

Exertion & Serenity In Torah Learning



Torah in Eretz Yisrael vs. Torah in Egypt

The first of Yaakov's sons to go down to Egypt was Yosef HaTzaddik. Yosef epitomizes *kedushah*, *Yesod*, to be exceptionally careful about guarding the *Bris* between one and Hashem. The *Arizal* says that the entire descent to Egypt was for the higher purpose of fixing the damage caused by the sin of Adam HaRishon, in which the *Bris* became damaged. Yosef was the first to go down to Egypt, so that the *tikkun* could begin.

In Egypt, the labor was with *choimer* and *levainim*, “mortar and bricks.” Besides for the simple meaning of this, the mortar and bricks also applied to them on an inner level (which we will soon explain). Chazal said that “Hashem, Yisrael and the Torah are one” (*Zohar Achrei Mos 73a*). We are “one” with the Torah, and therefore when we were exiled to Egypt, the Torah joined us in exile. But the Torah which Yaakov learned in Eretz Yisrael was not the same Torah that the people had in Egypt. In Egypt, the people were afflicted with *avodah koshoh*, difficult labor, of *choimer* and *levainim* – and in the inner sense, this means that it was harder for them to understand the Torah during their exile in Egypt. It needed a lot of *ameilus* (exertion) in order to understand. At Har Sinai, when the spirit of impurity became removed from us, we were elevated and we received a new level of understanding which enabled us to understand the Torah clearly. But in Egypt, we had the difficult labor of the “bricks and mortar”, meaning that it was very difficult to learn Torah there.

There is a *chitzoniyus* and a *pnimiyus*, an external and internal layer, to learning the Torah. The external layer to our learning is the kind of Torah we have during this exile, which requires great exertion to understand. But the level of Torah that we will receive in the future will not require any exertion to understand. and it will be total *menuchah* (serenity).

Chazal said that “Everyone agrees that on Shabbos, the Torah was given.” This

hints that the Torah we received at Har Sinai was a Torah of total *menuchah*, a Torah that represents Shabbos. Egypt was the root of all our exiles - and “Egypt” is still taking place today. We still have the *avodah koshoh*, difficult labor, in learning Torah – when we exert ourselves in it and we have a hard time understanding our learning. There are many *mitzvos* that are *zecher l’yetzias mitzrayim* (to remember the exodus from Egypt), and this is not simply to remember Egypt, but because it is still our *avodah* today to leave Egypt! We have to continuously leave Egypt. It is not about remembering the past, it is about the present. The redemption from Egypt wasn’t complete, and we have to complete it, by doing the *mitzvos* that are *zecher l’yetzias mitzrayim* so that we can keep remembering how we need to leave behind “Egypt.” Since we didn’t totally leave “Egypt” yet, we still have its difficult labor – the difficulty in understanding the Torah. However, on the other hand, we aren’t totally in Egypt either, because we did receive the Torah at Har Sinai. So one hand, we have with us the Torah that joins us in exile, which requires difficult labor to understand, and we also have the level Torah of the future (which we received at Har Sinai), which doesn’t require exertion.

If a person doesn’t exert himself in Torah, he will not understand the Torah. But on the other hand, a person also needs *menuchah* when he learns Torah. Therefore, we cannot look at Torah learning as just exertion and hard work. We need to also gain *menuchah* in our Torah learning. The *menuchah* in Torah is the inner point of the Torah which our soul needs to yearn for. We are now in exile, and we cannot have total *menuchah* yet. But Shabbos is a resemblance of the World To Come, and therefore Shabbos can give us a glimpse of *menuchah*.

This does not mean *chas v’shalom* that a person should not work hard at his learning. Rather, *menuchah* means that we need to become more **connected** to our Torah learning, to find serenity in the Torah that we learn – as it is written by the blessing given to Yissocher, **וירא מנוחה כי טוב**, “And he saw that serenity was good”, meaning that a person finds his serenity in the Torah when he **connects** himself to the Torah.

If we truly connect to Torah, the Torah reveals its secrets to us. The Torah is called the *aishes chayil* to the Jewish people, because just as the nature of a wife is to reveal her secrets to her husband, so does the Torah reveal to us its secrets – that is, when we **connect** and deeply attach ourselves to it.

Thus, when we exert ourselves in learning the Torah, it should not just be for

the sake of working hard at it. There is more to it. True exertion in learning is to learn Torah with dedication to the Torah, to learn it with all our energy, to become “one” with the Torah, and then we can become like a *maayan hamisgaber* (a “mighty wellspring”) in Torah, which is when we exert ourselves in learning with all our strength, with *mesirus nefesh* (sacrificing) for the Torah. We must “kill ourselves over the Torah” (as the Rambam writes), but eventually, we must also come to the point in which we are finding our *menuchah* in the Torah, where we are finding our Torah as our source of serenity.

The days of Shovavim are days that are meant to repair the damage done to the *Bris Kodesh*. These are days which we can essentially complete our redemption from Egypt, to totally leave all traces of Egypt behind. We should first realize what our exile is, and then we can know how to get out of it. If not for the damage done to the *Bris Kodesh*, our thoughts would always be pure and we would never have sinful thoughts. We wouldn’t need to exert ourselves in Torah learning, because our soul would be so connected to Torah that we wouldn’t need to try so hard to get involved in it. Chazal said “Hashem, Yisrael and the Torah are one” - we need to feel that we are “one” with the Torah, and when we feel one with the Torah, our thoughts will be purified. We will then be able to become a *maayan hamisgaber* in our Torah learning.

When our comprehension in learning is being held back from us, it is because our thoughts aren’t being guarded enough. All of us experience hardship in learning for this reason. Ever since the first time the *Bris Kodesh* became damaged, the purity of our thoughts have become affected, and we can’t fully understand the Torah as a result. But we can access the kind of Torah that we received at Har Sinai, in which we were able to fully understand the Torah.

What does it mean to do *teshuvah* [during *Shovavim*]? It means that we must return to the inner point in the Torah, to reach *menuchah* through learning Torah. The *Maharal* says that during exile, the Torah is spread all over the place and we need to gather it together. A person has to learn a *sugya* (section of Gemara) in one *masechta* (tractate) and then he has to learn a different *sugya* in another *masechta*, in order to complete his understanding. That is the Torah of this exile, the Torah is spread out everywhere, and it isn’t concentrated into any one place. We should exert ourselves in learning, but at the same time, we also need to aspire to reach *menuchah* in our Torah learning.

Besides for physical exertion in learning, we need to realize the depth of our

exile, which is that the Torah is in exile. Because the Torah is in exile, the Torah is scattered all over the place (as the *Maharal* explains) and that is why we need to exert ourselves so much to understand it. We need to taste the *menuchah* of Torah, and we can taste it through Shabbos. If we properly experience Shabbos, which is a resemblance of the World to Come, then we will have some understanding of *menuchah*. If we connect to the *menuchah* of Shabbos, we will gain the “Torah that was given on Shabbos” – a Torah of total *menuchah*.

If a person wants to see if he's leaving the Egyptian exile, he should see how connected he feels toward the Torah. If a person truly dedicates his mind towards learning Torah, as much as his energy allows him to – then he essentially leaves this exile, and he enters into the inner point of Torah – the *menuchah* of Torah. May we be *zocheh* to exert ourselves fully in our Torah learning, with all our energy, and from that, we should strive to reach the *menuchah* found in the Torah.

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