

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Shimon *ben* Menashe *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

No Retirement

PARSHAS RE’EH 5775

A certain individual who served as an agent (in a wood-selling business) for the venerated Maharsham passed away. While he had faithfully discharged his employment duties, he was much more delinquent in his approach to Torah and *mitzvos*. He appeared numerous times in a dream to the Maharsham; the latter would consistently engage in mitzvah acts (e.g., giving *tzedakah*, learning *mishnayos*) on behalf of his soul. These had their salutary effect; he was offered certain reprieves from retribution and was eventually granted access to eternal reward. At that point, the late agent appeared to the Maharsham to express his gratitude and informed him that he would no longer be “visiting.” On this final visit, the Maharsham asked if he could relate the details of his Heavenly station. The man replied that while these matters are generally not revealed to the living, he could share certain aspects for the sake of such a great sage. And this is what he said (as recorded by the Maharsham’s son):

“... In the Upper World, there are *yeshivos*, rooms, and (study) groups – just as in This World. Each group is stationed in its designated room. The exalted holy ones... study Kabbalah; the great *halachic* experts... learn (the Torah of the) *poskim* (*halachic* decisors); and so there is for Gemara, Mishnah and Tanach... Each group learns in its designated room and derives pleasure from the radiance of the Shechinah (Divine Presence). It is impossible to describe the extent of the delight these study groups enjoy.

“One who neglected to learn any Torah in This World... but nevertheless was (eventually) granted access to eternal reward stands outside and hears the sound of the learners emanating through the windows. The place where one stands depends on the level of merit he accrued through whatever he prepared in This World. If one were to attempt to describe, in writing, the colossal delight enjoyed... by merely listening to those learning and gazing upon their torch-like countenance, with the Shechinah literally resting among them – no parchment could possibly offer sufficient space...

“I myself did not merit... to view this, for not everyone merits to behold how the holy ones and the Torah scholars – for whom Torah study was their occupation in This World – are taught Torah, some by Hashem Himself, some by Eliyahu Hanavi, each one according to what he prepared while still in This World. Nevertheless, I also enjoy intense spiritual delight, to which all silver, gold and worldly pleasures cannot measure up... even to just one moment of simply hearing the learning in progress, without being able to see...

“More than this, I have neither the time nor authorization to reveal to you” (*Sefer L’iluy Neshamah*, pp. 125-127).

This account underscores a wondrous contingency that exists regarding the mitzvah of Talmud Torah (Torah study). That is, this mitzvah is distinct from all others in that the endeavor continues even after one departs from This World. (It should be noted, as well, that the above represents only the proverbial tip of the iceberg; particularly in the works of Chazal [e.g., Maseches Gan Eden], the situation of Torah study in Gan Eden is described in considerable length. In this particular forum, however, “the parchment does not provide sufficient space...”).

This notion can shed much light on another aspect of the uniqueness of this mitzvah, one highlighted in this week's *parshah*.

Timely Payment

A contradiction seems to emerge from the beginning of this week's *parshah*, which states: רָאֵה אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה, אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹת ד' – “See that I have placed before you this day a blessing and a curse; the blessing (comes if) you listen to the *mitzvos* of Hashem” (*Devarim 11:26,27*). The implication is that the blessing and reward will arrive “*hayom* – today,” even in This World. How does this square with Chazal's statement (*Kiddushin 39b*) that שְׂכָר מִצְוָה בְּהַאי עֲלָמָא לִיכָא – “Reward for a mitzvah is not granted in This World (but only in the Next)”)? The issue may be resolved by the comments of the Ba'al Haturim. He understands the *passuk* as referring to the mitzvah of Torah study, as alluded to in the final letters of the words אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְעוּ, which, when rearranged, form the word תּוֹרָה. In other words, שְׂכָר מִצְוָה בְּהַאי עֲלָמָא לִיכָא is the general rule; the mitzvah of Torah study is the exception.

The outstanding question, however, is why? What is it about Torah study that enables one to receive some reward even during one's lifetime?

The Ohr Chadash (*Kiddushin 39b*) presents a resolution, based on the laws governing wages. The Torah mandates that a hired worker must be paid “on time,” the parameters of which are delineated in the Mishnah (*Bava Metzia 9:11*):

שְׂכִיר יוֹם גּוֹבֵה כָּל הַלַּיְלָה, שְׂכִיר לַיְלָה גּוֹבֵה כָּל הַיּוֹם.

“A day laborer may be paid anytime during the night; a night laborer, by day.”

The Gemara (*ibid. 110b*) wonders why we don't say the reverse; perhaps a day laborer must be paid while it is yet day, and the night laborer before the night is over? The Gemara answers that a foundational principle is at work here: שְׂכִירוֹת אֵינָה מְשֻׁלְּמֹת אֶלָּא בְּסוּף – The obligation on the employer to pay the wages begins only upon the *completion* of the work period. Regarding a day laborer, then, the employer need not even contemplate paying wages until the night begins – and then he has the remainder of the night to pay. The opposite holds true with a night worker.

The same principle can be applied to the reward (*s'char*) for *mitzvos*. Why is it that *s'char* is not granted in This World? The reason, explains the Ohr Chadash, is the same. The obligation to pay wages only begins at the end of the work period. As it relates to *mitzvos*, the “work period” is not over so long as a person is still alive; it is only when he departs from This World that the time to collect his “wages” arrives.

And this is why Talmud Torah is an exception. Because, as we have seen above, *the “work-period” for Torah study never ends*. The entirety of the “payment” for this mitzvah cannot be delayed until one departs from This World because even then the task is not finished. Therefore, this dispensation was allowed with regard to the mitzvah of Torah study. For this mitzvah, the blessing and *s'char* may be bestowed even “*hayom*” – in This World.