

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

The opening words of the *pasuk* – *Im bechukosai teileichu*, “If you will follow My decrees” – are not addressing the subject of *mitzvah* observance, since the words that immediately follow are, *v’es mitvosai tishmeru*, “and observe My commandments.” *Rashi*’s observation is well-known:

Apparently, *Im bechukosai teileichu* teaches that one must be *amal*, exert himself and toil in Torah. In other words, Torah study that is simple “learning,” is insufficient to protect a person. In order to fulfill Hashem’s mandate concerning Torah study, he must labor when he studies and learn with fervor, passion and enthusiasm. This is a nice *pshat*, explanation, that has become a staple in Torah interpretation – but how do we derive from the word *teileichu* that *ameilus ba’Torah*, toiling in Torah is what it is all about? Torah study alone is insufficient.

*Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl*, observes two primary principles which serve as the basis for Orthodox Judaism: Torah study and *mitzvah* performance. These two principles are very much like the synthesis of the *guf*, body, and the *neshamah*, soul. Their bond may not be broken. One without the other has little value and even less endurance. One who studies Torah diligently will amass much knowledge and increase his level of wisdom. Will this guarantee that he will be a *frumer Yid*, observant, practicing Jew? Absolutely not! As the Montreaux *Rosh Yeshivah* notes, one who is simply erudite, whose acumen and ability to plumb the depths of Torah’s profundities is exceptional, is perhaps able to purify a *sheretz*, ritually unclean creature, one hundred and fifty ways. His brilliance permits him to analyze the *halachah* from all angles and develop an understanding unlike any other rendered before him. However, at the end of the day, this will neither increase nor improve his religious observance. He is a Torah intellectual, but far from being considered an observant, committed Jew. On the other hand, pure *mitzvah* observance, without the support of Torah study, is soulless – a body without a soul, living in a vacuum without “life.”

Wisdom allows one to find the loopholes for purifying a *sheretz*. However, this is not yet the level achieved through *ameilus baTorah*, toil in Torah study. Such a person may be considered erudite, brilliant, analytical – even a Torah giant – but he has still not reached the level of *ameilus*. With *ameilus*, one achieves a level of harmony in which his body and soul are all focused on Torah. Such an individual does not seek to refute the laws of *tumah*, spiritual defilement, but rather to understand why the Torah prohibits a *sheretz* and how to refute the one hundred and fifty reasons that undermine the *halacha*. Simply stated, one who studies Torah without *ameilus* will/can find ways in his logical mind to undermine the Torah – discover loopholes to get around its ordinances. Alternatively, one who studies with *ameilus* looks for ways to affirm and ratify everything that he has learned. Torah is not merely a subject. It is his life! *Ameilus* is the fusion of the human intellect with the human will/desire and the Heavenly source of wisdom. One realizes that the Torah he studies is authored by the Divine. He is attempting to “understand” the word of G-d with his limited mind. When one approaches Torah in this manner, he cannot just “study” it. He must **toil** in it; he must live it. It is the *dvar Hashem*, the word of G-d.

This may be derived from the word *teileichu*, follow, which is a derivative of *holech*, to go. The Torah does not say *Im bechukosai tilmedu*, “you will study”, or *taskilu*, “you will cogitate.” The Torah addresses a form of study that is akin to walking. It is a study that is focused on the question: “What does Hashem want of me?” This kind of Torah study is focused on “walking in Hashem’s ways,” not just “studying” to gain more wisdom and greater erudition.

By no means does this suggest that one should perform *mitzvos* without understanding what he is doing. We do not just “do.” We ask Hashem daily to “place in our hearts the understanding that will enable us to understand His Torah thoroughly, to listen/observe, to study and teach His Torah.” All of this is in order that we be able to carry out His word with love. Torah study and *mitzvah* observance go hand in hand. One without the other does not make one an observant Jew.

Rav Weinberg goes one step further as he compares the synthesis of Torah study and *mitzvah* observance with *lomdus*, analytical Torah study and *Mussar*, ethical character refinement. As Torah addresses the *halachah* and *mitzvah* focuses on the practical implementation of *halachah*, *Mussar* provides the means for executing what one learns in Torah. *Mussar* is *mitzvah* fulfillment of duties of the heart. It provides the passion and enthusiasm, the love and excitement, the awe and trembling, which should accompany all *mitzvah* observance. *Lomdus* is ‘external’ – it provides the parameters, the boundaries, rules and regulations, while *Mussar* internalizes and personalizes the *Lomdus* aspect. *Mussar* that infuses one’s life brings one to inspired *mitzvah* performance. To paraphrase Rav Weinberg, “*Mussar* provides *Lomdus* with a sense of integrity – to seek, recognize and concede to the truth. *Lomdus* is the teacher, the mentor, the guide; *Mussar* is the policeman, the guardian, the control over the *Lomdus*.”

The *Rosh Yeshivah* spoke from experience. A premier *talmid*, student, of Slabodka, a close disciple of the *Mussar* giants, student of its founder *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, he was also a brilliant Torah scholar, a philosopher schooled in both Torah and general knowledge. As rector of the Hildesheimer Rabbiner Seminar in Berlin, he was the pre-eminent *Rosh Yeshivah* and *posek*, *halachic* decisor, in Western Europe. He had the respect of the *gedolim* of Western and Eastern Europe – pre- World War II and after. He synthesized Torah and *Mussar*, representing the finest example of *Im bechukosai teileichu*.