

This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent. (19:14)

Chazal (*Shabbos* 83b) teach, “A person should never be absent from the *bais hamedrash*, nor ever refrain from studying Torah – even at the moment of death. For it is stated, *Zos haTorah adam ki yamus b’ohel*, ‘This is the Torah – a man who dies in a tent.’ This *pasuk* teaches us that, even at the moment of death, one should be involved in the study of Torah.” *Reish Lakish* adds, “The words of Torah are not retained, except by one who kills himself (by refraining from unessential physical indulgences). As it is stated, ‘This is the Torah of a man who dies in a tent.’”

Implied by the *pasuk* (according to the interpretation of *Chazal*) is that Torah is to be studied in such a manner that, even if he is in his last moments of mortal existence, he should study Torah. Furthermore, Torah can be preserved only if one is prepared to forgo anything physical that is absolutely not necessary. In other words, he always has to learn, and this manner of learning is not time-sensitive; he must learn every minute of his life. The obvious question is: How is a person expected /demanded to study Torah at the time of death? Torah study requires intense cognitive application, which is hardly practical at such a time.

Horav Shalom Ben Tzion Felman, zl, explains that we are being taught how one should study Torah. Torah must be paramount, the dominant factor in his life, without which his life has no value. Torah is not just a supplemental feature in one’s life, but very life itself. It is not now much one learns, but the quality of his learning. When he learns, he should apply all his *kochos*, energy, to this endeavor.

During World War I, the *Brisker Rav, zl*, and his father, *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, were forced to flee the city. During their journey, the *Brisker Rav* came up with a brilliant explanation to a passage in the *Rambam* that had been troubling him for a while. He immediately shared his innovative thought with his father, who agreed with him. The *Brisker Rav* had a special place in his heart for this exposition. Many years later, he would relate this *p’shat*, exegesis, with great joy. After all, he originated it while on the run during the war. Its value was the premium he paid with *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, elevating Torah study over personal comfort at a time when he was engulfed with the anxiety of war.

The *Ponovezher Rav, zl*, would often extol the extraordinary devotion to Torah manifested by the *Rav* of Tavig, *Horav Avraham Aharon HaKohen Burstein, zl*. He was completely invested in all areas of Torah knowledge. He gave his entire life for Torah. Even during periods of famine and deprivation, he would study diligently for twenty hours per day. His enormous diligence weakened him physically, which he attributed to the heart disease that had caused him great difficulty throughout his life. During World War I, when the Germans and Russians were at war, Tavig, being in Lithuania, was under Russian rule. At one point, the Russian high command decreed that no one was permitted to light a candle at night, since it might signal the enemy. The Germans

would roam during the night, and, whenever they saw a light, they would fire on it.

Rav Burstein sat and learned as usual, in complete disregard of the Russian law. He was completely unaware of the decree prohibiting light. When the Russians discovered him learning by the light of a candle, they accused him of spying for the Germans. He was immediately arrested and sentenced to be executed. He was imprisoned in a cellar in preparation for his execution. When asked if he needed anything, he replied that, when he had been arrested, he was in the midst of studying a difficult *Rambam*. He was troubled by a cryptic passage in the *Rambam*: “Bring me the *Rambam*, and, if I die, I will die for the *Rambam*,” he declared. His wish was granted. A *Rambam* was brought, and he immediately became engrossed in it. During the interval in which he was learning, the Germans had entered the city, and the Russians ran for their lives. He was prepared to die in the tent, to learn Torah.

The *Chazon Ish* was once asked to define *hasmadah*, diligence, in Torah study. He said, “A *masmid* is one who is waiting at the train station for his train. He still has a few minutes before the train rolls into the station, and he will have to board the train. His *Gemorah* is packed away in his suitcase. Yet, he takes the time to open his suitcase, dig through his belongings and remove the *Gemorah*, so that he can study for the next few minutes.” Willingness to exert oneself for a few moments of learning defines diligence.

Diligence does not come easily. One must close his mind to all external matter and maintain focus on what he is learning. At times, this can involve toil, *amal*. *Ameilus ba'Torah* is a prerequisite for growth in learning. Authored by Hashem, it is His gift to us – if we want it enough. When we toil in Torah, when we apply body and soul to plumb its depths, we show how important it is to us. One who is blessed with exceptional acumen, which would normally allow him to breeze through the Torah lessons at a quicker pace, is obviously responsible to achieve more and have a deeper understanding of the material. His *amal* should be no different than that of a student who must toil to understand a simple passage in the *Talmud*. He is empowered to achieve greater levels of erudition – with toil.

An elderly Jew visited the saintly *Chafetz Chaim*, who himself was then up in years. The man had toiled his entire life to eke out a simple living for his family. As he aged in years, he decided that it was time to work on his spiritual dimension as well. He began to *horeve*, work tirelessly with great effort to learn and master the *Gemorah*. Alas, after an extended period of learning, he was only able to achieve mastery over one *daf*, page/side of the Talmud. He was broken-hearted concerning his “failure” and dismal success. “Is it worth continuing?” he asked.

The *Chafetz Chaim* began to move his head back and forth, while he ruminated to himself, “A Jew in front of me wonders if he only covered/mastered one hundred *dafim*/pages of *Gemorah*, if it is worth the effort to continue?” The man heard the *Chafetz Chaim* pondering quietly and corrected him, “I said one *daf*—not one hundred.” The *Chafetz Chaim* ignored the man and continued his quiet review of the situation, once again saying, “This man covered one hundred *dafim* and wants

to know if he should continue.” The man was about to protest when the *Chafetz Chaim* looked him in the eye and said, “My son, I heard exactly everything that you said. My intention in saying one hundred *dafim* is by design, coinciding with the words of *Chazal* who teach, ‘One with pain is greater than a hundred without pain. Thus, since you exerted yourself, your one *daf* is valued like one hundred *dafim*.’”

Despite the critical importance of Torah-study for the *kiyum*, preservation, of *Klal Yisrael*, many of our own people still retain a dim view of one who learns full time without seeking a vocation to sustain his material needs. “Go out and get a job and do something with your life” is the popular declaration of the obtuse-minded people who, due to their lack of understanding of the significance of Torah to the Jewish people, look askance and denigrate those who make Torah-study their life’s focus. *Horav Asher Arieli, Shlita*, defines the prominence of the *yeshivah* man, who devotes his life to learning: “This *avreich, kollel* fellow, is on the highest level (of the loftiest status) of *Klal Yisrael*. (He is a member of the spiritual elite.) A *ben Torah* who clings to and toils in Torah – what can be greater/loftier than this? He establishes *Klal Yisrael!* It is through him that the guarantee of Torah is never to be forgotten. Without him, we have no *Klal Yisrael*. Every *avreich* who devotes himself to Torah – our eyes are uplifted to him. No one is higher than this.”

The *Tanna (Berachos 4:2)* quotes the prayer recited by those who leave the *bais hamedrash* after their study session. In his commentary, the *Tiferes Yisrael* focuses on the implied negativity concerning those who are counted as *lomdei Torah*. Why denigrate those who do not learn, referring to them as *yoshvei keranos*, idlers? [“That You have not established my portion with idlers; for I arise early and they arise early; I arise early for words of Torah, and they arise early for idle words... I run and they run: I run to the life of the World to Come and they run to the pit of destruction...”] He explains that this is to elevate the self-esteem of the *ben Torah*, who, upon leaving the *bais hamedrash*, might view himself -- and is likely viewed by others (friends and family) -- as indolent, concealing himself from the challenges of life. Thus, it is vital that the scholar say this to himself (for himself) to prevent himself from falling into the pits of depression. He should feel how valued and dear he is and, like an eagle, he soars above all those who idle away their time.