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Dikduk Chaveirim: Understanding Others

With the help of Hashem, we are approaching Shavuot, the day of the giving of the Torah.

One of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah, the *Mishnah* says, is through “*dikduk chaveirim*” – to examine the way of how our friends think when we learn Torah with others.

We will try to understand more what this concept is.

Chazal tell us that no two friends think alike. Every person has a different way of thinking. We all have a different and unique kind of *daas*; the Sages say, “Just as all faces are not equal, so are all *de’os* (opinions) not equal.”

The concept of *dikduk chaveirim* is that we have to get used to others’ thinking, besides for our own thinking. We need to come to understand how others think. It is for us to come out of how we are used to thinking, and come to understand an opposite view of how we are used to thinking.

This is a way of how to prepare for the Torah. Simply, this is because without a *chavrusa*, we can’t learn properly, because when we learn without a *chavrusa*, we are off-base and we make mistakes in learning the Torah.

The Power To Deal With Opposition

But the deeper understanding of *dikduk chaveirim* is as follows.

The Torah contains in it both positive and negative commandments. We must come to accept all of the Torah commandments – not just the positive commandments, but the negative commandments.

“*I am Hashem your G-d*”, the first commandment, represents all of the positive commandments. The second commandment, “*And you shall have no other gods before Me*”, was a negative commandment, and it is the root of all the negative commandments in the Torah.

In our soul, we have two powers. We have a power to accept the positive commandments, the *mitzvos*. But we also have a power to accept the negative commandments – to avoid the *aveiros*. The first power is known as the power of “*chiyuvi*”, to make use of positive concepts. The second power is called “*shelilah*” – to be able to deal with “negative” concepts.

What exactly is the power of “*shelilah*” in our soul? It is an ability in us to accept something that opposes us; to nullify ourselves. Just like we have to perform positive actions, so do we need to make use of the opposite power – to deal with something that negates us. We have an ability to deal with what opposes us, and the way we can do this is by nullifying ourselves to what opposes us.

The two root commandments of the Torah were “*I am Hashem your G-d*”, as well as “*And you shall have no other gods before Me.*” They are both equally important. On one hand, we have all the *mitzvos* to keep, and this is represented by the *mitzvah* of “*I am Hashem your G-d.*” At the same time, we also have to avoid negative actions, and this is represented by “*And you shall have no other gods before Me.*”

How do we keep the negative commandments? It is by **nullifying** ourselves [to the will of Hashem]; to nullify our pull towards materialistic desires of this world. When we nullify our desires more and more, we build our power of “*shelilah*” – we are able to deal with negativity.

But a deeper way to acquire the power of “*shelilah*” is through learning the Torah. The entire Torah is contained in the first two commandments, and therefore, we can acquire the power of “*shelilah*” (self-nullification) through learning the Torah.

Happiness When We Learn Torah

When a person learns Torah, he usually aspires to acquire more and more knowledge of Torah. But this leads to a problem: he never rejoices in what he has learned until then. He always wants more and more Torah – and he is never happy with what he has learned so far. The way to counter this imbalanced idealism is to **nullify** yourself. Realize how happy you can be by the fact that you’ve already been *zoche* to learn so much Torah.

The *Mishnah* says, “Who is happy? One who is happy with his lot.” The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that even in our *ruchniyus* spirituality, we must be happy with our lot. Although we must have aspirations to grow more in our *ruchniyus*, we must also be very happy with what we have gained until now.

The Torah which you have learned so far has become a part of you! Realize this and be happy about this.

If we are happy with what we have gained thus far in our *ruchniyus*, why should we aspire to grow more? And if we need to do more, how can we be happy? But the answer to this is that we need both perspectives at once. On one hand, we need to be happy with our spiritual gains thus far, but at the same time, we must also aspire for more and more spiritual gains.

How do we come to terms with this paradox? How are we able to both be aspiring and content at the same time? If someone’s perfect, then he has nothing to aspire to. If he doesn’t know a thing in Torah, he has to aspire for more, so how can he be happy?! What does it mean that one has to be *someach b’chelko* in his learning?

The answer is: “*Hashem and the Torah are one.*”^[1] [1] When a person learns Torah, he has to realize that Torah is “one” with Hashem; in other words, Hashem must be in the picture of his learning. A person can only be happy with learning Torah when he feels that Hashem through his learning.

At the same time, a person also has to feel that he needs to learn more Torah, and to realize that Torah is endless.

The Balance Between Aspirations and Inner Happiness

If a person only focuses on his happiness and he never aspires, he won't grow, yet if he learns a lot and he is never happy, he will never feel the happiness of learning. We need both perspectives at once in our learning – to be happy with our Torah learning, yet we still aspire for more growth.

The way to achieve this is by revealing the presence of Hashem in our learning.

For example, let's say a person has learned much of *Shas*. This won't be enough to make him happy with his Torah learning, because there is always more in Torah that he still hasn't learned yet. When a person only aspires to grow and he never reflects on what he has gained thus far, he will never be happy, no matter how much Torah he learns.

On one hand, the Torah is endless, and therefore we must keep aspiring to learn more and more Torah. On the other hand, because it is so endless, we must have some *bittul* – we must 'nullify' ourselves, and remain happy with whatever we have indeed learned thus far.

The way we prepare for Torah is not just through 'learning' the Torah on the intellectual level. It is to make a soul preparation for the Torah. The way we prepare for the Torah in our souls is to realize that we have a two-fold, paradoxical job to do: we must aspire to always learn more and more Torah, yet at the same time, we must be "happy with our lot" even in matters of our *ruchniyus*.

Dikduk Chaveirim: Getting Used To Contradictions In Life

This is the meaning behind *dikduk chaveirim*. When we get used to understanding others who think differently than us, it helps us deal with the concept of contradictions. Others' thinking contradicts how we think, and this helps us understand that our Torah learning contains a great contradiction – that on one hand, we aspire for more Torah, but at the same time, we are happy and content with our learning thus far. *Dikduk chaveirim* serves to get used to this contradictory concept – something that is necessary for our learning.

May we be *zoche* to prepare for the Torah in this way.

[1] [2] Zohar

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