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Menuchas HaNefesh In Learning Torah (And At Work)

Standing At Har Sinai Today

One of the six constant *mitzvos* we have every day is to remember when we stood at Har Sinai. This *mitzvah* is that we should feel as if we are actually standing there – that we have never left it.

How can we always feel as if we are standing at Har Sinai?

It is written, “By the word of Hashem they journeyed, and by the word of Hashem they rested.” When a person acts his life based upon Hashem’s words, it is considered as if he is still there at Har Sinai, as if he never left it.

The Torah was given at Har Sinai. Every year we can return there anew and receive the Torah again. Our Sages teach that everything that happens in a place, also happens in time itself, as well as in our very soul. Just as the Torah was given at Har Sinai, so is the Torah in our soul, and so is there a giving of the Torah every time of the year, on Shavuos.

The giving of the Torah still goes on in our souls. The time of the giving of the Torah takes place every year on Shavuos. The place where this happens is at Har Sinai, which we continue to remember every day.

The fact that we remember standing at Har Sinai every day is what enables us to have *menuchah*. We need *menuchah* in order to learn Torah.

Living By The Word Of Hashem

Chazal say that learning Torah needs a clear mind. This is only when a person lives with, “*By the word of Hashem they journeyed, and by the word of Hashem they rested.*” If a person wants to have the clear mind to learn Torah, he needs to always live with Hashem in every part of his life.

The Baal Shem Tov said that just like the Jewish people went through forty-two encampments, so does every person go through forty-two encampments in his own life. The only difference between our generation and the previous generations is that the previous generations lived “*By the word of Hashem*”, while in today’s times we have not revealed this ability.

Today, we are being tested with, “*Follow Me into the desert, in a land that is unsown.*” We are being tested to see if we will live by, and follow, Hashem’s words.

Exert The Body, Not The Soul

We are not the generation of the desert. We don’t have the Manna, the Well of Miriam, or the Clouds of Glory. We are instead bombarded with the challenges of life and making a living.

How are we supposed to have *menuchas hanefesh*? Our very life takes us away from *menuchas hanefesh*! What are we supposed to do about this?

We can dig deep inside ourselves to find *menuchas hanefesh* and realize that our difficulties in life don’t have to ruin our peace of mind. Life is physically challenging, but this doesn’t have to affect our souls.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that although man was cursed with having to work by the sweat of his brow, a person’s livelihood still doesn’t depend on his efforts. Most people think that their efforts are what bring their livelihood, because Hashem decreed that people have to work to make a living. Therefore, one may think, more work brings more livelihood from Hashem. This is not true. The fact that man was cursed with having to work is a penalty placed on mankind, and it has nothing to do with bringing a person his livelihood. A person’s livelihood is determined by Hashem, regardless of a person’s efforts.

The depth of the *Mesillas Yescharim's* words is that when a person makes effort, it is only his body undergoing exertion, not his soul. A person's soul is calm and knows that nothing depends on the body's efforts. One who doesn't have this belief and exerts his soul as well, does not have *menuchas hanefesh*, and he will not understand the Torah.

We can compare this to someone dancing at a wedding. When a person dances very enthusiastically, he is exerting his body, not his soul. The fact that a person doesn't stress his soul when he dances is actually what enables him to have strength to dance.

So too, the same attitude should be applied to how a person views his efforts to earn a livelihood. If a person believes that whatever he is supposed to earn is from Hashem and not from his efforts, he is only exerting his body, not his soul, and he will be able to have *menuchas hanefesh*.

After the sin of Adam, no one can have *menuchah* in his body. Anyone who thinks that he can live a steady life of comfort is living in a dream-like state. The *Mesillas Yescharim* writes, "this physical world was not given for relaxation, but to toil and work hard."

However, just because a person has to strain his body in this world does not mean that he must strain his soul. When a person is happy to do something, he can strain his body to get it, but his soul should stay relaxed. When a person does something he doesn't like to do, he is straining both his body and soul.

Menuchas Hanefesh At Work

If a person works to make a living because he understands that going to work is a penalty placed on mankind because of Adam's sin, he has *menuchas hanefesh*, and is also able to learn Torah properly. But if a person works and he is missing *emunah*, he strains his soul in the process and he will not have *menuchah*.

This world was not created for physical relaxation, but our soul must be relaxed. If our soul isn't relaxed, we cannot have *menuchas hanefesh*. Then we won't be able to learn Torah properly.

Exertion In Learning Should Not Stress Your Soul

In the same way one may exert his body and not his soul while earning a livelihood, one should learn Torah. Although we must have *ameilus* (exertion) in learning, "A person must kill himself in the tents

of Torah”, we must know what this means.

We must not strain our soul when we learn Torah, nor must we “kill” our soul in the process. Rather, we need to kill our bodies with exertion, so that we can reveal our soul. The way to learn Torah is by applying our whole body to the learning. We also need to lose sleep over it and work very hard to get it. But if a person’s exertion in learning is taking away his *menuchas hanefesh*, he will not be able to learn Torah.

The Vilna Gaon wrote that a person shouldn’t pressure his child to learn Torah. Instead, a person should push his child lightly to learn and this is how Torah is acquired. This is the same Vilna Gaon whose exertion in learning was unparalleled. He himself stated that Torah is only acquired when it is with *nachas*, a light push to learn. How can this be? It is because a person needs physical exertion in learning, but a person must remain with *menuchas hanefesh*.

If a person learns Torah, but is straining his soul in the process, he isn’t happy when he learns and cannot really receive the Torah. In order to receive it, the words of Torah have to be “as happy as they were when they were given at Sinai” and a person must have a relaxed soul for this.

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