

## **For it is not an empty thing for you; for it is your life. (32:47)**

When the Torah writes that the Torah is the life source of the Jew, it is not meant to be a cliché. It means exactly what it says. A parent may often tell a child, “You are my life,” but, despite the enormous amount of affection the parent seeks to convey with this statement, the parent’s life and existence is not contingent upon the child. Not so the Torah, which is perfectly exacting in everything it says. If the *pasuk* says that Torah is our life – then it is the entire source of our existence. Without Torah, we are dead. It is a fact. Torah means life. No Torah means death. It is as simple as that.

**Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl**, was the living embodiment of this concept. Anyone who had the privilege of seeing the *Rosh Yeshivah* learn saw pure life. One saw a person “alive” in the strongest and truest sense of the word. One saw the *joie de vivre* in all its glory. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains this phenomenon. He quotes the *Rambam* in his *Shemoneh Perakim*, who explains that all physical matter is divided into five categories. They are: *domeim*, inorganic objects, such as stones and rocks; *tzomeiach*, growing things, such as plant life; *chai*, living creatures; *medaber*, humans who have the ability to think and speak; *ben Yisrael*, the Jew.

Each of these creations is different from one another in essence, as well as in degree. Plant life is not merely a stone with added features. Plant life is a totally different creation, with nothing in common with the inanimate, non-growing stone. This idea applies equally to the others. Thus, the *ben Yisrael* is different from other humans. We may look the same, communicate in the same manner, but, from the perspective of their essential character, the two are miles apart. As each category is different in its level of life, so, too, is it different in its source of life.

The Jew, despite possessing a physical body like other human beings, is primarily comprised of a spiritual essence, and the source of this level of life lies in spirituality - not in physical substance. He certainly requires physical sustenance to sustain him in this world. In addition, the Jew lives on when his physical container is removed from this world. His essence is spiritual; thus, his essence lives on. Torah fulfillment is the source of life for the Jew. When he adheres to this way of life, he is connected with the bond of life, with his source of life. If, however, he severs this connection, he will remain physically alive, but his true essence and being – his spiritual dimension – will be non-existent.

Our Sages (*Avodah Zarah* 3b) compare a Jew to a fish. Just as the fish dies the moment it is removed from the water – its source of life – so, too, does the Jew die spiritually the moment he severs his connection with the Torah. The *Rosh Yeshivah* adds that while the fish may thrash around, flipping itself on the shore, it is in its death throes. Despite its movement, it is still considered dead. Likewise, the Jew, when he is separated from his life source may appear alive, since there still is some movement. This is only temporary, from his physical standpoint, but spiritually, he is already disconnected – dead.

The *Rishon L'Tzion*, **Horav Mordechai Eliyahu, zl**, offers an inspiring analogy to emphasize the importance of incessant Torah learning. He notes that whenever *Sephardim* read from three different Torah scrolls, *Half-Kaddish* is recited at the conclusion of each Torah reading. *Ashkenazim* do so only once. Some *Sephardim* recite two *Kaddeishim* on *Shemini Atzeres /Simchas Torah* when three *Sifrei Torah* are used: *Devarim* to conclude the Torah; *Bereishis* to commence the Torah; the regular *Yom Tov* reading *Sephardic* custom changes, and only two *Kaddeishim* are recited. This is because they want to connect the end of *V'zos Ha'Brachah* with the beginning of *Bereishis*. They do not want to interrupt with a *Kaddish* in between. Indeed, they connect the last letter of the Torah – *lamed* with the first letter – *bais*, which together spell the word *lev*, heart. The Torah is the heart of the Jewish People.

Rav Eliyahu explains that the human body is comprised of many organs, most of which “rest” when the body sleeps. The ears do not hear; the mouth does not speak, the legs do not walk, etc. There is one major organ which never sleeps. Indeed, if this organ were to stop its function for but a moment, the person would go into cardiac arrest and die. The heart must constantly function. There is no sleep for the heart, because, when it sleeps, the person dies.

The same idea applies to Torah study. A person asks, “If I learn when will I earn a living? When will I sleep? When will I eat?” The answer is that one should focus on Torah as his goal and primary objective in life. When one focuses on Torah, his entire day is considered as being totally replete with Torah. Indeed, the **Ben Ish Chai** encourages one to study Torah in the evening *bein ha'shemashos*, between sunset and nighttime, and also in the early hours of the morning prior to sunrise, thus connecting the two days. Likewise, since the world is round, in one place where it is already nightfall, the next day is beginning in another part of the globe. Torah study never stops. After all, one's heart must keep beating at a steady pace – or else.