



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת במדבר תשס"ט • Parshas Bamidbar 5769

## IT'S A PLEASURE

Atonement and forgiveness are most often associated with Yom Kippur; Shavuos is known as the day of receiving the Torah. Nevertheless, Chazal tell us that Jews can be pardoned for all of their sins on Shavuos, if they merely accede to one demand:

Hashem tells Yisrael: "If you accept upon yourselves the yoke of Torah on this day, I will consider you as if you have never sinned in your entire lives," *Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah*, 4:8 .

Truly a capital opportunity! By merely submitting to the "ol Torah" yoke of Torah on this *yom tov*, the slate is wiped completely clean!

What exactly does accepting the *ol Torah* entail? The *P'nei Moshe* in his commentary on the *Yerushalmi* interprets this to mean that he undertakes not merely to learn the Torah on a superficial level, but to be "עמל ויגע ביה" to toil strenuously and determinedly to achieve understanding .

The definition of *ol Torah* can be further enhanced by turning to the Mishnah in *Avos* and its accompanying commentaries. The Mishnah there 3:6 states:

רבי נחוניא בן הקנה אומר, כל המקבל עליו על תורה, מעבירין ממנו על מלכות ועל דרך ארץ.

"R' Nechunyah ben Hakanah says: When someone accepts the yoke of Torah upon himself, the yoke of government interference and worldly distractions will be lifted from him."

From the commentaries there, another element of *kabbolas* acceptance of *ol Torah* emerges. The Rambam *ibid.* , for example, describes the

acceptance as an undertaking of "התמדת הקריאה" constant and diligent study .

We discussed last week the prevalent tragedy inherent in some people's relationship with Torah study. As the *Or Hachaim* stated, if people were really aware of the true value of Torah and the unparalleled sweetness of its teachings, they would go *meshuga* to attain it. Yet there are many who find this "sweetness" to be somewhat elusive, and they despair of experiencing it. What can be done?

The twin components described above may be just the antidote for success in this lofty pursuit.

## HASMADAS HAKRIAH

People – in general – love to *shmooze*.

Looking at this fact objectively, it should appear quite strange. A person receives no physical, tangible benefit from just "shooting the breeze," the way he does from eating a juicy steak or enjoying a restful nap. Yet, people can just *ploppel* away for hours, seemingly enjoying themselves. Why is that?

Actually, profound and somewhat esoteric underpinnings form the basis for this phenomenon. According to the Vilna Gaon *Even Sheleimah*, 7:6 , very powerful, spiritual forces are at work here. The *passuk* states: הנה אביעה לכם רוחי "Behold, I shall let a spirit flow through you," *Mishlei*, 1:23 . Apparently, Hashem sends a certain "motivational spirit" to accompany a person in all of his endeavors. The nature and magnitude of this inner spirit is determined by those activities to which an individual chooses to devote his time. And so a person who engages in the act of talking, for example, will be granted – for better or for worse usually the latter – a spirit that will propel

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# משנת היום

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him to pursue this activity further. He will now possess an even stronger drive to *shmooze*, and this spirit will not be contented until its pursuit is fulfilled. Even then, the respite will only be temporary, as the drive will awaken the individual to pursue this endeavor ever further.

But a person has a choice to pursue worthy activities, which will give rise to a beneficial and even holy drive and spirit. As stated, the greater the magnitude of the deed, the greater the intensity of the drive that will develop within him. There is no greater mitzvah than that of Torah study; one who pursues this activity will be granted a spirit of purity whose intensity is unmatched. And the more one performs this mitzvah, the stronger will his desire for Torah grow, and the greater will be the pleasure which he realizes from this “drive.”

By following the Rambam’s formulation for *kabbolas ol* Torah – diligently and consistently

engaging in Torah study – the automatic effects should result in an increased desire to learn more and a heightened enjoyment of the actual learning.

## AMALA V’YEGIAH – TOIL

While the notion of toil and hard work may not initially sound too appealing, those willing to put in the effort will see that it yields tremendous rewards. By adopting the aspect of *kabbolas ol* Torah as proscribed by the *P’nei Moshe* – to be *עמל ויגע ביה* – one’s taste for Torah stands only to be enhanced.

As R’ Chaim Volozhiner expresses it: “Achievement in Torah requires sincere, strenuous effort, aimed at uncovering the true meaning of the Torah’s words – to the best of his ability. *And the more he increases this activity, his yearning to learn even more will increase as well,*” *Ruach Chaim, 6:1* .

The increased thirst for Torah that results from its intense toil can be understood at a number of levels. R’ Aharon Kotler *Mishnas R’ Aharon, vol. 1, p. 43* likens the pleasures of Torah and worldly pleasures to fire and water, which cannot coexist. Similarly, there is no “room” in one heart to harbor a true love for both the physical and the spiritual; one will be extinguished by the other.

The Chazon Ish takes up this thread by explaining that *amalah shel* Torah has the effect of mitigating a person’s natural desire for materialism. Immersing oneself in the pristine pursuit of Torah study can actually “free” a person from his natural predilection toward physical pleasure. His soul then “yearns for sensations of holiness, the pleasure of knowledge, and the sweetness of a pure heart...” *Igros Chazon Ish, vol. 1, sec. 37* .

While much of the rhetoric above may seem lofty and somewhat difficult to imagine, let us bear in mind – as the *Yom Tov* of *kabbolas HaTorah* approaches – that it all begins with a mere “acceptance”: the *kabbolas ol* Torah.

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