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Knowing Why We Learn Torah

From all of the *mitzvos*, learning Torah is the most important *mitzvah*. This shows us that every single Jew has a connection to the Torah.

We need to understand what this connection is, and how we actually connect to the Torah. What is the reason that we must learn Torah? Is there only one reason, or are there a few reasons? Is it automatic, or do we have to actually reveal it?

Maybe you will say that it doesn't make a difference, because all that matters is that we must do what Hashem commands us to do. But we find that when it comes to the mitzvah of Sukkah, there the Torah reveals the reason for the mitzvah - "*So that the generations will know that in Sukkos, I dwelled amongst them*", so there must be a reason for the mitzvah of learning Torah as well. What is that reason? Do we have to know the reason, or should we just learn because Hashem said so?

Another thing one must know is: "Why should I learn? Is the reason that I learn the same reason that everyone else learns?" The reason is not the same for every person. If one does not know the reason why he learns, then it is a sign that he definitely needs to improve in his learning.

If the whole reason that one learns is because he knows that learning Torah has a great reward in Gan Eden, then he is basically saying that you don't really have to learn Torah for the sake of the Torah, but simply because "Hashem said that you have to do it". If a person learns Torah for this reason, then when he gets to Gan Eden, he will have nothing to do!

In Gan Eden, we know that the souls learn Torah there. Why do they learn Torah in Gan Eden? Whatever that reason is, the reason why they learn should be the very same reason that we learn!

"*Sof Maaseh, B'machshavah techilah*" - "The end of actions is first with thought." What do we first have to think before we learn Torah? If the reason for learning Torah isn't clear to oneself on a personal level, then he hasn't yet begun to learn in the right way. Not only that, but the rest of what he does as well also needs to be fixed. He will then discover that all of his Torah learning was being done until now in a lethargic manner.

The *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* (in the laws of Talmud Torah) writes that in learning Torah, we have two *mitzvos*. One is the *mitzvah* to **know** the Torah, and the second *mitzvah* is to put **effort** into the Torah. But these two *mitzvos* are still just the external aspect of our learning. What is the actual essence of learning?

Why do we have to know the Torah? Is it so that we shouldn't become an *am haaretz* (ignoramus)?! Is that the only reason why need to learn Torah...?

We are all aware that we must know the entire Torah, but why?

Just like when it comes to each Yom Tov, we have to know its laws before we enter the Yom Tov. So too, when it comes to the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, we must know what it entails. On Sukkos, we have to know the laws of Sukkos before we enter the Yom Tov. We must know its laws of the Sukkah and the Four Species. The Yom Tov of Shavuot has its "laws" as well – the mitzvah to learn Torah! What are the "laws" of this mitzvah? What is the inner reason for why we learn?

If a person isn't clear exactly why he learns Torah, his "life" is not a "life"!

Connecting To The Torah

How, indeed, does a person connect himself to the Torah?

There are many people who sit and **learn** the Torah, but there aren't that many who are actually **connected**, inwardly, to the Torah.

Why? It is because the depth of their minds and hearts is not connected to the Torah. Such people are just "sitting and learning", in the superficial sense. A person has to know *what the reason is* that he learns the Torah – not the reason that "has to be", but the personal reason of why **he himself** learns the Torah.

Longing and Desiring For The Torah

If you learn Torah because you have a **longing** and a **desire** (*hishtokekut*) to know of it, then you are at least **starting** to connect to the Torah.

This **longing** that you need to have for the Torah is not simply from a desire of gathering more knowledge, but from the holy power of thought in the Jewish soul, "*machshavah*". Our connection to the Torah must be an inner connection, and it has many facets to it. We must reveal this inner power, and without it, we are not connected to the Torah.

Soul Connection To Torah

How does a person use his thought to connect to the Torah? The Sages say that the soul (the "*neshamah*") resides in the brain. The soul is what connects a person to the Torah. It is not simply the *thoughts* of the brain that connect one to the Torah; that is only a superficial attitude. The whole connection that one has with the Torah by thinking in it is only through the *soul* which resides in the brain.

We understand that a body cannot live without a soul. The root of all our *avodah* is with our soul, so we always have to look at everything through our soul's viewpoint, not through the body's viewpoint.

The superficial attitude of learning Torah is that we have "think" in our learning. But this does not always reveal the light of the soul as one learns Torah. Such an attitude is to be connected to the Torah only through one's body. A person might very well be learning Torah with the same attitude that he has toward eating and drinking...he learns it as more of an intellectual kind of thing. He's connected to the Torah only on a purely physical level.

Torah is a spiritual light, and one can only connect to the Torah through his soul. The mitzvah to learn

Torah is an entirely internal kind of mitzvah. All other mitzvos, such as shaking a *Lulav* and wearing *Tefillin*, involve physical actions. But the mitzvah to learn Torah is entirely internal.

If a person learns Torah through his body – meaning, if he was connected to Torah only at a purely physical/intellectual level – then when he dies, he cannot learn Torah in Gan Eden, because his body is gone. His soul never got used to learning Torah! It was only his body that was used to learning the Torah...and now his body isn't here...

The words here are very sharp. These words are not merely words of “*chizuk*” (inspiration). It is rather how we can have an entirely different view on things.

A “Torah of Life”

Many people make effort to “know” the Torah ever since they were young children, but they were never connected to the Torah. It is not a surprise, then, that these people grow up and eventually go off the *derech* (irreligious). They were never connected to the Torah in the first place, even though they learned it and knew it.

Yes, they will certainly get reward for their learning. Hashem doesn't hold back reward from anyone. A person will always be rewarded in Heaven for having learned Torah. But this is not enough for a person to become affected during his current lifetime through his Torah learning. When Torah is learned without a realization that it is a *Toras Chaim*, a “Torah of life” – when a person does not understand that the Torah is our very source of vitality – then such Torah learning was not a “Torah of life” to the person, and in turn, it does not provide him with life. That is why many people learned Torah when they were younger but it didn't have an effect on them to want to lead a better life. It is because they didn't realize that Torah is a “Torah of life” – a source that sustains us and keeps us spiritually alive.

The reason why you should be learning Torah is because you should have a desire for *life* itself, and to realize that the Torah is *life*! The Torah is called “*Toras Chaim*” – a Torah of life; it gives us life! It should be life to us!

The problem with our generation is that we do not have this desire enough for ‘life’; many of us are like dying people who don't have enough life.

But at least we have hope, because, after all, we all have within us a desire to live. We all want to live, and that, itself, can help us push ourselves to get to the real kind of life that we need.

We need to realize that only the Torah is *life*, and for that reason, we should have a desire and longing to know of the Torah.