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“Less Laughter” - Avoiding The Negative Trait of Leitzanus\Mockery

One of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah is through “less laughter.”

In order to get something, we need to acquire it. We own a table by purchasing it with our own money. How do we acquire the Torah? One of the ways is through “less laughter” – we have to be serious, and we need to avoid being frivolous.

Why is it that being frivolous prevents a person from acquiring the Torah? In order to know the answer, we need to make the following deep reflection.

“Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” The Torah is Hashem’s wisdom, and He used it to create the world. *“All of them You made with wisdom.”* Everything in Creation contains wisdom, since everything comes from Torah. So when a person laughs at something and makes light of something, he’s basically saying that there is no wisdom to be found in the thing he is making fun of. This is the depth of the negative trait of *leitzanus*, mockery.

It is not only the Torah which is wisdom. All of Creation contains wisdom, and therefore, a person shouldn’t be lightheaded with how he views anything in Creation.

Respect For Creation

Let’s say a person is walking in the street and he sees a cigarette butt on the ground. What does he think? Is there any wisdom to be found in such a thing? There is really wisdom in everything in Creation – in the smallest blade of grass, and even in a pile of garbage! This is because all of Creation is filled with the wisdom of Hashem.

The only reason why a person doesn’t view these things as wisdom is because he’s not seeing it through the lens of Torah. When a person sees Creation through the lens of Torah, he sees how everything was created by Hashem through the Torah, and therefore he sees wisdom in everything there is.

Respect For Your Self

The Chofetz Chaim ruled that it is prohibited for one to say *lashon hora* (gossip) about oneself. The depth behind this *halacha* is because it is forbidden for a person to belittle himself, for he was created in the image of Hashem (*b’tzelem elokim*).

When a person makes fun of himself and belittles himself – due to his various deficiencies and weaknesses that he recognizes in himself - then he is denying the fact that Hashem created him with these deficiencies; he is denying his *tzelem elokim*. If a person would feel that he is a *tzelem elokim*, created by Hashem – he wouldn't come to make fun of himself.

How To View The Other Nations of the World

It's not a good thing, then, when people have the habit of making fun of other people. People often like to make fun of people from other countries, but this is not a good trait. Belittling other people for the way they look and the way they act is denying that these people are a "*tzelem elokim*" (in the image of G-d).

Hashem created all the seventy nations of the world, and each of them has their nuances, and He created them all for His honor. "*All of it is called in My Name, I created it for My glory.*" Somehow, each creation of Hashem serves to increase His honor; we must be aware of this. All the nations of the world are all people who are created with a "*tzelem elokim*".

So before you make fun of them, remember Who created them.

Avoid The Trait of Mockery

We are describing here a whole different change in perspective to have in life.

Most of the conversations in the world today are frivolous and involve some kind of mocking of others. People are often poking fun at others, on a constant basis. This is really unrefined behavior that goes unnoticed and it has become acceptable, but it is really not acceptable. It comes from a lack of recognition that Hashem created this entire world. It is a form of *leitzanus* (mockery), an evil trait.

The trait of *leitzanus*\mockery is, in essence, the very antithesis to Torah! When a person is frivolous and he uses the power of speech in an idle way, this is the very opposite of Torah. Torah requires seriousness in order to learn it.

When a person grows used to making fun of people, even if he was always learning Torah and doing all the mitzvos, he grows more and more distant from the Torah, with the more he belittles others in Creation. The Torah requires trepidation and awe in order to learn Torah. Mockery makes us light-headed and takes away from our seriousness, which eventually has a detrimental effect on our seriousness towards learning.

Seriousness is called "*koived rosh*" in Hebrew – to have a "head" that "bears weight." The word '*rosh*' comes from the word '*raishis*', beginning. In other words, a person needs to see the 'beginning' of each thing in Creation, and this gives him a *rosh*\head. The beginning of each thing has a Source who created it: Hashem. So when a person recognizes that it is Hashem Who created everything, he gains *koived rosh*, a sense of seriousness.

Answering In The Phone In Middle Of Learning

People attribute importance to things that aren't important, and this also comes from a result of having gotten used to the concept of *leitzanus*\mockery. When people get used to attributing importance to things that oppose Torah, those things will become more important to the person than his Torah learning.

For example, a person is learning Torah his phone rings, and he immediately jumps to answer it.

How can this be? Where does this lack of seriousness towards his learning comes from? Why are people so quick to interrupt their learning? It's all because the person is already used to idle things from beforehand, and he comes to think that unimportant matters are really important. Therefore, when the phone rings, he considers the phone to be more important than his learning.

Seeing All of Creation As Hashem's Wisdom

We will try to understand better this concept. Why did Hashem create the world? He created it all so that we can recognize Him. What is the main way of how we recognize Him? It is through the Torah. How do we recognize Him through the Torah? How do we use the *Gemara* to recognize Hashem? How do we recognize Hashem better through learning *Halacha*?

When a person is born, does he naturally recognize Hashem? He should, but he doesn't. Why not? Because he didn't see the truth. For this reason, he needs to learn Torah, and this helps him see the truth.

Torah can return a person to the true way he can see Creation, and helps him recognize Hashem. Torah returns you to your true place – that is, if you are connected to the Torah that you learn.

But if a person is not really connected to the Torah he learns, then even if he knows a lot of Torah and learns it a lot, the Torah will not return him to his true place.

Finding a *shidduch* (spouse) is called *hashavas aveidah* (retrieving a lost item). Learning Torah is also a kind of *hashavas aveidah* – the person is returning his lost self to his true place, the Torah. Chazal say that "Avraham Avinu learned Torah from himself", and this shows us that a person can return to his true self when he recognizes his Creator.

When a person learns Torah, what is his perspective towards his learning? The audience here is currently learning *Maseches Pesachim* in this *yeshiva*. Let's say he is learning *Maseches Pesachim*, where he is learning about what the term "*kemach*"\flour is. He's learning about how a person can take flour and use it for the *mitzvah* of *matzah*. He takes something mundane in Creation and reveals the wisdom in it. In this way, he learns Torah in a way that it returns him to Hashem.

There are many mitzvos that involve seemingly mundane things. To give a few examples, we sanctify our ordinary clothing by avoiding *shaatnez*. We sanctify animals through the laws of *kashrus*. We take strings and make *tzitzis* out of it. We take our house, which is mundane, and sanctify it by placing a *mezuzah* on it. *The mezuzah* is not there just because we have a mitzvah to place it there. It sanctifies our entire house.

Everything in Creation can be returned to Hashem. It is all from His wisdom.

Therefore, now we can understand why we shouldn't make fun of things in Creation. Everything in Creation contains wisdom; nothing is to be mocked. If a person is truly connected to Torah he learns, he has this seriousness, and he won't mock other people.

More Examples of Breaches In Seriousness

When people learn in a *beis midrash* and chat, how can they do this?! In front of the holy *aron kodesh*, to sit and chat about who knows what? And to talk on a cellphone in a *shul*, in middle of learning?!

This is only because a person *isn't connected to the Torah* he learns, and therefore he gets used to attributing importance to things that aren't important. He is living a kind of life that is a total antithesis to a true life of Torah.

A person is *davening* and then as soon as he finishes davening, he talks to someone... how can it be that a second after he finishes davening he is already chatting? It's for the same reason.

The Voice of Hashem Is Everywhere

Shavuot is coming. If we really want to gain from it, we must look at reality as it is, and not mock anything in Creation.

When a person talks, where does his voice go? Where is Hashem's voice? It continues ever since we heard His voice at Har Sinai; it was "a great voice, which does not stop." Where did the voice go? It went into the Luchos, according to Chazal. Hashem's voice carved into the Luchos and formed the words in it; therefore, the voice of Hashem continues, through the Torah.

How can it be that a person is able to learn Torah in a country that's not Eretz Yisrael? In Eretz Yisrael, we have the air which makes people wise, but how are people able to learn Torah in an impure country like America? The answer is that everything that Hashem created was through His wisdom. Everything was created from the Torah, and therefore, even in America a person can learn Torah.

The voice of Hashem is still continuing, and for this reason, we are able to accept the Torah anew each year. There is a voice of Hashem in everything we see - even in the floor. Everything was created from Torah, but before the Torah was given, the Torah remained hidden and concealed. After the giving of the Torah, the Torah became revealed to Creation, and ever since then, each person has a mitzvah to learn Torah.

To work on this practically, when a person leaves the *beis midrash* and he's walking through the street, how does he view what he sees? He has to view it as all being the creation of Hashem.

Hashem gave us the Torah in the desert, not in Yerushalayim. Even though the main place of Torah is Yerushalayim - "*For from Zion comes forth Torah*" - Hashem chose to give it to us by Har Sinai, in middle of the desert. Why? There is no holiness by Har Sinai nowadays. The lesson was because even in the desert, there can be Torah. This is because the word of Hashem is found in everything, even in middle of the desert.

For this reason, even a person learning in a country outside Eretz Yisrael - even in a country like America - is able to learn Torah. Wherever we are, we can reveal Torah there. The Torah can be revealed everywhere, because Hashem's voice reaches everywhere in the world. All of Creation comes from Hashem, and we can reveal Hashem anywhere.

The Gemara, which is called Talmud Bavli, was written in Babylonia - the place where we were exiled to. This shows us that Torah can be revealed no matter where we are, even in the darkest places of exile.

Torah can be everywhere; it is not limited to any time or place. It is not either limited to any soul; even if you're tired at night and you don't feel like going to Daf HaYomi, you can still muster yourself and learn, not just because you have an obligation to learn Torah every day, but because Torah is not limited to certain situations. In any situation you are in, you are able to learn Torah.

When a person doesn't understand that the world was created by Hashem, he belittles things in Creation and doesn't see anything wrong with this kind of behavior. He doesn't see Creation as being Hashem's Creation.

When we learn Torah, we must understand that the Torah learning should fill our entire perspective on Creation, and not just when we are actually learning. Since the Torah fills the entire existence, we

must see all of Creation through the lens of Torah, and realize that all of Creation is created by Hashem.

Why is it that people are able to interrupt their learning for a mere phone call? How can it be that a person picks up his phone in the *beis midrash*, in middle of a *shiur*, and disturb everyone else's learning?! It is because he isn't really connected to the Torah. If a person would really be connected to Torah, he would never be able to disconnect from it.

May we merit to recognize Hashem from our learning, and that our Torah learning should fill our entire perspective towards Creation.

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