



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת משפטים תשס"ט 5769 Parshas Mishpatim

THE KEY TO BECOMING A TALMID CHOCHOM

THE GRAND PRIZE

One of the best minds and most prestigious *talmidei chachamim* of his time was the legendary R' Eizele Charif. When it came time to choose a groom for his daughter, he had quite an impressive array of outstanding prospects. Almost any Talmud scholar worth his salt would jump at the opportunity to become the son-in-law of this Torah giant.

R' Eizele devised a plan to help him select the most worthy candidate. He would pose a most intricate Talmudic question, one which only a scholar of the highest caliber would be capable of resolving. The prodigious *yeshivah* student who supplied the answer would become the new *chosson*.

R' Eizele traveled to the famed *yeshivah* of Volozhin and presented his challenge to its august student body. The *talmidim* immediately set about the formidable task of resolving the difficulty, each one hoping to emerge the "victor."

After poring over the problem for hours, however, the *talmidim* remained stumped. Resigned to the fact that he would have to return to his daughter empty-handed, R' Eizele prepared to leave.

Just as his wagon was about to depart, one of the *yeshivah bochorim* suddenly came running up from behind. "Wait! Wait!" he cried.

Hope rising in his heart that a suitable *chosson* might yet be found, R' Eizele turned to face the anxious student. "Yes, yes, what is it?" he asked. "Have you perhaps found the answer to my *kasha*?"

"No, I'm afraid not," the young man answered.

"Then why have you hailed me down?" asked R' Eizele.

"I realize that I have not succeeded in your challenge," the *bochur* answered, "but please, before you go... could you tell me the answer? I just really want to know what the true answer to the *kasha* is."

R' Eizele was moved. Peering at the boy, he saw in him an earnest thirst for Torah knowledge. Making up his mind then and there, R' Eizele declared: "You will be the *chosson*."

Of course, R' Eizele's impromptu choice was no mere rash decision. Apparently, the great love for Torah which this *bochur* possessed was proof for Rav Eizele that he was looking at a true *talmid chochom*.

RECIPROCITY

Such a notion is described by Chazal in a well-known Mishnah in Avos (4:1):

בן זומא אומר, איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם.
"Ben Zoma states: Who is wise? One who learns from every man."

Why is the willingness to learn from every person an automatic guarantee for gaining real wisdom? Rabbeinu Yonah (*ibid.*) explains that this willingness is indicative of the very trait discussed above: a true love for Torah knowledge. It is a thirst for Torah that propels one to seek it from wherever it may be found and from whoever may possess it. This love of Torah wisdom ensures that a person will find it.

This formula still needs some clarification, however. Someone who loves math doesn't automatically become a mathematician. By the same token, even someone who despises the subject can still ace the exams if he works hard enough. What is it about Torah that possessing a love for it is a precondition – and a guarantee – that one will master it?

Dedicated in honor of
Mr. & Mrs. Marc and Debbi Frankel, Bala Cynwyd, PA
by the staff of Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of אסתר דבורה בת חיים ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her neshamah.

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CHAYIM

משנת היום

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WHO'S THE BOSS?

This week's *parshah* continues with the depiction of the experience at Har Sinai and the Jews' enthusiastic acceptance of the Torah. As the great Mussar master R' Yeruchem Levovitz explains (*Da'as Chochmah U'mussar*, vol. 2, sec. 70), this episode contains a fundamental *yesod* (principle), which can help us understand the relationship between love of Torah and mastery of its teachings.

The *Shacharis* prayer for *Shavuos* (*Yotzros for 2nd day*) actually contains a "history lesson." A liturgical composition portrays the little-known "history" of the giving of the Torah. Apparently, the Torah had originally "set its eyes" on Adam HaRishon, hoping to be given to him. Adam disqualified himself by partaking of the forbidden fruit. The next potential "candidate" was Noach; however, the Torah became disinterested following the episode of the vineyard (*Bereishis*, end of ch. 9). Avraham, Yitzchok, and Ya'akov are also listed as having been considered, but for various reasons did not merit being given this gift. Finally, Moshe Rabbeinu emerged – after a considerable struggle with the celestial beings – as the one through whom the Torah was granted to Klal Yisrael.

A watershed revelation is contained within this "historical narrative." Through this sacred hymn, Chazal provide us with a window into the true nature of Torah. As R' Yeruchem explains, the Torah's essence goes well beyond mere factual information and certain academic properties. Had it been just another subject or discipline, then anyone with the skills, intellectual capacity, and determination could master this "field." Torah, however, is no mere subject; rather, it is an actual *entity* in and of itself, fashioned by the Creator of the Universe and imbued with an infinite measure of Divine sanctity.

As such, the Torah has a "mind of its own," so to speak. Being its own "boss," the Torah itself determines who can attain its wisdom. Mastery of

the Torah is not up to the individual; one can excel in its study only if the Torah allows. Hence, Adam, Noach, etc., were unable to acquire the Torah. It was only Moshe Rabbeinu to whom the Torah acquiesced to be transmitted.

Understanding this fundamental concept is crucial for excelling in learning. Since the Torah itself ultimately decides who will "acquire" it, the aspiring *talmid chochom* must "convince" the Torah itself to allow him to grasp its teachings and unlock its mysteries. And it chooses to give itself over only to those who persevere in its toil and demonstrate their love for it. As the verse in Mishlei (8:17) states: "I (the Torah) love those who love me; and those who seek me out, shall find me."

Next week, we will see, G-d Willing, a most incredible manifestation of this idea in Klal Yisrael's venerated declaration uttered at Har Sinai: "We will do and we will hear."



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