

If you will follow My decrees and observe My Commandments and perform them. (26:3)

At first glance, the *pasuk* appears repetitious: follow My decrees; observe My commandments; perform them. The Torah is not written in synonyms. Every word – indeed, every letter – has profound significance. How are we to understand what appear to be variegated nuances for heeding Hashem's word? *Rashi* explains that the *pasuk* is teaching us the process by which we proceed from learning to action. The combined meaning of the *pasuk* is: If you will follow My decrees by engaging in *ameilus ba'Torah*, intensive Torah study, with the intention that this study will lead to; observe My commandments properly, and, if you will actually elevate potential to reality; and perform them – you will merit the following blessings, which will be detailed in the upcoming *pesukim*.

Thus, it all reverts back to *ameilus ba'Torah*, commonly translated as toiling in Torah, or exerting oneself in his studies. Rarely has a *pasuk* – or actually a term, *ameilus* – been so expounded upon. The Jewish People, Torah and Hashem are one. If we have no clear understanding of the meaning of *limud haTorah*, study of Torah, then we are in serious trouble. Sitting in front of a *Gemorah* as if one is at a country club is not the Torah's idea of *ameilus*. Yet, on the other hand, we find ourselves reciting daily the blessing, *v'Haarev na*, "Please, Hashem, sweeten the words of Torah in our mouth." Toil? Sweetness? It would seem that these terms are not mutually consistent with one another.

A certain blessing precedes *v'Haarev na*, the *Bircas HaTorah* of *Laasok b'divrei Torah*, "To busy (occupy) ourselves with the words of Torah." We now have a third term for Torah study: *eisak*, busy ourselves. An *eisak* is a business. Literally, the Torah becomes our business, our occupation. The purpose of Torah study is so that we are able to perform the *mitzvos* properly. Thus, the extended meaning of *Laasok b'divrei Torah* is to occupy our minds with Torah, so that we are able to implement the words of Torah properly and correctly in actual practice.

We now know that Torah must occupy our minds and our mouths. We acknowledge that physical and mental exertion is an integral part of this process. Where does the "sweetness" enter the picture? **Horav Shimon Schwab, zl**, explains this pragmatically. Once we have expended the effort to apply ourselves to learning Torah, we ask Hashem to make the Torah sweet for us. He offers a prosaic analogy to one who is reluctant to jump into a pool of cold water. Once he has "broken the ice" and made the plunge, the water is quite soothing and enjoyable. Indeed, there are difficulties in studying Torah. It does not come easily for many people. Obstacles and challenges block the way. For some, it is time; For others, it is acumen, background, study partner, indolence, every excuse in the world. Once one has made the necessary effort, and dispensed the necessary toil and exertion, he asks Hashem to please grant him the enjoyment of the learning. We ask that the words of Torah literally become sweet in our mouths.

I think that there is another aspect to Torah study – one that eludes some of us – one which is a requirement – one that bespeaks *ameilus* – and one that will certainly define for us the sweetness of Torah. Let me first cite a story which is related by *Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*. One day, the *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ponevez, the veritable *gadol hador*, **Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl**, came late for *shiur*, his Torah lecture. This was not a common occurrence. The *Rosh Yeshivah* was always on time, because he loved to teach and share his Torah knowledge with his students.

Rav Shach began the *shiur* without introduction; rather, he began where he had left off the previous day: “Yesterday, we concluded the *shiur* with a difficult question. Probably, all of you were able to sleep last night. You went to bed at your usual time and you slept calmly, waking up this morning refreshed, rejuvenated, and ready to tackle the next day. I could not function all day. The question troubled me to the point that I could not think of anything else. I could not sleep. Finally, with the break of dawn, I called a taxi and traveled to Yerushalayim to present myself at the apartment of the *Brisker Rav, zl*. I posed the question to him, and he told me an original answer that was novel and incredible. At this moment, I have just returned from Yerushalayim to share the answer with you.”

This is a preamble to understanding *eisak haTorah* and *ameilus baTorah*. Nothing else matters; nothing else counts; no sleep – nothing. If I have a question, it must be resolved. Was the Torah sweet to *Rav Shach*? There is absolutely nothing sweeter than the Torah. It was his life. Let us go one step further, and we will have the entire picture of what is achieved by *ameilus* and what is meant by sweetness.

Rav Schwadron tells another story. This one concerns the *Rebbetzin* of *Horav Dov m’Yanava*. She was a righteous and very astute woman. Her husband had suffered a stroke, and he lay paralyzed. She saw the doctors who were attending to him move to the side and conference with one another. She approached the group and asked that they explain what was going on, as well as their approach toward healing her husband.

One of the doctors looked at her, and, with a chuckle, asked, “Why are you so adamant concerning your husband’s therapy? When your husband was speaking about a difficulty in the *Rambam* which he was learning, were you as determined to inquire concerning the explanation of *Rambam*?”

Without batting an eyelash, the *Rebbetzin* told the doctor, “If the *Rambam* was as important to me as my husband’s health, trust me, I would have found a way to explain the *Rambam*!”

Ameilus avails one *baalus*, ownership, possession, over the Torah which he studies. Through *ameilus* he develops an intimate relationship with the Torah, a relationship that is the result of toil and exertion immersed in love. When it becomes his, when he feels the Torah is a part of him – there can be no greater or more heightened sense of joy.