tanna* opines that it provided atonement only while he wore it, which limited its effectiveness, because he was prohibited from wearing his vestments when he was not actively involved in the *avodah* in the *Bais Mikdash*. When he wore it, however, it was necessary that he was always aware of it being on his head. As a result, he would touch his hand to it at frequent intervals.

The significance of constant awareness without *hesach hadaas*, removing one's thoughts, cannot be overstated. Only one who maintains his awareness of and connection to *Kodesh l'Hashem* in his mind and in his heart will reflect the Torah's illumination from within himself. As such, the Torah becomes an intrinsic part of his essence. The importance of diligence in learning Torah, or *hasmadah*, can be perceived through an analogy to a cup of coffee. In order to make a drinkable cup of coffee, one must cook the water until it reaches a boiling point. To achieve this, the water must cook continually. If he were to remove the water from the fire every minute, and then return it to the fire – it would never achieve its boiling point.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, cites the well-known story of *Rav Preida* (*Eiruvim 54b*) who had a student that required learning each lesson four hundred times before he was able to master it. One day, *Rav Preida* was required to leave to attend to a *mitzvah*. He did not leave until he had taught his student the lesson the usual four hundred times. Only this time, for some reason, his student had difficulty in grasping the lesson. When queried by *Rav Preida* why this day was different than all other days, the student replied, "From the very moment that they informed the master that there was a *mitzvah* to attend to, I was *masiach daas*, my attention was diverted, because every minute I worried that 'now, the master will rise up and leave me.'"

Incredible! It takes four hundred reviews to embed the lesson into the student's mind. Yet, the *hesach ha'daas*, diverted attention, causes such an interruption in the continuum of learning that the student is unable to retain the lesson. At the end of the day, the *Rebbe* started four hundred times, but, as long as the student's attention was not on board, his efforts were wasted. One can sit in front of his *Gemorah* all day, but if his mind is not completely focused – he will not achieve what he is capable of achieving.

The *Alter, zl, m'Novarodok*, was wont to use a practical analogy to explain the concept of focus. A fellow left home on a journey that would take him to a distant country. His purpose in going there was to attend to pressing business that would require all of one day. In other words, he was traveling to a distant country for one day – period. As things would have it, every day something new came up that prevented him from returning home in a timely fashion. These “things” occupied him for twenty years! For twenty years, every single day, he was packed and ready to return home. It was always something that came up at the last minute. At the end of the day, however, as far as he was concerned, the past twenty years had amounted to nothing more than one day.

Another fellow also took a long journey. He planned to be away for twenty years. That was the plan. He was very fortunate, however, to accomplish his goals in one day! While it is true that he was there only for one day, in his mindset, that day was twenty years long! The lesson is obvious. Twenty continuous years focused on one day fly by without notice. On the other hand, one day that was supposed to be twenty years long can feel like twenty years. A person who is focused on his learning with no room or tolerance for diversion of any kind will maintain the diligence required for achievement in Torah study.

Many people learn, but *hasmadah* eludes them. Many are proficient in learning and have achieved incredible heights in Torah. Nonetheless, they have not yet reached *masmid* status. How does one achieve such focus and commitment? The following story saw light in *Peninim* many years ago. I think that its message is timely. A *maggid* related that, as a young man, he had studied in a small Lithuanian town. In the *bais medrash* of that town, an elderly man who was at least in his nineties sat and studied Torah literally every waking minute of the day. He was so deeply engrossed in Torah study that he ate his meals where he sat, never leaving his Torah study. He fell asleep in front of his *Gemorah*, and – upon awakening – he immediately returned to his blatt *Gemorah*. He was the object of envy throughout the *bais medrash*.

One day, a group of curious students approached him and asked him for his secret. How is he able to study so diligently for so long? He explained that as a youth he had been blessed with a sharp, astute mind. He was able to grasp the various profundities of Torah with ease. Alas, he had one problem, *hasmadah*, diligence. His attachment to the “study” part left something to be desired. At the time, he was a student in the famed *Volozhiner Yeshivah*, whose *Rosh Yeshivah* was *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl. Rav Chaim* approached him more than once to be more diligent, to increase his *hasmadah*, but to no avail. He possessed a great mind, but he was also subject to the powerful allure of the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, that presented an overwhelming challenge to his Torah study.

“One night, about 2:00 a.m., in the midst of a deep sleep, I heard someone calling my name. First, I stirred, but, after the voice persisted, I awoke to see none other than the venerable *Rosh Yeshivah* standing over me. You can imagine the awe that permeated me as I saw *Rav Chaim* standing there with a candle in his hand, motioning me to follow him. Without further ado, I jumped out of bed, quickly dressed, and followed *Rav Chaim*. He quietly led me through the streets of the

city until we reached its outskirts. Never once did *Rav Chaim* say a word. He just led until we reached a large forest.

“We entered the forest and stopped in the middle. Suddenly, the *Rosh Yeshivah* turned to me and raised his voice, ‘You know that *Chazal* teach that when one studies Torah, the *Shechinah* sits opposite him and studies also. My child, if you do not want to learn Torah, why should you prevent Hashem *Yisborach* from learning?’ This heartrending plea, emanating from the innermost recesses of his heart, moved me beyond control. All night, I tossed and turned. My *Rebbe’s* anguished cry resonated through my ears. His profound accusation was mind-boggling. How could I impede the learning of the *Ribono Shel Olam*? From that day on, I decided that I would no longer prevent Hashem’s learning. On the contrary, I wanted to learn with Hashem *Yisborach*. I changed my entire attitude towards Torah learning and became a *masmid*.” We now have an entirely new perspective regarding Torah study and the *chavrusa*, study partner, with Whom we learn.