

## **“If you will follow My decrees.” (26:3)**

*Rashi* understands the concept of following Hashem’s decrees as engaging in intensive Torah study. *Ameilus*, toil, in Torah is a critical aspect of Torah study. The *Taz* in *Orach Chaim* 47 writes, “The Torah is retained only by he that toils in it diligently and with great intensity. Those who study Torah casually – amid comfort and without toil – will not retain it.” The study of Torah is unlike any other scholarly pursuit. For a Jew, it is his lifeblood and must be viewed as such. *Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, z.l.*, explains that one who toils in an endeavor or puts his heart and soul into the development of a certain goal will naturally develop a close bond with it. One who plants a tree or works in a garden becomes attached to the tree or the bushes on a level consistent with the effort and toil that he has expended. If this is true in the material/physical dimension, how much more so is it true in the spiritual dimension. The more one toils to achieve a foothold, to acquire a level of spiritual accomplishment, the stronger his relationship with the Torah becomes. Indeed, when one studies Torah with great intensity, it becomes his acquisition; it becomes an integral part of him.

Our great Torah leaders, past and present, have viewed *ameilus baTorah* as the only way to study Torah. Indeed, the more toil, the greater was their enjoyment. There is a story told that when *Horav Meshulam Igra, z.l.*, was *rav* in Sismanitz, two laymen from another town came to him with the request that he render judgment in a monetary dispute between them. *Rav* Meshulam listened carefully to the two litigants as they presented the case. He told them that the matter was laden with various opinions in *Halachah*, and he would need some time to sort out the *Halachah* and render judgment. The two men realized that it would take a few days, so they decided to return home and ask their local *rav*, who was also a Torah scholar.

They presented the question to their *rav*, who asked them to return in a few minutes. As soon as they left the room, the *rav* began to entreat Hashem with bitter tears, begging Him to guide him so that he would render the correct judgment in this most difficult case. He feared that if he could not give a correct judgment, he would lose his esteem in the community and eventually his position. Hashem listened to his prayers and guided him to look in a certain volume of *halachic* responsa that quoted the correct judgment to their dispute. The *rav* rendered judgment; the laymen accepted; everyone was happy.

A few months went by, and these men once again had the occasion to be in Sismanitz. They went to *Rav* Meshulam and apologized for not waiting around for his ruling regarding their earlier dispute, asking, “By the way, what was the *psak*, ruling?” *Rav* Meshulam said that after much deliberation, he had come to a judgment. The men began to laugh, explaining how they had left Sismanitz earlier because they could not wait a few days for *Rav* Meshulam’s *psak*. When they returned home, their *rav* had rendered judgment almost immediately.

After *Rav* Meshulam heard this, he was determined to meet the *rav*. Anybody who could render judgment in such a difficult dispute so quickly must be an erudite Torah scholar of the highest

calibre. He must go to pay him homage.

When *Rav Meshulam* came to visit the *rav*, the *rav* became frightened. *Rav Meshulam* was one of the preeminent Torah leaders of the generation. This was an honor of the highest accord. It also could prove embarrassing, because *Rav Meshulam* was under the impression that the *rav* was a great scholar, a fact which the *rav* viewed as somewhat inconsistent with the truth. *Rav Meshulam* began by saying how impressed and astounded he was that the *rav* was able to render judgment so soon after being presented with the dispute. The *rav* responded humbly, "It is not that I am a great scholar. Indeed, I feared that I would not be able to render judgment, so I prayed fervently to Hashem to guide me."

When *Rav Meshulam* heard this, he shrugged and said, "To cry – I could also do that. The proper and correct manner to render judgment is through *ameilus*, toil in Torah study, and careful, didactic perusal of the sources. I bid you good-day."

The message is loud and clear. Certainly, the *rav* must have been a pious individual, since Hashem had immediately responded favorably to his supplication. He was, however, lacking one point in his Torah study: *ameilus* - toil, and that was everything. We can pray for success before a test, or we can study for it. In the end, the scholar is the one who has studied

Studying Torah does not come easily to everyone. For some, it means overcoming the challenge of aptitude, while for others it is time. Then there is a challenge that many do not realize exists: parents who do not understand the value of their sons' achievements. These are simple challenges. What about studying Torah under duress, with extreme *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice? *Horav Chaim Kreisworth, z.l.*, would note that he had greater mastery and deeper insight into those sections of *Talmud* that he was compelled to study under great hardship and *mesiras nefesh*. He went so far as to posit that not only was he proficient in these areas, but his sons even achieved greater expertise in those sections of *Talmud* that he studied with *mesiras nefesh*. He cited a famous maxim of *Chazal* in support of this phenomenon. We are taught that any *mitzvah* which *Klal Yisrael* accepted with *mesiras nefesh* remained with them forever. These *mitzvos* were transmitted through the generations from father to son.

The simple interpretation of *Chazal* is that any *mitzvah* for which *Klal Yisrael* demonstrated remarkable commitment – accepting it from the beginning – endured. A classic example is the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah*, which is still an accepted Jewish tradition by even the most alienated Jew. *Rav Chaim* contends that *Chazal* are teaching us that any *mitzvah* – and we may add that this applies to any activity – that increases *Kavod Shomayim*, honor of Heaven, which is performed with *mesiras nefesh*, will remain in the family. It will become a father's legacy to his children.

*Horav Moshe Neuschloss, z.l.*, *Rav* of New Square, maintained such a strong bond with the Torah. Indeed, he lived his life with the acute awareness of the centrality of Torah to the Jewish people. After the Holocaust, which he miraculously survived, he took upon himself the commitment to study

Torah diligently – especially during such times when the community in general would be engaged in other areas of Jewish tradition.

At one point, towards the end of the war, he was so sick and weak that the accursed SS guards took him for dead and removed his body to the morgue to be incinerated with the other corpses. He survived and was allowed to go on living. After the war, he returned to his native Hungary, settling in Paksht. His brother, who also survived, was overwhelmed with joy when he heard that *Rav Moshe*, who was originally sent to the crematorium, had actually survived. He took advantage of the first opportunity to go see him.

He arrived on a Friday afternoon at the doorstep of *Rav Moshe's* home. With great joy and trepidation, he knocked on the door. One can only imagine the joy that reigned during this meeting of the two surviving brothers. *Rav Moshe* immediately invited his brother into the house and said, "We must learn *Torah* – now." For five uninterrupted hours, they sat together delving into the intricacies and minutiae of the *Talmud*.

As the time to usher in the holy *Shabbos* drew near, they closed their *Gemoras*. Only then did they embrace with great emotion and weep uncontrollably on one another's shoulders over their own and *Klal Yisrael's* losses. *Rav Moshe* then told his brother why, at first, he quickly retreated to studying Torah for five hours. "Since the world was devoid of Torah for so many years of the Holocaust – and even now, so many are involved with rebuilding their lives – I feel it necessary that someone carry the world's spiritual needs, which can be accomplished only through intensive Torah study. I have made this my life's commitment, expressing my gratitude to Hashem.

"Furthermore," *Rav Moshe* continued, "there is another reason. In payment for my room and board in this home, I agreed to a Yissacher/Zevulun partnership with the owner, whereby I spend my time learning and he shares half of my *Olam Haba*, reward in the World to Come. I did not think it appropriate that I set aside my responsibility for personal reasons."

It is also noteworthy that throughout his life, *Rav Moshe* made a point to engage in Torah study on days preceding *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, knowing that due to the pressures of the upcoming days, people would not be as inclined to study Torah with the same fervor and diligence.