

BUILDING A SANCTUARY IN THE HEART



Pre-Shavuos Meditation

Chazal ask: Why was the Torah given in the desert? One of the reasons given is because the desert is an uninhabited place. There is no civilization there – nothing is there. *Chazal* also state that the Torah is only acquired by “one who kills himself over it, as in the desert.” One who ‘kills himself’ when learning Torah is one who disconnects from his surroundings.

This is not a rule that was only applicable to the time when we received the Torah. We are currently in This World, and we await the World To Come, the days of *Mashiach*, and the resurrection of the dead. *Chazal* say that the wise sages only desired the days of *Mashiach* so that they could learn Torah in peace. If we try to picture what the World To Come is like, what is it? There is a very clear picture of what the World To Come is. There is only *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and His Torah there. That is what “eternity” is.

Let’s understand this clearly.

If Torah is not the main part of a person’s life, and he has many other desires in his life that are on his mind instead, he will not be able to live a “life of Torah.” He will be able to *learn* Torah, but he will not be able to *live* a life of Torah! He won’t become a “*ben olam haba*” (one who is destined for the World

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END RAB' TAM	END OF SHABBOS	CANDLE LIGHTING	
8.49	8.13	6.55	YERUSHALAYIM
8.51	8.15	7.07	SAFED
8.46	8.15	7.11	TEL AVIV
9.22	8.58	7.50	BROOKLYN
9.20	8.57	7.46	CHICAGO
9.03	8.33	7.31	LOS ANGELES
7.12	6.33	5.41	BEUNOS AIRES
7.44	7.05	6.13	PANAMA
6.43	6.07	5.12	SAO PAULO

PLEASE SAFEGUARD THE SANCTITY OF THIS ISSUE

Returning to Har Sinai

Clear Emunah

By the giving of the Torah, when Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He said, “*I am Hashem Your G-d* (who took you out of Egypt).”

There is a dispute in the *Rishonim* if belief in Hashem is counted as one of the 613 *mitzvos*. Some say that *emunah* is a *mitzvah*. Other *Rishonim* say that it’s not possible to list *emunah* as a *mitzvah*, because a person cannot be commanded to believe in Hashem; for if he wouldn’t believe, *chas v’shalom*, it would be possible for people not to feel commanded in this *mitzvah*.

It is explained, however, that even those *Rishonim* who do count *emunah* as a *mitzvah* are not saying that we are simply commanded to have *emunah*; rather, that it is a *mitzvah* upon us to internalize our *emunah*, more and more. We cannot be commanded to actually have *emunah* - but we can be commanded to let our *emunah* penetrate into our *daas* (mind) and into the depths of our heart.

The *mitzvah* to have *emunah* in Hashem. Then, we must be clear about it using the power of *daas* in our mind. When we have clear *emunah* in our mind, it can penetrate into our heart. It can penetrate the innermost depths that exist in the heart.

Our Emunah Was In Exile

“*I am Hashem your G-d, who took you out of Egypt*”. When Hashem took us out of Egypt, what did He take us out of? Simply speaking, He took us out of the land of Egypt. But the depth is because our very *emunah*, itself, was in exile!

When we were in Egypt, Moshe complained to Hashem that the people are not believing in him to perform miracles. In other words, their very *emunah* was in exile.

Until the people were absolutely sure that Moshe was the “faithful shepherd” of Hashem who would take them out, their own *emunah* was in exile. Hashem promised Avraham that his descendants would inherit Eretz Yisrael, and Avraham asked Hashem for a sign for this. There were *Rishonim* that say that this was some imperfection on his level of *emunah*, and for this he was punished that his descendants

would endure exile. Thus, the entire exile came about through a lack of *emunah* – and even more so, the nature of the very exile itself was that there was a lack of *emunah*.

The Egyptian exile was full of difficult labor, the bricks and the mortar, the terrible physical suffering, the *avodas perach* (cruel labor) in which men had to do women’s labor and women had to men’s labor, etc. But this was all but the physical aspect of the exile. As the *Chovos HaLevovos* explains, everything in Creation consists of two layers – *chitzoniyus* (a superficial layer) and *pnimiyus* (an inner layer). The *chitzoniyus* of the exile was the physical suffering there, while the “soul” of the exile, the *pnimiyus* of the exile, was the absence of the light of *emunah* from our minds and hearts. When *emunah* isn’t revealed to us - that is a deep form of exile.

There was exile to our bodies there, but there was exile as well to our souls. We are made of body and soul. Just as the body is made of many parts, so is the soul made of many parts. The root of the soul is *emunah*. It is the ‘head’ of the Jew’s soul. Egypt was the root of all exiles to come. It was the root of all suffering to our soul – an exile upon the root of our soul, our *emunah*.

Thus, the depth of the redemption from Egypt was that our *emunah* became revealed. We believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant. At first the people did not believe in Moshe, and now that there was a redemption from Egypt, they were able to believe in Moshe. From that, we became eligible to receive the Torah.

The Revelation of Perfect Emunah

The giving of the Torah revealed a clarity of *emunah*, a perfected level of *emunah*. The Sages say that when Hashem said “*I am Hashem your G-d*”, the words of Torah became carved on our hearts. The Vilna Gaon says on *Shir HaShirim* something a bit different: *Emunah* became carved **into** their hearts.

At the splitting of the sea, everyone saw the miracle and believed. The Sages say that a typical maidservant there reached levels of vision that even the prophet Yechezkel did not see. They saw great visions of *emunah*, but it wasn’t yet engraved in the depths of their heart. Only at the giving of the Torah, when Hashem said

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To Come) on This World. In the Next World, there is nothing except for Hashem and His Torah. That is all that goes on there, 24/7!

In This World, even if we learn Torah all day, we eventually go to sleep at night. But in the Next World, there is no sleep. It is for 24 consecutive hours in a day! Every day! (On a deeper note, the 24 hours of the day are only from the perspective of This World, but in the Next World, there are no 24-hour intervals). It keeps continuing. It is a “day of entirely light”, a “day of entirely Shabbos”, where the *tzaddikim* bask in the rays of the *Shechinah*.

If one tries to imagine this, he might think of it as a bright, sunny day which warms his body. That is very far from what the Next World is like; it is but a parable. What is life in the Next World? There is nothing there at all, other than Hashem and His Torah!

When considering how we are living our own life, this is not simply a question of what “level” we are on. There are certainly levels upon levels that a person can be on in the World To Come, for it is the “world of reward”, but our question is: Who is the kind of person that can live a life on This World that resembles the World To Come? Only someone who lives it and is found there.

An ignoramus, who does not learn Torah and who is sustained from the Torah others, certainly doesn't live that kind of life. A Torah scholar, someone immersed in Torah, is one who can live a life that resembles the “Next World” already on This World. If someone cannot identify with such a place in his soul [in which there is nothing in the world other than Hashem and Torah], he is far removed from anything to do with the Next World.

Let us imagine the following simple example in our own lives. If we come to a person today and we tell him, “From Elul until Yom Kippur, for 40 days straight, when you are waiting to receive the second pair of Luchos, you will have absolutely nothing on This World. It will be just you and Hashem, Hashem and His Torah, and that's it.” Can a person do that for 40 days straight, doing nothing else?

Let's consider the three days preceding Shavuos (the *yimei bagbalah*). Can a person just imagine three days in which there will be nothing in the world other than Hashem and Torah, and himself? (A person needs a *chavrusa* too, because “Either a *chavrusa* (friend) or death.”) But can a person be ready to live three days with nothing other than this, just him, Hashem, and the Torah? Would a person feel that these three days are a “resemblance of the World To Come”, or does he instead feel towards it like Hashem removing the sun from its sheath in the future, which will punish the wicked?

What does a person imagine towards it? If someone cannot fathom going for three days with nothing in his world other than Hashem and Torah, and it seems to him too far-fetched and not for our generation, and that we should just feel fine with learning Torah seriously for even five minutes – we must counter to this: “But Hashem has created a certain reality. He has created the situation of the Next World, and all people will need to reach it someday!”

This is not an issue of what personal *madreigah* (spiritual level) one is on. Rather, it is the general level of all of the *madreigos* which describe the Next World. Within it of course are many levels of *madreigos*, and there is no end to these levels, depending on how much Torah one has attained. But this is the picture of the life that we need to arrive at!

When we understand it, we can realize that This World is but a passageway to the Next World; it is like preparing on Friday afternoon for Shabbos, so that we will have what to eat on Shabbos. All that we do on This World is but a preparation stage for the Next World. What does it mean to prepare on this world for the next world? It means to reach a deep place in your soul where you are prepared to live such an existence, where there will be true spiritual pleasure, and not the opposite of pleasure, *chas v'shalom*. That is what it means to prepare for the Next World.

Of course, on This World, we also have the three pillars which the world stands on, which includes *tefillah* and *chesed*, and we have all the 613 mitzvos. These all give us holiness, but at the same time, they also obscure us from studying Torah on the perfected level, because we currently do not have the perfect level of Torah, for we live after the sin. But in the Next World, where all is rectified, where the perfected level of the End of Days is already realized, where “Hashem is One and His Name is one” – it is a realm where there is complete revelation of *Shechinah* – that is what life is like there! That is what our life will be like, because that's the way it's supposed to be!

If you want to visualize a perfect picture of what life should look like – what is the driving force in our life that will help us reach this perfect picture? It is to have a goal of reaching such a kind of life, in which there will be nothing in our life other than Hashem and His Torah. That is what a person should want, and that is what he should be enjoying. If one keeps reflecting on this point, he can eventually reach a point where he will want this to continue without pause. If he can envision such a thing, he is touching upon a “resemblance of the World To Come” in the soul. For how long will he be able to remain in such a space in himself? It will depend on how connected he is to this.

If he has a connection to this, he can already experience a “resemblance of the World To Come” here, in his own soul. (A higher level than this to become a “*ben olam HaBa*” (destined for the World To Come); here we are talking about the first step, which is to experience *me'in olam haBa*, a resemblance of the World To Come).

It is to imagine a life in which you are totally removed from everything on This World, and you are perfectly content with all that you remain with [nothing but Hashem and His Torah]. This is a truthful visualization to imagine, and one who has *da'as* (mature understanding) and who desires true life will visualize this many times. Slowly as a person gets used to this visualization, he will see what his current level is, and think of how to get to the next step. It will be a journey in his soul.

This imagination exercise is but one example of how you can personally connect yourself to the Torah (and it is in addition to what we said before about learning about the importance of Torah study). Anyone who desires to be a true *ben Torah* should try the above imagination exercise.

Advancing And Retreating

On the flip side, a person might counter to all of this, “But I have a wife and children, *Baruch Hashem*, and I also have physical needs.” That is all true, but a *ben Torah* needs to think about the following. The Torah says that in the three days preceding Shavuos, the men were told to separate from their wives. After they received the Torah, they then were told, “Return to your tents.” The meaning of “return” here is to return to your previous state, where you are not as elevated; but there is also a point in our soul in which we need to ascend to higher levels. This is also known as the concept of *ratzu v'shav*, “advancing and retreating”, in which we move back and forth between spiritual progression and regression. Our soul has a point of “*shav*”, where we return/retreat to our previous level, after we have become spiritually elevated. But our soul also has a point of “*ratzu*”, to advance – to reach for higher levels.

We must want to ascend to an existence in which there is nothing but Hashem and His Torah. After we reach higher levels we will certainly fall back onto our previous level, “return to your tents”, but we must also have a point in our soul in which we ascend to higher levels, where we want nothing other than Hashem and His Torah.

Practically Actualizing This Concept

If someone thinks that preparing for Shavuos means to close the doors to the *Beis Midrash* after the morning session starts so that anyone

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coming late won't be able to enter, this is missing the whole point of preparing to receive the Torah. It is not incorrect to act this way, but it is simply an immature perspective, which misses the point. The point is to develop an attitude in our life in which we want to experience a "resemblance of the World To Come".

Practically speaking, it is advisable for a person to set aside a few hours of the day of his Torah learning, where he views it as a blissful experience of experiencing a "resemblance of the World To Come". If a person gets used to this, putting his heart into it and not simply as a habitual practice (which does not bring a person to the desired purpose, and it is just fleeting inspiration).

The point here is not to simply feel uplifted, or to become more immersed in one's Torah learning, or to attain more clarity it; those are all wonderful qualities, but they are results of what we should want to achieve. What we should mainly want to achieve here is to feel how Torah learning is "a resemblance of the World To Come" on this world. For a little bit of time, a person can temporarily feel in his soul a resemblance of the World To Come, where he is disconnected completely from everything, and that has nothing in his life other than Hashem and His Torah.

When a person truly desires the World To Come, he seeks ways of how he can experience some of it already on This World. He can try learning Torah for several hours straight, consecutively and without interruption, in which he truly feels that has nothing in his life other than his Torah learning. He can try this twice a day as well. But in order to do this, one needs to expand both his mind and heart, as mentioned earlier.

Every day, one should set aside time of the day in which he does not just learn Torah by rote, and to reflect before he begins to learn Torah: "Where do I want to go with this? What is the purpose?"

There are simpler reflections than this that one can make as well. But we are approaching the days preceding Shavuot, and it is worthy to contemplate this, even if one is not actually on the level of living like this all year round. Since it is the desired purpose of one's life to reach this, it is worth it to have it at the forefront of our minds, even if a person can't reach actually reach it yet.

When one gets used to the imagination exercise described here, his entire attitude towards his Torah learning will be overhauled. The point is not to enjoy the feeling of disconnecting from the world, which feels uplifting and which is certainly wonderful to experience. Rather, the point is to truly connect oneself to the purpose of life, to connect oneself to the World To Come as he is on This World.

In Conclusion

These words are but an opener that we should merit to enable ourselves to reach the inner, intended goal. May we merit, together, to truly live in a world which is entirely a world of Torah, a world which is entirely the world of Hashem. ■
Clip taken from the end of original hebrew audio shiur:
שבועות 031 - הכנה למתן תורה תשע"ז

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"I am Hashem your G-d", did *emunah* become carved on their hearts. Our *emunah*, ever since then, has become imprinted onto our hearts. That *emunah* knows no end and it is the very *havayah* (essence) of a Jew's soul.

At the giving of the Torah, the *posuk* says that all souls were present – those that were there, and even those that weren't there. Some were there in body and soul, some were there only in soul – but all of the Jewish people were there. There, the depth of *emunah* was engraved on our hearts.

Remembering Har Sinai: Returning To Our Emunah

But it didn't last for long. As we know, the sin with the Golden Calf made us once again plummet to the damaged level of mankind where we are cursed with death. But the *emunah* still didn't leave us! It has been covered over and hidden. Therefore, *emunah* is in the depths of every Jew's soul, but it is just very covered over, unrevealed.

"Remember the day you stood before Hashem at Choirev." What is the depth of remembering Har Sinai? It is to remember the clear *emunah* we had there. There are many facts to this *mitzvah*, but the root of the giving of the Torah was "I am Hashem your G-d." The depth of remembering Har Sinai is to return to the clear level of *emunah* we had there, as much as we can, which resembles our level of standing at Sinai.

But the question of all questions is: how do we return to it?

The Current Generation and the '50th Level of Spiritual Impurity'

Our Sages said that in Egypt, the people were steeped into the 49th level of spiritual impurity, and they were on the verge of entering the 50th and worst level. Had they remained even one more moment, they would have descended into the 50th, so they had to get out right away, or else they would go lost forever in their depravity.

The *Ohr HaChaim* writes that in our final exile, the '50th of impurity' has already been opened. If so, he asks, why did our Sages say that we couldn't get out of Egypt had we entered the 50th level of impurity, yet we are guaranteed to leave this current exile even though we are in the 50th level? The *Ohr HaChaim* answers that in Egypt, they didn't yet have the Torah, so there was no way for them to get out of it had they entered. Therefore, they had to get out right away, lest they become forever entrenched. But in our current exile, we have the Torah, and with the power of the Torah, we can leave even the worst level of impurity.

Based upon his words, it must be clear to all of us what kind of time we are found in; what kind of situation we are in. We are in the 50th gate of impurity!

What they didn't descend to in Egypt, that is what we are in now. If one doesn't know this, he is like a person who shakes *lulav* and *esrog* on Pesach; he doesn't know the time he is in.

The time we are in is in the 50th gate of impurity. It is our hope each day that we be redeemed from it, but we must understand *this is where we are found* as of now, this is where are.

There was never an exile like this. In Egypt they didn't get to this point we are in. They were in the 49th level, and they were redeemed from it. The 49 'gates of impurity' essentially represent 49 evil forces that prevent the light of *emunah* from being shined onto the soul. (In the side of holiness, there are also 49 levels of purity, which can counter this).

When the Torah was given, we were first told "*Anochi Hashem*"; it was revealed to us the depth of *emunah*, the 50th gate of holiness, which can take us out of the '50th gate of impurity' that is the total absence of belief in G-d.

There were two times in history when we needed to be armed with the '50th gate of holiness' in order to save ourselves from evil. One time was then, at Har Sinai, when we were rescued from the impurity of Egypt. The other time is now! In our own generation, when we are in the 50th gate of impurity, there is no way to be saved spiritually, unless we return to the '50th level of holiness' that was at Har Sinai.

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The deeper our exile is, the deeper of a spiritual light our soul needs. When *emunah* is perfect, that is the '50th gate of holiness'. By contrast, the '50th gate of impurity' is when a person reaches a point where he cannot believe.

When Truth Vanishes

The world which we are in now is called by our Sages as "*alma d'shikra*" (world of falsity). To be more specific, the Sages said that it is "mostly false, and minimally truthful". Those who do have the truth are getting fewer and fewer as the generations continue. When we get all the way to the end of the exile, truth is almost completely gone from the world. As the Sages said at the end of *Tractate Sotah* (49a), that truth will vanish in the era preceding *Mashiach*. It will only be found in *goyim*, thus it will be hidden.

If there is *emes* (truth), though, there can be *emunah*. If there is no *emes*, there is no *emunah*. When there is no *emes* to be found in the world, it places a person into a certain bind. As we head into the future redemption, there is the light of complete *emunah* slowly being revealed onto the world, and at the same time, there is also a darkness enveloping the generation, which totally obscures a person from *emunah*. The depth of the exile we are in is that people don't even know where *emes* (truth) is found.

Where is truth found? Where can we find truth on this world? Simply speaking, it is found with the *Gedolim*. But where is *emes* found in the world? Where is it??

Emes used to be openly revealed in certain places of the world. It used to be that you could go to a place and see openly the *emes* there. In today's times, though, there is no place where *emes* is openly found. Everything is concealed. Even the writings of our Sages today are being corrupted by people today who are explaining their words as they see fit.

There is no place in the world where *emunah* shines completely. There are a few people who are connected to that *emunah*, but there is no place where we can find it. As a result, there is much confusion everywhere. Every person, no matter what sect of *Yiddishkeit* he comes from, is facing various kinds of confusing thoughts about life.

There are also some groups who feel that only **they** have the truth and that only **they** live correctly. This very notion itself is false! There is no such thing! The few people that truly seek truth do exist, as in every generation. But the general lifestyle of people today is false.

Returning To Emes: How?

How indeed can a person reach the *emes*? How do we sift out the truth from all the falsity that has mixed up the world?

Generally speaking, it is through the power of returning to the event of Sinai. Now let us explain how we can return to there.

The Power To Separate Ourselves

The *Bnei Yisrael* at Har Sinai were commanded to prepare for three days before the Torah and separate from society; they were told to isolate themselves and be separate from everything. Even the *Erev Rav* were apart from us then, as the *Ramban* says. Thus the giving of the Torah essentially enabled each Jew to separate himself from everything and be connected to nothing else, other than his own soul, the Torah, and the Creator.

The Sages recount that "For every word of Hashem, their souls left them". At first, we were all connected with each other, with "one heart". We all had *ahavas Yisrael* then. What could be greater than that? But that was only a step to get to a greater goal. The greater goal was to reach the point where our souls left us. That was the apex of the event.

These represent two totally different levels: being unified with others, and being apart from others.

The unity we had before we received the Torah came to us from purifying ourselves for 49 days. But in order to receive the Torah on the 50th day, we needed the clear *emunah*. Thus, we needed to leave the body and gain the view that comes entirely from our soul. If we would have remained in our body, we wouldn't be as purified to accept the Torah; our body always holds us back.

We must understand a very deep point. We are made of soul and body. Our body causes us to connect to all that goes on in this world, which doesn't allow truth to shine completely on us. What, then, is the solution? We must leave the body! "For every word of Hashem, their souls left their bodies". So too, we must leave the 'body' – we must leave our connection to materialism.

One who lives only with his body will fall together with the rest of the generation who are pulled after the body. We are referring to all the many kinds of gadgets of this world that sway a person after them.

If a person has the higher perspective that comes from his soul, he can be saved; he has hope. But if one wants to remain in the body, he is far from truth.

If one merits for even one moment how a truthful and Heavenly existence feels like, he sees a whole different world. Many things which he had previously thought were truthful, he will now see as totally false. The giving of the Torah gave us the strength to have the view of the soul

as it is in the body when we all stood as one man, "with one heart", and we were connected with all Jews. There is a deeper aspect as well: the power to leave the body, and only have the soul's viewpoint. In other words, we can see life from the perspective of the soul in a body (which is the external perspective), or we can see life from the soul without a body (the inner perspective). Both aspects are necessary.

The Two Sides of Our Life

Now we will speak about how to make this matter more practical.

There is love of the Creator, love of the Torah, and love for the Jewish people. Love of the Jewish people is when the souls are connected with each other deeply. But that is all one side to the coin. The other side of ourselves is to feel separate from society.

If one takes either extreme, it is detrimental. One who only secludes himself and is not connected to others is forgoing the purpose of Creation. But if one only knows of *ahavas Yisrael* and he does not know how to separate himself from others, he is not living truthfully either.

Every person must have two sides to his life. One side of his life must include others and be deeply connected to other Jews in love. But the other side of his life must be able to isolate from others. As *Chazal* say, "Therefore, man was created individual."

(This is part of the cycle of "*rotzoy v'shov*" ("running and returning") which we must live with and alternate with).

There are two different viewpoints in us – our 'outer' aspect and our 'inner' aspect. The outer aspect was the fact that we were all connected together at Har Sinai, with one heart; we were united with each other. But our inner and deeper aspect came afterwards: our souls left our bodies. We became one with Hashem. We separated from everything and everyone and integrated our being with Hashem; we each became individuals.

The tendency of man is to seek either one of these two natures, and we do not like the idea of maintaining opposite aspects in our personality. Some people love to pursue *ahavas Yisrael* as the center of life, others think that love of Torah is all that there is to life, and others think that loving the Creator is the central aspect of life. As for the rest of the Torah, it's doubtful if they will keep those other parts...

But if we want to know what the complete and true way to live life is – it is to be able to live alone with Hashem, along with love for others. When we have these two aspects together, we are properly balanced and living life correctly.

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On the one hand, we must love others, accept others, and greet each person with a smile. *Chazal* say that one should learn from all people. But at the same time, we each need to be able to be individuals – **totally**.

Seeing The Truth

Herein lays the secret of life. When one reaches this state, he sees the truth according to the level of his unique soul. There are so many different opinions in the world, so many different ways of how to view things, so many ways of serving Hashem. The Sages said, “Just as all their faces are not equal, so are all *de’os* (opinions) not equal.” But each person can see the truth that is meant for **him** to see.

This is not referring to the truth which is gleaned from outer sources, which is almost always full of falsity and only a little bit truthful.

If one doesn’t reach this place in himself, he has never clarified where he is and what his unique role is and he surely doesn’t realize how affected he is by the outside. He has no idea which parts he picked up are good and which parts need to be thrown out. And if a person simply accepts everything he comes across which he has picked up from the outside, he will definitely fall by the wayside, into the great mixture of good and evil that is out there.

Preparing To Receive The Torah

When we think about what it means to prepare for the Torah, we must seek an inner kind of preparation, and not a kind of preparation that is superficial. We have to make sure that we are not just going through the same motions we go through each year, and that we keep continuing this routine kind of life.

We instead need to reach our innermost depths, the place in ourselves where our soul is ready to leave everything around us. There, in that place in ourselves, we can merit the light of *emunah*, the true light that was at the giving of the Torah.

Then and Now

It’s very possible that many people who hear this will find these words far-fetched. But we all stood at Har Sinai. Would we have said then also that it’s too much for us to hear the word of Hashem, and that we’re not capable?!

The words here are close only to those who search for truth - and they are far from anyone who does not really yearn that much for an inner kind of life.

We must know that the generation today is as upside-down as can be. It is totally not like how we were at Har Sinai. It’s like two opposite sides of a coin. By Har Sinai, the ‘50th gate of holiness’ was revealed there. In our generation, the ‘50th

gate of impurity’ is here! (If someone merits it, he can leave the impurity and enter holiness). There was never a generation as far from the giving of the Torah as in today’s generation – and surely the next generation after this is going to be further.

If someone says that it is the opposite, being that there is more Torah learning today which was never here before, all we have to do is take a look into what’s going on inside people’s hearts. Then we can see what kind of ugly level of the ‘50th gate of impurity’ we have descended to. Almost all of have fallen into it.

Examining Our Way of Living

I will ask a very clear question. Is there anyone here who thinks that the way of life he lives is a true kind of life? I am not talking against any one particular sect of *Yiddishkeit* today; I am referring to the general way that we are living. Is anyone confident that his way of *Yiddishkeit* is the true way for him to follow?

The first question to ask is: am I walking on a true path or not? The second question is, that even if the path one is taking is a true path, how does one know if that path of *Yiddishkeit* is good for **him** to take?

There are ways that are true and ways that are false. Even the ways that are ‘true’ are only ‘true’ for those who are **meant** to take that path.

If a person has thought about this question, he will find that there is no end to how much we can search for truth. As an example, the Alter of Novhardok *zt”l* said that if there is a person who says even one statement that is perfectly true, he will cross the ocean to meet him.

It seems that the *emes* is found in all of the *sefarim hakedoshim* which we know of, and it seems that that we are all basically “on the *derech*”, and that we just have a few things that we need to rectify. But you should know that it is not quite like that. The *emes* today is very hidden. Most people cannot deal with the *emes*, not because it is difficult for them to change, but because they simply do not know what the *emes* is – they don’t recognize it.

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein *zt”l* said sharply, about his own *yeshivah*, that people have been listening to him for 30 years, yet they haven’t even begun to understand what he wants when he speaks. This didn’t mean that people have a hard time carrying out what he says and following his advice. They didn’t even **begin** to know what he’s talking about.

People today can hear a *shmuess*, write it down, and think they understand it, and they go on to live their life, confident that they understand what was said...

But after 120, a person sees the truth. He sees if his life was really spent pursuing Hashem. Our Sages write that every person merits at least one moment in his life where he sees the truth. A person can then realize what kind of life he is living and what kind of life he must now live.

Understandably, we all make mistakes, and none of us are perfect. But the question is if we are heading towards the inner and true point of life. That is the deepest question we can ask about our life.

Learning Torah, doing *mitzvos*, loving the Torah, and loving other Jews are all but general descriptions of what we have to do. These are all true, and there is no doubt about this. But the question is if our soul is heading towards truth.

At the giving of the Torah, we all became aware of the total truth. That was the complete level of our *emunah*. Complete *emunah* did not mean that we knew Hashem existed and that He runs the world. That is all true, but the depth of clear *emunah* means that we do not see anything other than the pursuit of *emunah*. The Torah, the *mitzvos*, *ahavas Hashem*, *ahavas HaTorah*, *ahavas Hashem*, are all things that shine the light of complete *emunah*. They are all tools that bring us to a greater goal.

We reached it at Har Sinai, when we understood clearly what the truth was. But ever since we sinned with the Golden Calf and we fell from our pure state, we tend to think that there are “other” things than this that we need to pursue. Even holy acts such as learning Torah and doing *mitzvos* can be masking our true priority in life.

Chazal say that all *tzaddikim* will say in the future, “This is my G-d that I hoped for.” How much time in a person’s day does he spend thinking about this and yearning for this? We have many tools we use, the tools of Torah, *mitzvos*, *chessed* – all of these are but **tools** that must lead us to a greater goal!

Being ‘Alone’: Separating From The World

In order to live such a life, we cannot be connected to this world. This is not limited to separating from the streets and keeping ourselves in the *beis midrash*. That’s just the first step. The more inner aspect is that we need to enter our own souls. We need seclusion, as the Ramchal says in *sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*, that one must seclude himself each day and think about the truth.

But this is not referring to physical seclusion alone; it means to enter the most secluded place in our own soul. Yaakov fought “alone” – and so do we have a power to be “alone” in our own souls. The giving of the Torah enabled us to be a nation that is apart and alone from the other nations, at the same time allowing us to feel con-

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What Was Our Neshamah Doing Before It Came Down Here?

There is something good they have in America: it's called "Sunday." It's a time of the week in which people have off from work. But the question is: what to do with this time. Hashem gave Sundays to us as a day off; is it only so that we can spend more time with our family? It's a day where we can reflect on the purpose of our life.

Hashem took a soul, carved it out from His Throne, and sent it down to this world. For what purpose did He send our soul here for? And if we know that purpose, we still have to ask ourselves if our life is heading towards that goal we were sent here for.

What is the purpose of life? Is it so that we should be a good husband, a good father, to support our family, and to give *tzedakah*...or is there more to our life?

Think about what our soul was doing in Heaven before it came down here. What was our soul doing in Heaven? Yes, it was very happy there. But what was our soul actually doing there all the time?

Our Soul's Inner Yearning

Let's say a person was married to a woman for 70 years, and then his wife dies one day. This is a very hard thing to go through. When you have a wonderful relationship for 70 years, it's very difficult to just move on.

Before we were born, we learned the entire Torah in the mother's womb. When we are born, this is very hard for our soul. It's a very hard transition. This is really why a baby cries as soon as he's born – he misses the Torah he was learning.

It seems as if we have all forgotten our first relationship we once had with Hashem!

Once there is a relationship, it's very hard for us to just sever ourselves from the relationship. When a spouse dies after 70 years of marriage, it's extremely painful for the other spouse who remains alive. You don't just forget your spouse after living with him/her for so many years.

That is the *moshol* (parable). The lesson of this is very clear – our own soul has left Heaven, from the wonderful relationship it enjoyed. It can't just forget this relationship so easily.

Life After Death

Chazal say that one must know where he came from, and to where he is going. We must all know that we came down from Heaven, and we will go back there one day. Are we aware from where we came from – and to where we are eventually going?

We will all leave this world eventually. Do we know where we are going to? We are going to

a whole different world than what we see now. Should we go there if we don't know anything about it? Don't we all want this transition to go easy for us, so that we will feel at home when we get there?

If we want to be comfortable when we get to Heaven eventually after we die, we must already prepare ourselves on this world, and to learn about what life is like in *Gan Eden*.

One day, we will all go back to *Gan Eden*, where the Torah is being learned all day. Are we ready for that? Are we ready to learn Torah all day?

Most of us would be afraid of what to do with themselves if they wouldn't work. We all want to have something to do one day when we get old and can't work anymore. Do we realize that one day our life will end, and that we will no longer have our job? Are we aware of reality?

Most people are terrified of the thought of death. But if a person lives a true kind of life, he doesn't fear death, because he realizes that death is just another step – it is another step in the process of living a truthful kind of life.

Let's be very honest. Are we ready to learn Torah all day in *Gan Eden*, after we die? Do we look forward to that?

Imagine if Hashem would come to a person and tell him, "You don't have to worry at all about money. I'll give you all the money in the world. Just learn Torah all day." Would any of us be ready for that?

If someone answers, "Yes", then it shows that he does indeed want to learn Torah, even though he works. But most people would answer, "No, I'm not ready to learn Torah all day, even if I don't have to work and I have all the money in the world."

Balancing Torah Learning With Working

I understand that everyone needs a source of livelihood. I also need a livelihood. But what I'm asking is: What are our **aspirations** in life? Dovid *HaMelech* says in Tehillim, "*One thing I ask of Hashem, that I sit in the house of Hashem all the days in my life.*" Is it only Dovid *HaMelech* who said this, or do any of us feel that way also, that we wish we could sit and learn all day, even though we work?

I understand that not everyone can sit and learn all day. But imagine if you have a child who can't walk! Do the parents not want him to walk? Of course they want him to walk! It is just that he can't. So even if a person can't sit and learn all day, he should at least **want** to.

If we have to go to work, then of course it's necessary for us to go to work. But as we leave shul in the morning, shouldn't we at least wish that we could linger in the *beis hamidrash* and learn, even though we have to go to work? Hashem

wants us to desire the right kind of life.

When Adam sinned, he was told that now he will have to work to make a living. This was a curse, not a blessing. We have to realize that ideally, man was not supposed to work and our whole situation of having to go to work is a curse. Of course, now we have to work; but we still have to realize that it's a curse placed upon mankind.

When a person is in jail, he knows that he has to be in jail as a punishment, but he knows that jail is not his real life. He wants to get out of jail.

The same attitude we need to have if we work. When we go out to work each day, we have to realize that it's not the real situation we are supposed to be in. We should realize that although we have to work, we should wish that we could sit and learn all day.

"*Take my soul out of prison.*" Dovid *HaMelech* says: Take my soul out of the prison of my body. Our soul is imprisoned by our body. We have to want to come out of the materialistic pursuits of the body.

What Does Hashem Want From You?

What does Hashem want from us, and what should we want from ourselves? The first thing we need is to have a desire for a true kind of life – the real kind of life. Most people are not rich, but most people still want to be rich. The same goes for learning Torah – not everyone is *zoche* to sit all day and learn. But we should at least wish that we could.

If a person doesn't aspire to sit and learn all day, then he has no hope for a true kind of life. However, if a person at least wishes that he could sit and learn, then even if he works, he at least has hope that he will live a true kind of life.

We may not have the time to be able to sit and learn all day, but we should at least want this. Hashem wants us to really *want, want, and want* to learn Torah – even if we can't actually do it. We have to at least *want* to.

Even if a person works to make a living and he can't learn Torah all day, he has to at least want deep down in his heart to be able to learn all day.

After a person dies, he goes to Heaven. If someone truly learned Torah on this world, he has what to do when he gets to *Gan Eden*, because people are learning Torah in *Gan Eden*. Even if someone on this world worked to make a living, if he had a deep wish inside to learn Torah, then he will find what to do in *Gan Eden* – he will be able to learn the Torah he always wanted to learn. But if someone didn't even want to learn Torah, he will have nothing to do when he gets to Heaven.

How can a person know if he will get *Olam HaBa* or not? There are two ways how you can know you're heading towards *Olam HaBa*. One
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LIFE BEFORE DEATH

way is if you sat and learned Torah on this world – and the other way is if you want to learn Torah all day, even if you didn't.

I will say something now that is a bit harsh. If a person gave a lot of *tzedakah* on this world, and he also wanted to learn Torah – then when he gets to the next world, his *tzedakah* will uplift him and be a merit for him. But if he gave *tzedakah* and he didn't want to learn Torah, then his *tzedakah* will not be a merit for him when he gets to Heaven, and it will be the opposite – it will feel like *Gehinnom* for him.

Hashem wants us to all have the desire to want to learn Torah. If we really want to learn Torah, then we have a real life. Not to have this desire is a life that is death. I hope that all of you here, from the depths of my heart, should gain a desire to want to learn Torah all day; and through that, maybe we will also actually merit to sit and learn Torah all day.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: How can the Rav say that we won't get into Olam HaBa if we don't desire to learn Torah, won't our other mitzvos help us get in?

A: The Zohar says that our *mitzvos* are like a garment, while our Torah is our soul. If a person comes into the next world with just garments and no soul – he's like a body without a soul.

Q: If people who are sitting and learning all day are living the right kind of life, while we who work, who want to support our families – but we wish deep down that we could be able to sit and learn all day – are we only living a "b'dieved" kind of life?

A: First of all, the fact that you wish you could sit and learn all day makes you feel pain at this, and the pain itself is an atonement... The fact that you know that your life is a "b'dieved" kind of life is already an atonement. As long as you wish you could learn Torah, you will have hope in achieving you want. It's like a person who is in jail – if he wants to get out of jail, he will have hope in getting out of jail. But if he never desires to get out of jail, he won't ever get out of jail.

Q: What should I do if I realize that I don't have any time to learn Torah, because all day I am either working or taking care of my family?

A: Good question. Firstly, realize that it's a problem. Then realize that since there's nothing you can do - and cry to Hashem about this. If you don't cry about it, it shows you don't realize how much of a problem it is. But if you cry to Hashem about it, Hashem will help you find time to learn Torah.

Q: If a person can't sit and learn all day, but he still wishes that he could, what can he do to protect his aspirations?

A: Very good question. Every day, for 15 minutes a day, sit quietly, and ask yourself: "Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? Am I on the right direction in life?" If you have pain that you aren't on the right direction, then that pain itself will lead you to the right direction in life. ■ Based on original hebrew audio shiur: תשס"ו החנוכה לחיים לאחר המוות תש"ז

(Cont'd from page 5)

nected with all souls of the Jewish people. But after that, our souls left us, and we each became "alone" with Hashem. We entered the "individual" aspect in us which enables us, individually, to connect to the reality of the Creator.

One needs to set aside time every day to separate himself from everything. The first thing you need to disconnect yourself from is all that's going on in the world. Along with this, as we said, is that a person must also make sure that he feels a deep love for other Jews.

Balancing Between Connection and Being Alone

However, *ahavas Yisrael* is a very delicate matter, because there is a very narrow and fine border between how much we should connect to others and at what point we should disassociate. It is very easy for a person to fall into bad influences when connected with other people, even if we have a lot of *ahavas Yisrael*.

To give a dramatic example, one of the students of the Baal Shem Tov would see people and return them to *teshuvah*, and people would come to him and tell him all of their sins. He eventually fell into those very same sins that people were confiding to him!

One who is very connected to his own soul is balanced. He is able to have deep *ahavas Yisrael* yet he can also avoid the influences of others. But if someone is not balanced in his soul, he is not fortified enough spiritually, and his involvement with *ahavas Yisrael* will be detrimental to his spiritual situation. He will end up stumbling; it will not be a path that brings him to *emes*. Even our *tzaddikim* who succeeded with their *ahavas Yisrael* were only able to do because they also knew how to isolate themselves from others.

Leaving The 50th Gate of Impurity

These words are deep and not just intellectually because they concern deep matters of our soul. It is describing a way of life which cannot be seen on the surface of this world that we view. But that is where life is found. On the streets, there is nothing but death there.

The words here are subtle and sensitive, and they can be easily misunderstood, which will be detrimental. But if we really want to live a truthful life, we need to develop both our external and internal sides of life. On our external side of life, we need *ahavas Yisrael* and we need to learn Torah in-depth, but we also need to develop our inner side – to be able to live 'alone' from the world.

Hashem opened all the heavens at Har Sinai and showed us that He is the only One. The depth of this is that He revealed to each of us our 'individual' aspect.

If one reaches his 'individual' aspect and he has succeeded in separating totally from all outside influences, that is how he will free himself from the '50th gate of impurity'. When one reaches this place in himself, instead of being influenced by others for evil, he cannot be influenced at all, and instead, he influences others.

Of course, if he does not balance his 'individual' aspect with love for others, then he will simply become stubborn and unaccepting of others, and that is why he is uninfluenced. But if he has attained the balance, of being connected deeply to all Jewish souls as well as knowing how to be 'individual', he has gotten it right, and he is a kind of person who can avoid all influences.

In Conclusion

This is the **only** advice that can help a person avoid all the outside influences today. It is called the 'giving of the Torah' which essentially enables us to leave the '50th gate of impurity'.

The influences found today are so destructive to the soul that the only way to be saved from them is to become 'individual' and unfazed by what goes on in the world. Upon reaching that place in oneself, one is not influenced by anything, and instead, he influences others, for holiness. ■ Based on original hebrew audio shiur: שבועות 015 - אמונה תשע"ב



How To Reach Yechidah Through Torah Study

QUESTION: The *Sfas Emes* in *parshas Beraishis* writes that just as the *Chayah* and *Yechidah* parts of the soul are “enveloping lights” which surround a person, so are Torah and *mitzvos* “enveloping lights”, which raise a person from the soul levels of *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah* to the higher soul levels, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. He writes further that doing *mitzvos* raises a person to the *Chayah* level of the soul, and learning Torah raises a person to the *Yechidah* level of the soul. Understandably, though, most people learning Torah do not reach the *Yechidah* level of the soul, even though they learn it with exertion and even though their main desire in life is to learn Torah. So how can a person truly reach the *Yechidah* level of the soul through learning Torah, as the *Sfas Emes* describes?

ANSWER: Through learning Torah with *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) and *l’sheim l’shamayim* (for the sake of Heaven).

Staying Motivated When Learning Torah

QUESTION: For years, I have been learning in *Kolel*, and I have not been successful yet to finish any topic of *Gemara* I learned. I never yet completed anything, from beginning until end. At first, whenever I begin to learn, I have excitement, and slowly my excitement wanes, until I lose the whole thing. Then my learning will eventually become shaky and unstable, and unproductive. What is the reason for this, and how can I solve this issue?

ANSWER: Whenever you begin to learn, the main power you need to use is your intellect, not your heart. You need to enter Torah learning with the abilities of logical planning and thinking. In contrast, when [you start with excitement], you are starting from your heart [from a place of emotion], and this excitement will tend to weaken. You can also bring some of your heart into the process, but you mainly need to apply your cold, clean intellect, so that you can build a structure, step after step. The more solid your foundation is when you start, by mainly using your intellect as opposed to your heart, the more your Torah learning will last, with *siyata d’shmaya*.

Torah-Based Therapy

QUESTION: There is a topic where there is much confusion: the role of psychology/psychologists [in a religious Jew’s life], even when the professional is a Jew who serves Hashem, or even if he is simply called a “Chareidi” Jew.

The Rav has explained at length about the powers of the soul, and how to recognize and direct them, based on Torah and *halachah*, and that through this, a person will feel inwardly satisfied, and serene, from the

connection to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. [It seems that] when one’s entire aspiration is to do the will of the Creator, even if he falls sometimes to sin, if he learns the words of the Rav properly, he should simply get up from his fall. However, if his fall is more severe, he needs to call for help.

But how does it make sense that true help will come from anyone who uses the approach of [secular] psychology, whom anyone recognizes as being based on heresy, and on pursuing “feeling good” as opposed to doing what’s good and upright, as we are commanded to by Hashem? Sometimes a person is even speaking with a *Mashgiach*, and even the *Mashgiach* will say that it’s improper for a Jewish soul to run after all kinds of ways that develop the individual, the world of psychology; but if he thinks that the yeshiva *bochur* or seminary girl has a particularly difficult situation, he will tell the parents, “Send him/her to a psychologist.” Why?

Is this because we are living in the generation of “the footsteps preceding *Moshiach*”? Instead of sitting with the boy or girl and cheering him/her up by telling him/her Hashem loves him/her, instead of relating to him as an

only child or only daughter of Hashem, instead, he/she is being sent to a psychologist, who teaches the boy or girl how to be haughty, and to run after “how to feel good”, etc. Often the boys or girls just want to simply have a warm feeling of connectedness, not only in their homes, and not only afterwards when they get married, but also while they are in yeshiva or seminary - to feel like they exist as individuals, and that they are not just another part ‘of the herd’.

And even the Rav himself writes that if his teachings about *avodah* are not helping a person, the person should seek professional help (I don’t remember the Rav’s exact words about this, but something to that effect). But why? According to my knowledge, which is comprehensive enough, even the gentiles are beginning to re-evaluate their knowledge about healing the soul, and they are seeking other ways to heal the soul, because they have already realized that their methods aren’t helping, and that even taking pills isn’t helping, and rather the opposite, by causing people to become dysfunctional in their souls.....

They speak openly about this, that they need to find new ways of helping people, and that we cannot label every difficulty today as a disorder. Some are turning to the East, and some simply argue that we need to

find a way to return the love and warmth back to humanity, instead of formulating new psychological approaches or medications for everything—the damage of which can be seen a few years down the line. I will be happy to read what the Rav says about this topic, which is so painful and confusing.

ANSWER: One must turn to professional help, which uses a Torah approach that is based on the words of the Torah’s sages alone. There are several Rabbonim today who are intentionally involved with this cause.

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 עצלות - הדרכה מעשית - יום ד' 16:30
 אנציקלופדיה - מחשבה - יום ד' 20:30

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