

If you will follow My decrees. (26:3)

Rashi explains *Im bechukosai teileichu*; “If you will follow My decrees” – *she’tiheyu ameilim baTorah*; “That you will toil in Torah.” This is the deal breaker. It all begins and ends with Torah. One who does not toil (study is not enough; it must be toil) in Torah is not ensured success in *mitzvah* observance. Only one whose life is all about Torah – who studies Torah amid sacrifice, placing it on a pedestal above all else – can hope to follow in Hashem’s decrees.

David *Hamelech* says (*Tehillim* 119:72), *Tov li Toras Picha meialfei zahav va’kesef*, “The Torah of Your mouth is better for me than thousands in gold and silver.” The Torah’s value exceeds that of the most precious metals. It has greater value than the most sought after jewels. Sadly, it takes a spiritual connoisseur – or an intelligent person who is not beholden to his physical desires – to appreciate the unfathomable value of Torah. Perhaps the following story will illuminate us.

A wealthy man encouraged his son to study Torah with greater intensity, claiming that, ultimately, it is the most precious commodity to possess. The son had difficulty with this. “I have been learning Torah for years,” the son said. “The time has come for me to earn a living.” His father asked him to be patient, to continue learning, and he would soon see that nothing is as precious as Torah.

The son returned to his studies. That night, when his father returned from the office, he asked his son what he had learned that day. The young man quoted a *halachah*, explaining it beautifully. “See!” exclaimed the father. “You gained a gold coin (that is what your *dvar Torah* is worth). I worked all day and only earned a silver coin.”

The next day, the son went to the market and chose a number of items from a vendor. The total of his purchases added up to half a gold coin. The son then proceeded to say over the *dvar Torah* to the vendor. After he finished speaking, the son said, “My *dvar Torah* is worth one gold coin. I owe you a half gold coin. Now you owe me a half gold coin.” The young man seriously stretched out his hand, believing that the vendor would give him a coin. Enraged, the vendor grabbed his merchandise and threw the son out of the store. Obviously, when the son returned home, he complained to his father about the purported value of his *dvar Torah*: “You told me that my *dvar Torah* was worth a gold coin. Well, all I received was an angry merchant who humiliated me and threw me out of his store!”

The father listened, went to his safe, and removed a precious diamond from it. “Here,” he told his son. “Take this diamond (which indisputably has considerable value) and go to the fruit and vegetable store, and, after making an order, attempt to pay with the diamond.” The son followed his father’s instructions. The people in the store were very impressed with the diamond’s luster and perfection, and they were even prepared to give up to ten dollars for it. The son said that he would go home and ask his father if he was prepared to sell it.

The father looked at his son and said, “See, unless one is well-versed in the value of an object and

appreciates it, he will be unable to grasp its worth.” The next stop was the jewelry store, where the owner offered them a large sum of money for the little “stone.”

Only someone who is involved in the “business” can appreciate the value of a product. The fruit peddler is not proficient in diamonds – as the jeweler is not qualified to determine the value of a mango. One who studies Torah is able to estimate its extraordinary value. To one who learns, nothing is sweeter, more absorbing, more intellectually stimulating, than Torah. One who does not learn has greater problems with which to concern himself.