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Less Pleasure

There are 48 ways to acquire the Torah, which are also 48 ways of how we can *prepare* for the Torah. Let us study one of them: “less pleasure.”

The words of Chazal are well-known: “Eat bread dipped in salt and water in a cistern, and live a life of suffering.” Let us ask a very simple question. Are we meant to suffer on this world, or to enjoy our life?

On one hand, Chazal are saying that one needs to live a ‘life of suffering’. But can a person learn Torah like this? Can a person ever be happy if his life is full of pain...?

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes in the beginning of the sefer, “A person was not created except to bask in the pleasure of Hashem.” This makes our question even stronger: we were created for pleasure! If so, why do Chazal say that one must live a life of suffering? Pleasure is not just for *Gan Eden* and *Olam HaBa* (the World To Come). The *Mesillas Yesharim* is telling us that even on this world, we were created to have pleasure.

Which makes our question even stronger.

What Is Real Pleasure?

Let us ask another question, a different question. Does anyone ever taste even a moment of true pleasure – “*oneg*”?

People who hear this wonder what “*oneg*” is; “What difference does it make to me if I have “*oneg*” or not? As long as my meals are good each day, that’s fine for me.”

People get their enjoyment from good food and all kinds of other physical desires of this world. When people lose interest in one kind of physical desire, they seek a new kind of physical pleasure, and they move on between pursuing different pleasures.

It is our very nature to seek pleasure. But how should we use our nature to seek our pleasure? We all need pleasure, and the only question is, *what kind of pleasure* we are having.

If someone tries to live without pleasure in his life, either this mean that he’s on a sublime level and he learns Torah totally *lishmah* (for pure motives) – or, it means that he’s living a very wrong kind of

life. It is impossible to live without pleasure! Anyone who does so is suffering, and not only that, he won't be able to live a life of Torah.

So what does it mean that we must live a 'life of suffering'?

Responsibility Vs. Pleasure

If a person has no pleasure in what he does, what will happen? He will lose interest, and he won't do it. If he's not enjoying his Torah learning, he won't learn Torah. If he's not in the mood of *davening Shacharis* in the morning, he won't *daven*.

But we know that a person has to *daven* and learn Torah, whether he's in the mood or not, because it is our obligation. This is one part of life: we have to do things even when we don't enjoy it. We are able to do things even without enjoyment, and we must be able to pull ourselves together and fulfill the Torah's obligations (i.e. learning and davening), even when we don't enjoy it.

But the other side of our life is our need for pleasure. We need to develop pleasure also, so that we won't lose interest in what we do. Someone who is level-headed will know where to get real pleasure from, so that he won't lose interest in the obligations of the Torah that are upon him.

So on one hand, we have to learn Torah and do all the *mitzvos* - whether we have pleasure in it or not. But at the same time, we need to uncover pleasure in life. And it has to be a constant kind of pleasure.

When There Is No Pleasure

When a person doesn't have pleasure in his Torah learning, he might be able to force himself to learn Torah for a few years, but then one day, he might suddenly decide to stop learning and seek a job.

Often a person will claim that he's doing it for *parnassah* (livelihood) reasons: "I have to support my family." But the real reason is because he had no source of real pleasure in his life; he had no pleasure in his Torah learning. Therefore, he looks for a job - hoping to find his pleasure there.

That's what happens to a person who lives without pleasure.

Real Pleasure - Forming A Deep Connection With Torah and Mitzvos

How indeed can we get real pleasure in our Torah learning and *mitzvos*?

We all recognize what superficial pleasure is. A person enjoys good food, or from using any of his five senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, etc. But real pleasure is inner pleasure, pleasure that's *inside* yourself. The *Rambam* says that all pleasure is found within the soul of man, not from anywhere on the outside. Real pleasure comes from being connected to Torah learning and to the *mitzvos*.

So a person has to be able to identify what he feels deeply connected to. We all have things we are connected to; we feel connected with our friends and family, etc. Make a list of whatever you feel deeply connected to on this world, in order of preference. This will help you get to know where you're mainly deriving pleasure from.

The more you are connected to something, the more pleasure you will have in it. The less you are connected to something, the less pleasure you have in it.

This world's pleasures are referred to by the *possuk* [in *Mishlei*], "*Stolen waters are sweet.*" But real

pleasure, pleasure of our soul, is when we are truly *connected* to the pleasure, as opposed to a passing feeling.

What is “Oneg Shabbos”?

To give a clear example: We have a *mitzvah* to have *oneg Shabbos* (pleasure on Shabbos). What is *oneg Shabbos*? Does it mean to have good food?

We enjoy good food. But is that what ‘*oneg Shabbos*’ is? If you would have that same good food on Sunday, it would be just as good. So what does the good food have to do with Shabbos..?

The true meaning of “*Oneg Shabbos*” is to enjoy “Shabbos” *itself*. Is there anyone who can say that he derives enjoyment on Shabbos just from the very fact that it is Shabbos?

Torah and *mitzvos* can be real pleasure to us. But sadly, a person can very well be living his life always learning Torah and always doing all the *mitzvos*, while having never experienced true pleasure in his Torah learning, in his *mitzvos*, in Shabbos.

Feeling Alive From Our Torah Learning

The Torah was given to us by Hashem, and we accepted it. The Torah was given on Shabbos, a time of *oneg*\pleasure. We received the Torah amidst pleasure.

Without this, we wouldn’t be able to learn Torah our whole life, because we would be missing pleasure. We wouldn’t be able to hold up that long.

Every person has connection in his life – to his parents, to his friends, with his family. The connection we need to have with Torah must be constant.

When a person is in *yeshivah*, he needs to ask himself each year (when it comes Shavuos time) if his connection to the Torah has grown deeper than those connections.

We miss our friends and family when we don’t see them. Do we miss the Torah when we don’t learn it? When it comes *Bein HaZemanim*, do we miss learning and wish we could be sitting and learning it as much as we do during *yeshiva*...?

If we are truly connected to the Torah, our pleasure in it will grow, and we will live a life of happiness.

When people aren’t happy, it might be because of various problems: “I don’t have a good *chavrusa*”, etc. But one can still be happy in spite of his problems - if he feels a deep connection to Torah. And this does not mean that he’s happy over the mere fact that he “sits and learns” the Torah. The happiness one must come to feel is: that he feels truly and **deeply connected** to the Torah.

This gives a person a constant source of vitality for his whole life, even when he goes through troubles. It fills him with a happiness that cannot be taken away by any problem.

The Secret of Being A ‘Masmid’

How many hours a day does a person have to learn Torah for? Every moment, as the *Rambam* writes. What is the reason for this? If you tell anyone that you have to learn every second, he will look at you as if you’re crazy; to learn Torah every second?! Sure, there are times of the day when we learn, but every second...? Torah learning is really “every second” because it is a soul kind of connection.

Our soul has to be connected to Torah learning, and then it will constantly find pleasure in it. We

recognize that our body needs constant air in order to live, and that every second, we must breathe in or out. We all need to eat in order to live. Our soul also needs to be sustained. We need to feel our soul's hunger, and then we will seek to feed it, all the time, with Torah learning.

Know Your Personal Reason Of Why You Learn

Everyone here [in this audience] is *zoche* to be sitting and learning Torah. Why is each person sitting here and learning? Everyone has their own answer.

But a person needs to ask himself: "Why do I, personally, learn Torah?"

Of course, one has to learn Torah even when he's not in the mood, because Hashem commanded us to. But let's say Hashem wouldn't command you to learn Torah. Would you still learn Torah?

The *Avos* learned Torah even though Hashem didn't command them to. So there is more to Torah learning than just the fact that we are commanded by Hashem to learn Torah.

First one should clarify through the teachings of Chazal about all the reasons why we need to learn Torah: **1)** Because Hashem commanded us to; because it will give us a great reward in *Olam HaBa*; **2)** to refine our *middos*; **3)** to know *halachah l'maaseh*, **4)** to be saved from the evil inclination.

All of these reasons are true, but in addition to this, each person has to also find his personal reason of why he learns Torah. Even if we would be guaranteed to have *Olam HaBa* in the next world, be saved from my *yetzer hora*, etc. and have all these gains, he must ask himself: "Would I still learn Torah?"

If a person learns Torah, let's say, because it saves him from the *yetzer hora* - is that the only reason that he learns Torah? This should not be the only reason why a person learns Torah. A person needs to have pleasure in his learning, to feel that he gets his life from it.

Know why you **have** to learn - and after that, figure out why **you** learn. If you feel that you learn *only* because you have to, you need to uncover pleasure in your learning.

Replacing Unhealthy Pleasure With Real Pleasure

A person cannot survive life if he only lives a life of suffering for the Torah. If he takes the words of Chazal literally and only eats bread and water, can he live like this? Now that we have clarified that this isn't possible [unless a person really enjoys his learning and he can therefore handle pain] we can add on the following point.

People often become idealistic and try to work on giving up their physical desires (*taavos*). This is very common with *Baalei teshuvah*, who will immediately decide to give up all their physical desires right away - and then find themselves in trouble. It backfires. It doesn't work, because if you don't have a source of pleasure in your life, you won't be able to survive. If a person gives up his physical desires, he needs to uncover a source of pleasure from spirituality, or else his plan will backfire.

When a person goes to learn Torah, he must realize that he is going to receive his vitality.

This does not mean that one has to seek pleasure 24/7 in his learning and if he feels that he's not enjoying it, he shouldn't learn...*chas v'shalom!* What we mean is that one has to make sure that the general plan in his life is to have pleasure in Torah learning and *mitzvos*.

Deprivation Doesn't Work When You Don't Have Pleasure

In these days of preparing for Shavuos, we must also reflect about the following.

Another of the 48 *kinyanim* is “less sleep”. The *Rambam* says that we need 8 hours of sleep a night. The *Vilna Gaon*, though, would sleep for only 3-4 hours a night. Who do we follow – the view of the *Rambam*, or the view of the *Vilna Gaon*?

(Every person needs a different amount of sleep at night.)

The answer is that a person has to sleep according to the amount of clarity he will have in his learning the next day. If a person cuts back on some of his sleep because he wants to increase his time of Torah learning – as Chazal say that one should get less sleep over the Torah – if he cannot think clearly the next day when he learns, he is acting incorrectly. If any amount of sleep will take away from his clarity in learning the next day, he needs that amount of sleep.

Connecting to Torah doesn't mean “sitting and learning.” Nor is it about “talking” in learning all the time. Of course, we must sit and learn and talk about learning, but it has to emanate from **a connection we feel** towards our learning.

Mind and Heart Connection To Torah

This is because we need to both feel an **emotional** connection to our learning, as well as to have a **clear mind** in our learning.

If a person sleeps less so he can get in more time of Torah learning - but he's not learning with enough clarity as a result of being tired, or he's not getting vitality from his learning - this is not called having a 'deep connection' with Torah. It's more important to make sure you feel deeply connected to learning than to put in more hours of learning and not get vitality from it.

So if getting more sleep will help you learn better, you should definitely get the right amount of sleep. When a person learns Torah with an unclear mind, he can't get vitality from it.

There were some *Gedolim* who slept little and were able to think clearly, but the majority of us cannot do this.

Preparing For Shavuos

We are approaching Shavuos. To prepare, we need to put in more time to learning, but more importantly, we have to make sure that our connection to learning is getting deeper. And when next year Shavuos comes (if Moshiach isn't here yet), we should feel an even deeper connection to the Torah.

To summarize: We need only minimal physical discomfort when it comes to learning, and we need mostly pleasure in our Torah learning.

May we be *zoche* to connect ourselves deeply to the Torah and doing the *mitzvos*, to find pleasure in it – and to live a life of pleasure and vitality from that.