

It is not in Heaven... rather, the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and your heart – to perform it. (30:12,14)

The *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zuta* (14:1) relates the following vignette. “Once I (Eliyahu *HaNavi*) was traveling from place to place when I chanced upon an unlearned Jew. He knew neither *Chumash* nor *Mishnah*. He spoke cynically and disparagingly. I asked him, ‘My son, what will you respond to your Father in Heaven on the Day of Judgment?’ He replied, ‘*Rebbe*, I have an answer for my lack of Torah knowledge. Heaven did not endow me with the knowledge and ability to understand Torah.’ I then asked him, ‘Who taught you how to fashion and tie the nets made from flax and to know where and how to throw them into the sea to catch fish?’ He replied, ‘Heaven gave me the knowledge and the ability to excel in this profession.’ ‘If so,’ I countered, ‘if Heaven can avail you the acuity to understand how to make fisherman’s nets and how to use them successfully, surely it could have granted you the ability to, likewise, excel in Torah. As it is stated in the Torah, *Ki karov eilecha ha’davar me’od b’ficha u’bilvavcha laasoso*; ‘Torah is close to you. The one who (supposedly) made you a fisherman, could likewise have made you into a Torah scholar.’ As soon as the fisherman heard these words of reproof, he broke down in copious weeping.”

Obviously, the message to be gleaned from this dialogue is much deeper than a simple conversation concerning Heaven’s ability to endow a person with the requisite acuity for Torah scholarship. The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, supplements the message. The fisherman implied that he was unable to find the tool to open the “door” to achieve Torah scholarship and, by extension, a closer and deeper relationship with Hashem. Eliyahu *HaNavi* replied that his ability to “make it” as a fisherman stemmed from the fact that he was acutely aware that he needed to earn a living. As such, he decided to apply himself fully to learn how to prepare the nets required to catch fish. At the end of the day, his motivation was a need to earn a livelihood. It was important to him, to the point that it became his life. Apparently, when something is important, one is able to jump through hoops, scale heights and overcome challenges. Why should Torah study be any different? If the fisherman would have viewed Torah study through the same lens that he viewed earning a living – he would have become a Torah scholar! It is not that he was unable. He did not sufficiently value it. When one cares, he can do just about anything.

How should we define “caring”? I think “caring” is related to “values.” Thus, for the individual who truly values his Torah study, nothing stands in his way. He has no hurdles or challenges to overcome. The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, was wont to say, “Concerning every action one endeavors, it is incumbent upon him to think it through, introspect and confirm that his intentions are pure and his goals and objectives consistent with Torah ideology. With regard to Torah study, however, he has no *cheshbonos*, calculations. He just “jumps into the water.” Torah reigns supreme, thus overriding all *cheshbonos*.

Horav Sholom Povarsky, Shlita (Rosh Yeshivah in Kol Torah), relates that, following his marriage, the two sides (parents and in-laws) met concerning the purchase of an apartment for the young

couple. A nice apartment was available about a twenty-minute walk from the *yeshivah*. The asking price was within the planned budget. When *Horav David Povarsky, zl* (father of *Rav Sholom*), heard the distance, he asked whether anything was closer to the *yeshivah*. He was prepared to pay above his share in order to secure an apartment within closer walking distance to the *yeshivah*. He explained, "I would like that walking to the *yeshivah* be easy and simple. If he thinks it is a bother to make the trek, he will think twice about going to the *yeshivah*."

Rav Sholom underscored his father's unstinting dedication to his *yeshivah* (Ponovezh) and his *shiur*, lectures. At one point, his father was very ill, running a high temperature. The members of his family felt that, in his condition, it was unsafe for him to entertain going to the *yeshivah*. Yet, at the time when he would usually leave for his *shiur*, he arose from bed, dressed and prepared to leave. His eldest son, present *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ponovezh, *Horav Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, asked his father how he could answer that he was *halachically* permitted to endanger himself by going out in his present state, with such a high fever.

His father cited an incident that occurred concerning an elderly woman whom the doctors prohibited from fasting on *Yom Kippur* for health reasons. She flatly refused to listen to the doctor, and she responded emphatically, "I am fasting." When the doctor took note of her obstinacy, he relented and permitted her to fast. He explained that for her not to fast was more physically demanding than fasting. He felt, given her utter devotion to *halachah*, not fasting would take such an emotional toll on her that, in her present state, it would endanger her life. *Rav Dovid* looked at his son and said, "For me not to attend *davening, seder* and *shiur* in the *yeshivah* puts me at greater risk than going out with a high fever." Torah was his life.