

And if you will consider My decrees revolting, and if your being rejects My ordinances, so as not to perform all of My commandments, to annul My covenant. (26:15)

Chazal teach that the final straw, which is denying belief in Hashem, is part of a descending seven-step process. In other words, one does not just wake up one morning and decide to become a *kofer*, heretic. He has been slipping slowly over a period of time, and now this trait has finally begun to manifest itself in his denial of the Creator. What makes this process most astonishing is that it takes very little to gain entry into it. All one needs in order to mount the first step is not really a lack of study, but rather, a lack of *ameilus*, toil, in study. So, one might be studying diligently, but not toiling assiduously, and he is already guilty of not “studying” Torah. Indeed, *Chazal* (*Meseches Shabbos* 88b) add that, not only does a lack of Torah study lead to heresy, but even Torah studied superficially will lead to a similar end. *La'maiminim bah sama d'chaya, l'masmilim bah sama d'mosa*, “To those who go to the ‘right’ with the Torah, it is an elixir of life; to those who go to the ‘left’ with the Torah, it is a potion of death.”

The above statement teaches us that the Torah itself acts as a potion of death to those who go ‘left’ with it. *Rashi* explains that going to the ‘right’ with Torah means, “That they engage in it with all their strength and are preoccupied with knowing its secret, similar to the one who uses his right hand, which is his primary organ.” **Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl**, derives two important points from *Rashi*’s commentary: “Engaged in Torah” is defined as “with all of one’s strength and preoccupied with it.” Also, the essence of Torah study is: “To know the secret,” to understand its mystery.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the concept of “Torah’s secret” does not suggest that in Torah there exists a revealed portion and a hidden portion. The secret and mystery of Torah denote everything that a person is privileged to attain and understand. The very essence of Torah study is the revelation of secrets, to delve deeper and deeper into the Torah’s profundities. Therefore, one’s knowledge of Torah assumes a new meaning each time he delves deeper to plumb its depths for even greater knowledge. He reveals new unknowns and uncovers that which heretofore had been incomprehensible. This is why studying Torah is the process of uncovering its secrets.

No dichotomy exists between the Written Law and the Oral Law concerning the revelation of the Torah’s secrets. Studying the *Talmud*, developing a deeper understanding of its subject matter, increases one’s understanding of the Written Law – as well. The more one learns, the deeper one plumbs in either of the Laws, the greater his access to the Torah’s secrets. With each layer of secret that one reveals, he gains new insight. Thus, the more that he reveals, the broader one’s definition of the “simple meaning” becomes.

A student hears a *sevara*, logical explanation, from his *rebbe*. At the student’s stage of maturity, the *sevara* is merely a fact, the revelation of something he had already known before. He does not

yet have an intellectual understanding of the *sevara*. As time goes on and the student matures, the *sevara* takes on a new image. He senses the revelation of a new world within Torah, the world of Torah analysis. The *sevara* is now the key to a mystery, which, due to his new maturity level, he is able to understand. In appreciating the *sevara*, his entire being becomes enveloped by the intellectual adventure of understanding. This is what is meant by the statement: The essence of Torah study is to deepen secrets and reveal its mysteries.

We now understand why Torah study is different from other disciplines. In his *Kuntres Emunah u'Bitachon*, **Ramban** writes that no portion of the mystical Torah is divorced from the revealed Torah; rather, the mystical Torah is but the profundity, the secret beneath the revealed Torah. The entire Torah is a single entity, with learning being the process of discovery, as one engrosses himself ever so deeply in the Torah. Thus, one uncovers what is obscure and concealed.

An individual who studies Torah as if it were just another discipline transforms it into an ordinary subject. When it is so treated, it becomes a potion of death, the poison of the human spirit. On the other hand, the individual who studies Torah by going to the "right," who is constantly united and bound with its unknown, with what he has yet to understand, he is the wise man who actualizes the Torah. The one who goes to the "left" is bound and united with the transitory, drawing the existence of the Torah towards his personal preferences.

In summation: One should study Torah as a never-ending plumbing of its depths and revelation of its secrets. The Torah is not his – it is G-d's wisdom which we attempt to understand in accordance with our limited abilities. The person who thinks the Torah is a subject which he studies and controls is clueless, and he will ultimately be poisoned by its secrets. He will find questions that are beyond his ken. His human logic cannot grasp the depth of its wisdom. So, he will reject it.

Torah learning is a process through which one delves deeper and deeper, but never actually masters the text, since one cannot grasp G-d's wisdom. Every step of understanding, of uncovering the secrets, is a privilege and viewed as a great merit. To paraphrase the *Rosh Yeshivah*, "When man's entire will, desire, and ambition are inextricably bound up with Hashem's Torah (this refers to the Torah that is still Hashem's, because it has not yet been revealed to human understanding), only then is he capable of sensing the infinite pleasure of his 'own' Torah (which he has already revealed), which he has already succeeded in attaining. Every second, every minute, during which one is free of the struggle to master Torah – in these moments he is severed from the secrets and mysteries of Torah, and, in such moments, he has lost the pleasure of Torah."

The *Rosh Yeshivah* of Telshe was totally immersed in Torah. His *ameilus*, toil in Torah, was his greatest source of joy and pleasure. One would think that toil and pleasure are far from synonymous. Yet, as *Rav Gifter* explains: "The concept of *amal haTorah* is inherent in the study of Torah... *Amal haTorah* does not mean a life impoverished by complete removal from human joys and pleasures, but rather, the sublime contentment of the most intimate contact with the source of

all joy and pleasure.”

Rav Gifter loved learning. He appreciated *ameilus* in others, especially in his *talmidim*, students. One *Shavuos* in the late 1950's, a group of older students visited the *Rosh Yeshivah* for an *oneg Yom Tov*, celebration of the Festival. As the *oneg* began, *Rav Gifter* appeared to be unwell. The students asked if something was wrong. He replied that he was well, but tired, having been unable to sleep since the night of *Shavuos*. He explained that, after having been awake all night on *Shavuos*, he had attempted to go to sleep in the morning. The windows to his room were open, however, and he had been privy to gorgeous sounds emanating from the *bais hamedrash* situated just behind his apartment. A young boy was learning with a magnificent *niggun*, song, of Torah. “Imagine,” the *Rosh Yeshivah* declared, “a *bachur* studying Torah on *Shavuos* morning when no one is in the *bais hamedrash* (since everyone is asleep after having studied the entire night). Do not think that I am upset that I was unable to sleep. (On the contrary) there is no sound more beautiful for a *rebbe* than the sound of his *talmid* learning.”

Related to the concept of pure pleasure that is associated with Torah study, I cite two correspondent repartees expressed by **Horav Aharon Kotler, zl**, which demonstrates how our Torah leaders viewed the “enjoyment” of Torah study. *Rav Aharon* was – together with *Reb Yitzchak (Irving) Bunim, zl*, a prominent Torah *askan*, lay-leader, and *shtadlan*, intercessor, on behalf of Orthodoxy in particular, and Judaism in general – at a conference, when a distinguished Jewish leader rose to speak. The speaker related in the name of the saintly **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, that in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come, *Zevulun*, the brother/Jew who supports *Yissochor*, the Torah student who devotes all of his time to study, will be equal. Not only will *Zevulun* reap similar reward, but (because he sustained and enabled *Yissachar's* Torah study) his *yedios haTorah*, knowledge of Torah, will correspond to that of *Yissochor*. Despite the fact that he had not studied Torah in this world, because he was engaged in commerce, his supporting *Yissochor* will earn him equivalency in Torah erudition.

Reb Yitzchak Bunim turned to *Rav Aharon* and said, “According to what we have just heard, if in *Olam Habba* my reward for Torah study and my Torah knowledge will be on par with that of the *Rosh Yeshivah*, how are we different from one another?” *Rav Aharon* replied, “Veritably, according to the *Chafetz Chaim*, in *Olam Habba* – you are correct – we will be equal, but I have one advantage over you; I (also) have *Olam Hazeih!*” *Rav Aharon* had no greater satisfaction than Torah study.

In a similar incident, a distinguished student of the *yeshivah*, who was very bright and capable, came to the *Rosh Yeshivah* with a “practical” request. Since he was accomplished and talented, he had the ability to enter the world of business and achieve great success. He would thus earn a considerable amount of money, of which he would apportion to support the Torah world. Was there a problem with this?

Rav Aharon replied, “Indeed, if you do this, you will surely earn great reward for which you will be

reimbursed in *Olam Habba*. It would mean abrogating your *Olam Hazeih*. If, however, you remain in the *yeshivah* and study full-time, you will benefit both in *Olam Habba* and in *Olam Hazeih*!”

How far are we from such an appreciation of Torah study?