



You Should Labor in the Study of Torah

The Purpose of Exerting Oneself in Torah-Study Is to Attain a Higher Level Neshamah to Attain Insights that Are beyond the Level of One's Root Neshamah

On the auspiciously approaching Shabbas Kodesh, we will read from the Torah the two parshiyos of Behar and Bechukosai. Clearly, the entire seven weeks of Sefiras HaOmer are a period of preparation for receiving the Torah on Chag HaShavuos. Nevertheless, the reading of parshas Bechukosai constitutes a special part of this annual preparation. In fact, Chazal teach us that Ezra HaSofer arranged for Jews to always read the “tochachah”—rebuke and curses—in parshas Bechukosai prior to Chag HaShavuos. Here is the passage from the Gemara (Megillah 31b):

”תניא רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר, עזרא תיקן להן לישראל שיהו קורין קללות שבתורת כהנים קודם עצרת ושבמשנה תורה קודם ראש השנה. מאי טעמא, אמר אביי ואיתימא ריש לקיש, כדי שתכלה השנה וקללותיה.”

It was taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: Ezra decreed that Yisrael should read the curses found in sefer Vayikra (Bechukosai) prior to Shavuos and those in sefer Devarim (Ki Savo) prior to Rosh HaShanah. For what reason? Abayei said, while some say that Reish Lakish said it: So that the year may end along with its curses.

This prompts the Gemara to ask: **בשלמא שבמשנה תורה איכא כדי** “The concept of “let the year end along with its curses” is appropriate for the “tochachah” in sefer Devarim, because it is read prior to Rosh HaShanah, which is the beginning of a new year. But does this pronouncement apply to the “tochachah” in sefer Vayikra? Is Shavuos a type of Rosh HaShanah? The Gemara answers: **איין** “yes, indeed, Atzeres (Shavuos) is also a Rosh HaShanah . . . with respect to the fruits of the tree.

This teaches us an important principle. Reading these two “tochachos” portends putting an end to the previous year’s curses and negative events. This mechanism can be understood based on what the Tiferes Shlomo writes (Ki Savo): **We can propose a reason for the “tochachah.” We read it at this juncture, so that “the year will end along with its curses.” This is consistent with the concept of (Hoshea 14, 3): ונשלמה** “and let our lips substitute for bulls. So if, chas v’shalom, something bad (not good) has been decreed, we will have fulfilled our obligation by reading these words (these passages). Thereby, they will all be transformed into forms of berachah.

If You Abide by the Torah I Will View It as if You Made Yourselfes

With immense pleasure, we will analyze the text at the beginning of parshas Bechukosai. It suggests a wonderful “segulah” for protection from the “klalos” and being blessed with all the Berachos (Vayikra 26, 3): **אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי** “If you will follow My decrees and observe My mitzvos and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will yield its produce and the tree of the field will bear its fruit. Rashi comments based on the Toras Kohanim: **“If you will follow My decrees”: One might think that this is a reference to the fulfillment of mitzvos. When it says, “and you will observe My mitzvos and perform them,” the fulfillment of mitzvos has already been stated in the passuk. What then is meant by the phrase “if you will follow My decrees”? That you should labor in the study of Torah.**

We will endeavor to explain where they learned this exposition from—that “אם בחוקותי תלכו” refers to studying Torah with diligence and exertion. After all, these words could just as easily have been interpreted to mean studying Torah even without labor and exertion.

To clarify the matter, we will refer to an elucidation in the Midrash (V.R. 35, 7): “אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם, אמר רבי חנינא בר פפי, אמר להם אם שמרתם את התורה הריני מעלה עליכם.” **... and observe My mitzvos and perform them.”** Rabbi Chanina bar Pappe said: It can be interpreted as if HKB”H said to them, **“If you observe the Torah, I will reckon it for you as if you had made yourselves.”** The commentaries explain that this elucidation is based on the fact that the word “אותם”—meaning “them”—is actually spelled without a “vav”; as such, it can be interpreted as “אתם”, meaning “you” (plural). Interpreted this way, the passuk states that if you labor in the study of Torah and observe the mitzvos, it will be viewed as if “ועשיתם אתם”—**you made yourselves**. Why, indeed, does laboring in the study of Torah accomplish this feat? And, furthermore, what is the great benefit of having it considered as if a person made himself?

Anyone Who Teaches His Friend’s Son Torah Is Viewed as if He Made Him

We will begin this discussion by introducing an illuminating insight from the Noam Megadim (Noach). He addresses the Mirash just presented and provides an explanation based on a teaching in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 99b):

כל המלמד את בן חברו תורה, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו עשאו, שנאמר ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן.”

Anyone who teaches his friend’s son Torah is considered as if he made him, as it states (Bereishis 12, 5): “And the souls that they made in Charan.” The Maharsha interprets this to mean: **They made them into souls of “adam” (man).** Prior to knowing the ways of the Torah, each person was no better than an animal; upon learning the ways of the Torah, he surpassed all other living creatures, and became an “adam,” which was the purpose (fulfillment) of his creation.

Thus, if one who teaches his son’s friend Torah is considered as if he made him, it stands to reason that one who teaches himself Torah and performed its mitzvos would be considered as if he gave birth to himself. Understood in this light, the elucidation

of the Midrash makes perfect sense: **“If you observe the Torah, I will reckon it for you as if you had made yourselves.”**

Toiling in the Study of Torah Earns a Person a Higher Level Neshamah

Since it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, I would like to explain in greater depth why HKB”H views somebody who studies Torah and performs mitzvos as if he made himself. We will begin by introducing an illuminating insight from the holy Admor, the Maharid of Belz, zy”a, which should encourage and inspire everyone who studies Torah diligently. He addresses what they expounded in the Sifri on the passuk (Devarim 12, 28): “שמור ושמעת את כל הדברים: האלה, אם שמרת מה ששמעת, סופך לשמור מה שלא שמעת.” **“Safeguard and listen to all these matters”—if you observed what you heard, you will ultimately observe what you did not hear.** How is it possible for a person to observe something that he has not heard?!

To explain the matter, he refers to a valuable principle taught by his father, the holy Admor, the Mahari, zy”a. In reality, a person possesses his own, unique portion of the Torah, and he is only capable of attaining wisdom and insights related to the root of his own neshamah—and not any more than that. However, when he labors and exerts effort in the study of Torah, he is awarded a higher level neshamah. This enables him to attain greater insights in his Torah-study than he was capable of previously based on the original neshamah he was born with.

Now, we are familiar with the following teaching in the Gemara (Niddah 30b): **“דרש רבי שמלאי למה הולך דומה במעי אמו, לפניך: שמקופל... ואוכל ממה שאמו אוכלת ושותה ממה שאמו שותה... ונר דלוק לו על ראשו, וצופה ומביט מסוף העולם ועד סופו, שנאמר בהלו נרו עלי ראשי... ואין לך ימים שאדם שרוי בטובה יותר מאותן הימים, שנאמר מי יתנני כירחי קדם... ומלמדין אותו כל התורה כולה... וכיון שבא לאויר העולם בא מלאך וסטר על ראשו.”** Rabbi Simlai expounded: **To what is a fetus comparable in its mother’s womb? To a folded ledger . . . it eats of what its mother eats and drinks of what its mother drinks . . . and a lamp is lit above its head, and it peers out and sees from one end of the world to the other end, as it states (Iyov 29, 3): “When his lamp shone above my head, by its light I was able to walk in the dark” . . . And there are no days during which a person experiences more bliss than during those days (in his mother’s womb), as it states (ibid. 2): “If only I could relive the months of earlier times” . . . And they teach him (the unborn child) the entire**

Torah ... but as soon as he emerges into the air of the world, a malach comes and strikes him on his mouth causing him to forget the entire Torah.

We can now explain the Midrash as follows: **“Safeguard and listen to all these matters”—if you observed what you heard**—refers to remembering the Torah you were taught while in your mother’s womb, compatible with the original neshamah you were born with—you will ultimately observe **what you did not hear**—you will merit observing and attaining insights related to portions of the Torah you did not hear in your mother’s womb, because you will be awarded a higher level neshamah. These are his sacred remarks.

A Corroborating Chiddush from the Noam Elimelech

We can find corroboration for this enlightening concept in the impeccable teachings of the Noam Elimelech (Pinchas). He reveals a fantastic phenomenon based on the Gemara’s statement (B.B. 21a): **“קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה”—jealousy among scholars increases wisdom.** Here is a translation of his sacred remarks:

When a man serves Hashem on his own, according to his own intellect, he can only ascend to the point that his intellect reaches, according to his roots and his capacity for understanding. But when a man sees something good done by his friend, and he is jealous and aspires to do the same, that jealousy enables him to do things beyond his natural abilities. As a result, he can rise to a higher level. Therefore, it is written (Mishlei 23, 17): “Let your heart not envy sinners, rather those who serve Hashem all day long.”

It appears that we can combine the sacred words of the Noam Elimelech with the incredible insight of the holy Mahari, zy”a. When a person has constructive, good jealousy associated with kedushah, it enables him to exert himself in the study of Torah and the service of Hashem beyond his natural abilities. As a result of this increased effort, he merits being awarded a higher level neshamah, which enables him to attain insights into the Torah and the service of Hashem surpassing his natural limits.

With this understanding, we can propose a nice explanation for the famous teaching (Megillah 6b): **אם יאמר לך אדם יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן, יגעתי ומצאתי אל תאמן.** If someone tells you, **“I labored in my Torah-study but did not succeed,” do not believe him. “I have not labored, yet I**

have succeeded,” do not believe him. “I have labored, and I have succeeded,” you may believe him. The commentaries are bothered by the language employed here. Finding something implies that it was not deliberate; it happened coincidentally. Yet, the language of the Gemara is: **“יגעתי ומצאתי”—I labored** (exerted deliberate effort), **and I found it.** The Sefas Emes (Toldos 5649) explains the nuance of the Gemara’s language in the name of his grandfather, the author of the Chiddushei HaRim, zy”a: **הגם כי מציאה היא שבאה בהיסח הדעת, ואיך שייך יגעתי ומצאתי, רק שבאמת אין ערך שיוכל אדם בכח יגיעתו להשיג דבר ה’, רק שבשכר היגיעה נותנין לו במתנה ובדרך מציאה.** The Gemara refers to one’s success in learning Torah as a **מציאה**—finding something inadvertently. So, how can the Gemara describe this process as **יגעתי ומצאתי**—laboring and finding? In truth, there is no way that a person can merely exert his own powers and comprehend the words of Hashem; it is only as a reward for his laborious effort that the knowledge of Torah is given to him as a present, as if he found it inadvertently.

In keeping with our current discussion, let us expand on this explanation. By exerting effort and toiling to attain the portion of the Torah that one heard from the malach while in utero, one is awarded a higher level neshamah. As a result, one is able to attain novel insights in his Torah learning akin to a **“מציאה”**, since these are insights that were not heard previously, even in utero.

A Fascinating Insight from the Shev Shematita regarding the Neshamah

We will continue along this path to explain the meaning of the Midrash—that one who toils in the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvah is considered by HKB”H as if he made himself. We will refer to what the brilliant author of the Ketzot HaChoshen wrote in his preface to the Shev Shematita (4). He justifies the surprising death sentence HKB”H decreed on Adam HaRishon and all living creatures in the aftermath of the **“cheit Eitz HaDa’as,”** as it is written (Bereishis 2, 17): **ומועץ הדעת טוב ורע: “but of the Eitz HaDa’as Tov VaRa, you must not eat thereof, for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.**

The commentaries point out that this seems to be at odds with the following teaching (Eiruvin 18b): **אדם הראשון חסיד גדול היה, כיון שראה שנקנסה מיתה על ידו, ישב בתענית מאה ושלושים שנה.** Adam HaRishon was exceedingly pious. When he saw that creation had been penalized with death on his account, he fasted for one hundred and thirty years. Since Adam

performed teshuvah for his transgression, why didn't HKB"H rescind the death penalty? Then he would have lived forever as it was originally intended prior to the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as."

Based on the writings of the Arizal, he explains that when a person sins, the neshamah—the godly portion from above that he was endowed with—abandons him and returns to G-d above. All that remains within him is his animalistic soul. Yet, when he repents by performing teshuvah, the divine neshamah returns to him. This is the lesson conveyed by the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni on the passuk (Tehillim 102, 19): **"ועם נברא יהלל: יה—the newborn people will praise G-d: This refers to the generations who resemble the dead on account of their deeds, and they come to pray before You . . . And You create them as newborn creatures.** For, in the merit of performing teshuvah, the godly neshamah returns to them, and they are like newborns created anew.

Accordingly, the Shev Shematita explains why Adam HaRishon would have lived an eternal life without dying had he not sinned. When Adam HaRishon was created, HKB"H Himself, as it were, blew a living soul through his nose—this was a portion of G-d from above. As such, Adam was created solely by the hands of HKB"H without the participation of a father and mother. As we know, what HKB"H creates Himself—without being corrupted or tainted by human beings—is eternal. Therefore, the neshamah should have remained within him forevermore.

This was not to be, however. When Adam HaRishon sinned, the divine neshamah abandoned him and returned to its Father in Heaven. So, even though that divine neshamah returned to him after he performed sincere teshuvah, it did so because of the act of repentance of a human being of flesh and blood and could no longer endure forever. The neshamah no longer possessed the strength to endure within a physical, human body forever—as it did when HKB"H initially blew it into Adam to give him life. From then on, death became a reality; eternal life was no longer possible.

Based on this, he interprets the prayer uttered by Yirmiyah HaNavi, the divine author of Lamentations (Eichah 5, 21): **"השיבנו: ה' אליך ונשובה חרש ימינו כקדם—bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return, renew our days as of old.** First, he beseeches Hashem: **"Bring us back to You"**—initiate the return of the godly neshamah to us Yourself from above; then, **"we shall return"**—

by taking the necessary actions down below; as a result, **"renew our days of old"**—things will once again be as they were prior to the cheit of Adam HaRishon, i.e., it will be possible to live forever. This is the gist of his fascinating insight.

Laboring in the Study of Torah Earns Us an Elevated Neshamah

With immense joy, we can now shed some more light on the elucidation in the Midrash: **"אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם, אם שמרתם את התורה הריני מעלה עליכם כאילו עשיתם עצמכם"**. Indeed, when a child is born, HKB"H joins the parents by endowing each child with a neshamah commensurate with its being. (As explained, the reason this neshamah does not remain in the person forever is a consequence of the cheit of Adam HaRishon. After all, all the neshamos were present within Adam when the original neshamah HKB"H blew into him abandoned him.)

Nevertheless, when a person exerts himself by studying Torah and performing mitzvos with vigor, he is awarded an elevated neshamah. Therefore, it is viewed as if he created himself anew, in keeping with the words **"ועם נברא יהלל: יה—the newborn people will praise G-d.** This new development results from man's own efforts and actions. With this understanding, the precise language of the Midrash can be interpreted as follows: **If you observe the Torah "הריני מעלה עליכם—I will elevate your neshamah to a higher level.** And since you accomplished this through your own diligent Torah-study, **"it is as if you made yourself."**

At this point, we can better appreciate Rashi's comment in the name of the Toras Kohanim: **What then is meant by the phrase "אם בחוקותי תלכו"? That you should labor in the study of Torah.** We asked where they learned this from? We can now suggest that they derived this conclusion from the continuation of the passuk: **"אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם"**. For, the Midrash expounded: **If you observe the Torah, I will consider it as if you made yourselves.** Recall that this exposition is based on the words **"ועשיתם אותם"**—literally, **"you made them."** This was accomplished by studying Torah with vigor to earn an elevated neshamah; thus, it is as if you made yourselves. The only possible way to accomplish this is through the labor and diligence of Torah-study—sacrificing oneself for its sake. Conversely, if a person only learns when it is convenient for him, without labor and diligence, obviously he will not deserve and will not be awarded an elevated neshamah.

HKB"H Can Attest that even though Yisrael Are His Children He Views It as if They Made Themselves by Laboring in the Study of Torah

We will now enjoy and delight in the sacred teachings of the Bnei Yissaschar (Shabbasos 9, 3). He focuses on a peculiar statement in the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 2, 2): **What constitutes teshuvah? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart, never to commit them again . . .** He must repent to the degree that **He Who knows things that are concealed can testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin again.** What novel point is the Rambam making by specifying that teshuvah requires this testimony from HKB"H?

To explain the matter, the Bnei Yissaschar refers to what Chazal teach us in the Gemara regarding an argument that will take place le'asid la'vo between HKB"H and the nations of the world (A.Z. 3a): **כך אומרים העובדי כוכבים לפני הקב"ה, רבש"ע ישראל, שכיבלוהו היכן קיימנו, אמר להם הקב"ה אני מעיד בהם שקיימו את התורה כולה, אומרים לפניו רבונו של עולם כלום יש אב שמעיד על בנו, דכתיב בני בכורי.** This is what the gentiles say to HKB"H: **Master of the Universe, concerning Yisrael who accepted it (the Torah), where is the evidence that they fulfilled its mitzvos? HKB"H responds to them: I testify regarding them that they fulfilled the Torah in its entirety.** Then, **they say to Him: Master of the Universe, is there a father who can testify (i.e., is a father qualified to testify) about his son? For it is written (Shemos 4, 22): "Yisrael is My son, My firstborn."** To counter this disqualification, **HKB"H said to them: Heaven and earth will testify** on their behalf.

The commentaries question why HKB"H initially offered to testify on behalf of Yisrael, since He surely knows that a father cannot legally testify on behalf of his child. Based on the Midrash discussed above, the great Rabbi Shlomo Algazi, ztz"l, answers that by learning Torah diligently and abiding by its precepts, Yisrael made themselves. Since their status has been modified from that of a child to being self-made, the argument that a father cannot testify on behalf of a child is no longer valid. Hence, HKB"H can attest to the fact that Yisrael kept the Torah.

Even so, the nations of the world might still persist and argue that Yisrael did not keep the precepts of the Torah and are, therefore, not viewed as being self-made. In that case, HKB"H can

no longer testify on their behalf, since a father is not trusted to bear witness on behalf of his child. Therefore, HKB"H will bring the heavens and the earth to testify that Yisrael kept the Torah. Thus, it will be considered as if they made themselves, and it will be revealed retroactively that HKB"H's testimony on behalf of Yisrael was valid; and the word of Hashem will endure forever.

Based on this, the Bnei Yissaschar explains the words of the Rambam: **What constitutes teshuvah? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart, never to commit them again . . .** He must repent to the degree that **He Who knows things that are concealed (HKB"H) can testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin again.** HKB"H can testify that this Jew's teshuvah is sincere and complete; as such, he is viewed as a newborn person who made himself. Thus, HKB"H is qualified to testify that he will not sin again, and the argument of the nations of the world—a **father cannot testify on behalf of his son**—will be null and void.

The Appellation "Adam" Implies Striving to Emulate Our Heavenly Father

Following this line of reasoning, the Bnei Yissaschar goes on to explain magnificently the narrative related to the creation of man (Bereishis 5, 1): **זה ספר תולדות אדם ביום ברא אלקים אדם בדמות. זכר ונקבה בראם ויברך אותם ויקרא את שמם אדם ביום הבראם.** **This is the book of the history of man. On the day G-d created man, He made him in the likeness of G-d. Male and female He created them. He blessed them and named them Adam on the day that they were created.** Regarding the appellation **"Adam,"** our commentaries suggest that this is related to the phrase (Yeshayah 14, 14): **"אדמה לעליון"**—which implies that man must strive to emulate HKB"H—the Most High.

In keeping with our current discussion, this implies that a Jew should strive to create himself anew through diligent Torah-study and observance of mitzvos—i.e., emulating HKB"H, Who created him at the time of his birth. For this reason, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai declared (Yevamos 61a): **אתם קרויין אדם ואין הגוים קרויין אדם—you are called Adam, but the goyim are not called Adam.** In other words, this unique ability to recreate oneself via Torah-observance only applies to Yisrael, who accepted the Torah. The nations of the world who refused the Torah cannot recreate themselves. Hence, the name **Adam** does not apply to them.

We can now interpret the passuk as follows: "זה ספר"—by means of this sefer, i.e., the Torah—"תולדות אדם"—a Jew, an Adam, can recreate himself. How is this possible? "ביום ברא"—because G-d created man in His image, endowing him with the capacity to create himself anew by means of diligent Torah-study. To attest to this: "ויקרא את שמו"—He called them **Adam**, related to the phrase "אדמה לעליון"—as an indication that a Jew possesses the capacity to recreate himself just like HKB"H created man.

In summary, to prepare ourselves for "Kabbalas haTorah" on Chag HaShavuot, it is incumbent on us to fulfill the words of the passuk "ואת מצוותי תלכו"—to study Torah diligently—"ואת מצוותי תשמרו"—and observe the mitzvos punctiliously, so that on Chag HaShavuot, HKB"H will endow us with a higher level neshamah, which will enable us to soar to greater heights in our Torah studies. Thus, the following will become a reality: "ועשיתם אתם"—HKB"H will consider it as if we made ourselves, and He will testify as to our worthiness—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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