

Shavuos

Recognizing the Imperative to be an Ameil BaTorah



Rashi at the beginning of *Parashas Bechukosai* speaks about the *chashivus* of *ameilus baTorah*, “toiling in Torah.” What does *ameilus baTorah* mean?

For men, it means working hard to overcome the *yetzer hara* not to learn, pushing oneself to learn even when you don’t want to learn, when you “don’t have the head for it.” It means going to a *shiur* or to your *chavrusa* and getting there on time, even though you’re tired. It means staying up during a *shiur*. It also demands that we learn with excitement and *simchah*, because we know that it will bring us incredible reward and ultimate satisfaction.

For the women, it means working a little harder to free up their husbands to get to that *shiur* or *sefer* a bit earlier, after he has relaxed a bit at the end of his long day at the office. (If the husband is wasting his time, there is no great mitzvah to work hard to allow him to free more time.) It is crucial that the *nashim tzidkanios* remember that the learning of their husbands and sons is a key to their *Olam Haba*.

There are a number of very important *m’koros/sources* on this subject, and they

point out a surprising advantage enjoyed by the *ameil baTorah*. No one can avoid some measure of *yissurim* (sufferings), but one can choose how he will experience them. People have “X” amount of *yissurim* coming to them (*lo aleinu*), “X” amount of inconveniences, “X” amount of what we call pains, trials and tribulations of daily life – all of which have been decreed from *Rosh Hashanah*. However, if you put your effort into the *ameilus* of Torah, you will experience those inconveniences and (hopefully) minor pains for the sake of Torah and not for something empty.

Pain Yourself Over Torah... Not Other Things

The first source is a *Yalkut* in *Tehillim*. “Rav Shimon bar Yochai says that *Hashem* gave three good gifts (*matanos tovos*) to *Klal Yisrael*, and all of them were only given through *yissurim*.” The three *matanos tovos* are Torah, *Eretz Yisrael* and *Olam Haba*.

The *Yalkut* then provides some examples: not being able to sleep due to worry, a headache or an eye-ache. Everybody experiences minor aches, pains, inconveniences,

disruptions... whatever you want to call the distractions we encounter in everyday life. Nevertheless, the *Yalkut* says, a person can experience them because of mundane things or more exalted things. He can experience sleeplessness, headaches and eye aches due to material worries and pressure, or from sweating over a *sugyah*. (This does not mean that those who toil in Torah will be spared from all of the above. However, *Chazal* are teaching us that much of what was decreed can be discharged through *ameilus baTorah* and sacrifice for its study.)

The end of the *pasuk* quoted in the *Yalkut* says that if your *yissurim* come through *talmud Torah*, *ashrecha*, “happy are you!” You were *yotzei* the *yissurim* that were decreed through *talmud Torah*!

Toil – For What?

The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* speaks about this concept as well. The *pasuk* states that everybody is born *l’ameilus*, “To toil.” *Adam l’ameil yulad*. That means that we’re here not to have a good time, not to relax—but for *ameilus*.

The Gemara says that although we are all

born for *ameilus*, it is not decreed what type of *ameilus*. Is it an *ameilus* of the “mouth” or “physical labor?”

What is *ameilus* of the mouth? There are people that spend the days of their lives talking, making an *avodah* out of it. They are professional *shmoozers*. The Gemara says that once a person is busy talking and the mouth is moving, he might as well use that *ameilus* to talk in learning.

The body, too, is fated to *ameilus*. All bodies are made to work hard. If so, the Gemara says, *ashrei ish*, “happy is the person” who is *zocheh* to work hard in learning.

Note that this is *not* only for someone learning in *kollel*. It is also for someone who works hard all day. He comes back home at night and rightfully feels that he deserves a break. After dinner and a bit of relaxation, there is family time. Now... the fateful decision to decide what

to do with the rest of the evening.... *Chazal* say in a number of places that nights are created for learning. And if he thinks that by relaxing he's going to end up relaxing more, *Chazal* tell him that he is fooling himself.

Can you Escape the IRS?

A third *makor* is found in *Pirkei Avos*: "Rav Nechunya ben Hakaneh says that whoever accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah will have removed from him the yoke of government and the yoke of *derech erez* (*parnassah* issues)."

Now, a person might think that the simple meaning is that if a person has a *zechus* in learning, he will not have problems with the IRS. The explanation, however, goes much deeper. There is a certain amount of aggravation coming to you from the yokes of government and *derech erez*, and if you take upon yourself the yoke of Torah you will not have this aggravation. You can't avoid aggravation, but the question is does it come from the IRS, work—or your *ameilus* in Torah?

The Gemara tells the story of Rabbi Akiva. We all know Rabbi Akiva was *moser nefesh* for Torah. The Romans issued many decrees against the Jews, including prohibiting teaching Torah publicly. Pappas ben Yehudah was a *chaver* of Rabbi Akiva and one day he saw Rabbi Akiva delivering a public *shiur*, apparently without any fear of the Romans.

"Aren't you afraid?" he asked.

That's when Rabbi Akiva told him the famous *marshal* about the fox that saw fish swimming to avoid the fisherman's net. The fox said to one of them, "What's the rush?

Come out of the water next to me on dry land where it is safe."

"You're supposed to be smart?" the fish responded.

"If we're afraid in the water, how much more so if we leave the water!"

Here, too, Rabbi Akiva told his friend Pappas ben Yehudah, "Torah is our life. If we are in danger with it, how much more so without it!"

The Romans eventually caught Rabbi Akiva and put him in jail. One day, the door opened and they threw another person in—and lo and behold, it was his *chaver*, Pappas ben Yehudah!

He was the last person one would think would be there. He was on good terms with the Romans. Yet, here he was sitting in jail with Rabbi Akiva.

"What are you doing here?" Rabbi Akiva asked him.

"*Ashrecha*, happy are you, Rabbi Akiva. At least you were *moser nefesh* for learning. I'm here for *d'varim b'teilim*, empty things."

It was decreed on the previous Rosh Hashanah that both Rabbi Akiva and Pappas ben Yehudah would sit in jail. Yet, Rabbi Akiva fulfilled this decree through his self-sacrifice in learning and *harbatzas haTorah*.

We have to realize how lucky we are. From a safety perspective, most Yidden do not have to display too much *mesirus nefesh* to come to a *shiur*. We don't have to sneak past any KGB agents. The police are not stopping us, asking for ID. We don't even have to walk five miles. All we have to do is get into our air-conditioned car and come into the air-conditioned *Beis Medrash*....

True *mesirus nefesh* is learning even though your *yetzer hara* has a hundred other things to do.

Learning Lishmah

One should try to learn Torah *lishmah* – simply because it is the greatest mitzvah we can perform (*Talmud Torah k'neged kulam*). However, to motivate ourselves we should bear in mind that the effort put in will be richly rewarded in *Olam Haba*, and save us much trouble – as well as bring us much *simchas hachaim* – in *Olam Haze*.

Genuine *kabbalas haTorah* is recognizing the beauty and reward of Torah, while accepting its yoke and challenges as well. ■

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