

If you will follow My decrees. (26:3)

Rashi explains that this *pasuk* refers, not to *mitzvah* performance, but rather, *shetiheyu ameilim baTorah*, that we engage in intensive Torah study, with the intention that such study will lead to *mitzvah* observance. Contrary to the mistaken notion that observance and study are two distinct Jewish functions, *mitzvah* observance is actually a function of Torah study – not its goal. An observant Jew's life revolves around Torah study which guides and defines his *mitzvah* observance.

The *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 31a) teaches that when one arrives in *Olam Habba*, the World-to-Come, he is asked, *Kavaata ittim laTorah*, "Did you set aside specific times for Torah study?" It seems that studying Torah is insufficient; the significance is placed on *kvias ittim*, setting aside time. As long as one is learning, what difference does it make if it is a *kvius*, a set time, or not? It is related in the name of *Horav Ovadyah Yosef, zl* (*Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, quotes the *Sephardic* Chief Rabbi cited by *Rav Michael Perets, Oros HaChumash*), who explains the following: We have a *halachic* principle regarding *sfeikos*, doubts: *Kol kevua k'mechtza al mechtza dami*; if something (a piece of meat) is separated from a *kavuah*, fixed place, it is treated as *mechtza* 50/50, even if the permitted (meat) is in the majority. For example, if one finds a piece of meat and most stores are kosher – the meat is considered kosher. If one takes the meat from a store, however, and it is unknown from which store it came, then it is a 50/50 doubt – even if the majority is kosher. [*Horav Akiva Eiger, zl*, explains that in the case of *kavua*, the reality was once established. Thus, in principle, a specific *halachah* is assigned to this case. The doubt is: What is that *halachah*? In such a case, we do not invoke the rules of majority, and every doubt is treated as an equal doubt. In the case of found meat (*kol d'parish*), the reality has never been established, because this meat never before stood out from the rest of the meat. [From the instance that we encounter it – we are in doubt, unlike *kavua*, in which the doubt concerns the stores, which are a reality.]

One who is *kovea/kavua*, fixes his time for learning, even for one or two hours daily, transforms that fixed time as if it were fifty percent of the day, as if he is spending twelve hours a day learning!

Horav Michael Perets explains that when one is *kovea ittim*, his entire day revolves around that set hour or two in which he learns. He makes sure to push off appointments, meetings and trips, because he does not want to infringe on his *kvius*. The result is that his entire day is filled with Torah. Such a person deserves that his reward for *limud haTorah* should at least be for fifty percent of his day. The attitude that we demonstrate towards an activity will define what that endeavor means to us. When one establishes a *kvius*, he makes a statement: my learning is a reality which I value. Everything revolves around it. A similar idea might apply to *davening/shul* attendance. One who attends a *minyan* at a specific time should arrive sufficiently early prior to *davening*, so that he can *daven* in sync with the *chazzan/tzibbur*. Running in right before *Borchu* and leaving after *Kedushah* is a telling affirmation of his *davening* values. The only saving grace for such an individual is that he probably manifests the same attitude with regard to everything else that he does.

It goes without saying that an observant Jew knows and understands the centrality of Torah in his life. The meaning of “centrality,” however, regrettably changes with each generation. The following story underscores this idea. *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, once told a businessman who had a night *seder chavrusa*, Torah study partner at night, that he should have a morning session – because one hour of learning in the morning, when the mind is fresh, is worth two at night. The following incident demonstrates how distant our present definition of early morning Torah study has changed.

When *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, Brisker, zl*, was first married, he could not acquire his own set of *Arba Minim*, Four Species. He would use those of his grandfather-in-law, the *Netziv, zl*. The custom was that the *tzibbur*, congregation, did not begin the recitation of *Hallel* until *Rav Chaim* had *bentched Esrog*, made the blessing over the *Lulav* and *Esrog*. One year when it came time to recite *Hallel*, the congregation looked around and noticed that *Rav Chaim* was not there. When the *Netziv* noticed *Rav Chaim's* absence, he instructed the congregation not to wait any longer, but to begin *Hallel*. A few minutes later, *Rav Chaim* appeared and the *Netziv* hurried over to enable him to make the *brachah* on his *Arba Minim*. Surprisingly, *Rav Chaim* demurred, saying that he would soon explain his behavior. When the prayers were concluded, the *Netziv* asked *Rav Chaim* for an explanation. His actions clearly required some sort of clarification.

Rav Chaim explained that this year a *shailah*, *halachic* question, had arisen with regard to the *Netziv's* *Lulav* and *Esrog* which precluded *Rav Chaim* from making a *brachah*. He added, “This question applies only to me – not to anyone else.” The *Netziv* did not agree, “Surely, if a *shailah* exists concerning the validity of the *Esrog*, it applies equally to me as it does to you.” *Rav Chaim* explained why it did not: “This year is the eighth year of the *Shemittah–Yovel* cycle, and your *Esrog* came from *Eretz Yisrael*. Veritably, it comes from a non-Jew, but, since it was harvested during the seventh/*Shemittah* year, I am *machmir*, especially stringent, concerning myself. “If this is so,” said the *Netziv*, “it is a *shailah* for me as well.”

The next day, the second day of *Yom Tov*, at four in the morning, *Rav Chaim* was awakened by a knock on his door. He quickly ran to answer. It was the *Netziv's* *shamash*, attendant, who had been sent by the *Netziv* to summon *Rav Chaim*. *Rav Chaim* was disturbed. What could be so important that he had to be called so early in the morning? He quickly dressed and ran over to his grandfather-in-law's home. As he walked in the door, the *Netziv* happily called out, “I have wonderful news for you!” *Rav Chaim* heard this as he walked into the *Netziv's* study, to be welcomed by the *Netziv* whose head was buried in the mound of *sefarim* that surrounded him, “You can make a *brachah* today with no problem. Immediately after our discussion, I sat down to study through and analyze all aspects of the question. I have been sitting here since yesterday poring through all of the ‘data’ and sources, and I have concluded, beyond any reasonable doubt, that there is no question: you may recite the *brachah*!”

The *Netziv* did not allow *Rav Chaim* to digest his words before he began elaborating on the *shailah* and his reasoning for permitting the blessing. *Rav Chaim* politely interrupted him and asked him to

stop. Apparently, he ran over to the house without having first recited *Bircas HaTorah*. Rav Chaim went to the side, and, as was his custom, he recited the blessing with great *kavanah*, concentration/devotion, and fervor. When he concluded his blessings, he turned to the *Netziv* who was weeping. Rav Chaim was taken aback; why was his grandfather-in-law weeping? "What is it?" he asked. "Why are you crying?" "How can I not weep, when I see a young *avreich*, married scholar, like you, who, at four in the morning, has not yet recited *Bircas HaTorah*? What will become of the next generation (if its future leadership is still sleeping at four in the morning)?"

Rav Chaim was wont to relate this story to his son, the *Brisker Rav*, *Horav Yitzchak Zev*, *zl*, with a caveat: "Everyone is aware of the concept of *yeridas hadoros*, the subsequent descent of generations (subsequent generations spiritually truncate in comparison with the previous generation). But I will add to this: *yeridas hadoros* exists even from one generation to the next. Point in reference, look at the huge gap between the *Netziv* and myself. He could not fathom how I could become a *gadol*, Torah giant, if on *Yom Tov* I was still sleeping at four o'clock in the morning! It upset him so, that he began to weep profusely. And we – what do we have to say for ourselves?"

And I add a postscript: What do we have to say for ourselves?