



## 48 Ways - 019 Less Sleeping (2) Using Our Intellect

### ***Less Sleep: Sharpening Our Mind***

One of the 48 *kinyanim* to acquire Torah is “less sleep.” Simply, this is because we need to lose some sleep in order to learn Torah well.

But the deeper meaning is that even while we are awake, we are kind of asleep, since our mind doesn’t always work properly; so when Chazal say to lessen our sleep in order to acquire Torah, they were referring to how we must make sure that we should not become sleepy in our minds, and therefore, we need to sharpen our mind.

### ***Do We Feel Affected From Learning Gemara?***

When a person learns Gemara, when he learns the words of Abaye and Rava – do the words affect him? When people want to become affected, they learn *mussar sefarim*. But what about the Gemara we learn – does it affect us?

The Vilna Gaon wrote that when a person learns Torah, he doesn’t need any medication to be healed from illness. The point of what he said was that when a person has Torah, he doesn’t even need the remedy of *mussar*.

When the *Mussar* movement began, there was a big argument throughout the *yeshivos* if the study of *Mussar* should be incorporated into the schedule of *yeshivah*. Some said that we don’t need *mussar*, because we have the Gemara to affect us.

There are people who complain that the Gemara doesn’t affect them, and that only *mussar* affects them. There are also those who go very extreme with such an argument, because they are a bit more emotional than others, and therefore they are following their heart’s emotions; they feel that learning Gemara has no effect on them, so they choose instead to learn *mussar* all day. Maybe they go to a *Daf Yomi shiur* at night to fulfill the *mitzvah* of “*Talmud Torah*”, and they learn some *halacha* every day also, but they choose not to learn Gemara at all. This is clearly very extreme behavior.

But even the others who don’t have this extreme problem will also need to ask themselves if learning Gemara is really affecting them.

### ***Utilizing Our Intellect***

It’s possible that a person is learning Gemara the entire day, yet his *seichel* (intellect) isn’t working.

A person who learns Torah a whole day – does his perspective on life and on the world change? Usually it does not. Chazal say that “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world” – the Torah is the way to view life. Yet, people often don’t see the world through the lens of Torah. Even people learning the entire day usually don’t have a more mature perspective on life than those who are working all day. It’s because their *seichel*/intellect isn’t being utilized enough.

The Gemara says that “If a person merits it, the Torah to him is like an elixir of life; if he doesn’t merit, the Torah becomes like deadly poison to him.” The Vilna Gaon explains that the Torah is like watering a plant. If the plant starts out as a regular seed, it nourishes the person and helps him blossom into a beautiful tree. But if the person contains any poisonous weeds, the opposite will happen – it furthers the growth of his poisonous weeds.

There are people who are learning Torah for many years, all day, yet their soul remains unaffected. If their intellect would only be working properly, they would mature in life. People might know Gemara very well, but they don’t always know what life is really about and how to live life correctly.

When we utilize our intellect, we see life through the lens of the holy intellect – through the intellect of Torah. Without making use of our intellect, it doesn’t make a difference if one works for a living or if he learns Torah all day – his Torah learning won’t affect him *at all*. Without utilizing the intellect, even if a person is immersed in learning Torah, his outlook on life is no better than someone who doesn’t learn Torah at all.

On the other side of the extreme, when people feel that learning *Mussar* is unnecessary, it’s because they view learning Gemara and learning *Mussar* as two separate things, and therefore they are disconnected.

### ***To Naturally Think In Learning***

What does it mean to use the intellect?

The question is if we are naturally thinking like the Torah or not, as a result of our learning. Is our intellect naturally working? That is the question.

We breathe in and out because it comes naturally to us, not because we have to think about it. What about our intellect – is it coming naturally to us? When we learn or when we say a *chaburah* (a short class delivered about a topic being learned in the Gemara), is it coming natural to us to use our intellect?

It’s not enough to *learn* the Torah. It’s possible a person is learning all day and even *thinking* in learning all day, yet it’s only because he knows that it’s a *mitzvah* to learn Torah and to fulfill *halacha*. But we are supposed to think as a nature. The Ramchal says that the “way of the wise is to always think wherever they are.”

If we utilize the potential of our intellect, we see things differently. We look at something and we naturally think about what it is.

Utilizing our intellect is not about finishing *masechtos* (tractates of Gemara). It’s about thinking more like the intellect of the Torah, and that this should come to us as a natural way to think.

When we have perspective of Torah *only* through *learning* Gemara (and never thinking about it when we aren’t learning it), this is not what it means to be a true *Talmid Chochom*! Maybe such a person will know a lot of Gemara, but he’s not a real *Talmid Chochom* yet. A real *Talmid Chochom* is someone who sees the world through the lens of Torah; someone who always thinks about everything in the world through the lens of Torah.

The barometer to measure this is: When you finish *first seder* in the morning, what are you thinking about as you leave the *beis midrash*? Are you naturally thinking about the Gemara – or do you have to force yourself to think about it...?

Of course, it's wonderful to get yourself to always think in learning, but you have to develop in yourself a kind of constant thinking about Torah that comes naturally to you, and not because it's "a *mitzvah* to always learn Torah."

The Rambam states that in essence, our holy *seichel* intellect is always at work. The Ramchal also writes that our intellect is constantly "yearning". The Vilna Gaon calls it *cheifetz hasichli*, "the intellect that desires." Our intellect is a part of ourselves that naturally wants to think; that is the true level of our intellect – when we **naturally** think, and not because we have to pressure ourselves to do so.

What we are saying here is is not an idea or a "nice *dvar Torah*" you hear...

What's the difference between the current generation and the previous generations, with regards to learning Torah? The new generation might know a lot of Torah (due to computers...) and have all kinds of new methods to improve memory, but it is very hard nowadays to find someone who is utilizing his intellect all the time. Someone can be learning Torah for a long time, yet he doesn't have any idea about what it means to be a *Talmid Chochom*.

### ***What To Aspire For In Your Learning***

What are our aspirations in Torah? If we go around and ask this question, we will get different answers. One person answers: "To know the entire Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi by heart." Another person answers: "To know every *halacha*". Another person answers: "To be clear in every Gemara we learn".

But the real answer should be: To be able to think naturally about Torah, and to not have to force ourselves to think about Torah!

This only exists by a person who forms an inner connection to the Torah, and it is rarely found in today's times. "Torah and Yisrael are one" – to always think in learning is to naturally think in learning, because we feel that we are one with it.

It's possible that a person might learn Torah a whole day, yet he never even thinks once into what he is learning; he's only learning because there happens to be a *sefer* in front of him.

The true way a *Talmid Chochom* looks is to make use of his intellect on a constant basis, and that is should come naturally to him. Torah learning is a constant *mitzvah*. It applies every second. Why? It is because we are meant to always use our intellect.

Some people are always learning Torah because they love to learn Torah; this is wonderful, and if only most people would be even like this. But the real, inner connection to have to Torah is to always think about it because it should be natural for us to always make use of our intellect.

When we make use of our intellect, our whole life will change. Otherwise, a person might always be learning Torah and constantly trying to produce *chiddushim*, but he never changes in his learning. He learns and learns and learns, but his learning never matures. (He remains complacent not only in his learning, but his situation of marital peace will also stay the same...) He doesn't have what to talk about in learning, because he keeps learning the same words of the *Rashba* and the same *Ritva*; he finds nothing invigorating about what he learns...there's nothing to talk about when he comes home...

"Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world." The Torah is really a way for us to see the world; when we use our intellect in Torah, we can see the world from it, which is a whole different perspective.

Chazal say that "The Torah protects a person even when he's not learning it." The depth of this is that

even when he's not learning, his intellect is still at work, and it will protect him even when an urge to sin enters him.

Why is it that people sin even when they are involved in learning Torah, and they often aren't that different from those who don't learn Torah at all? Why doesn't their Torah learning help them avoid a sin? It is because they haven't formed an inner connection to Torah, and therefore, their Torah learning is weak, and it doesn't protect them from sin.

### ***Immersing Our Minds In The Torah***

When a person wants to prepare for Shavuos, it's not enough to learn about the great importance of Torah by learning holy *sefarim* such as *Nefesh HaChaim (Shaar Daled)* and *Maalos HaTorah* in order to prepare for Shavuos. It's not about inspiring yourself. We have to change our perspective towards Torah.

This was always true, but nowadays, it applies even more so. Nowadays, the world is full of filthy perspectives about life that come from the street. When a person leaves the *beis midrash* and walks through the street, what happens to him? If he did not deeply connect to the Torah as he was learning it, he will become affected by the influences of the street. But if he has formed an inner connection to Torah, then even when he's in the street, he won't lose his connection to Torah. Because he sees the world through a lens of Torah.

Simply speaking, one can attain this by always making sure to be immersed in a deep Torah thought, such as to be immersed in the words of Reb Chaim, Reb Boruch Ber, or Reb Shimon Shkop, on the *sugya* he's learning. But it doesn't even have to be limited to this; as long as a person forms an inner connection to the Torah he learn [as we described here], he will automatically remain connected to the Torah even as he walks through the street.

Of course, some people have this very hard, due to all sorts of difficulties and worries they have in life. We are not saying that it isn't hard. We are rather describing here the inner kind of life that exists.

### ***To Become Truly Immersed In Learning Torah***

When was the last time someone had a dream at night about a *chiddush* in Torah? We dream about what we think every day. If someone thinks every day about Torah, he will naturally dream about it. If a person fantasizes by day, he'll dream about that at night too - his various fantasies. We learn for so many hours a day; if so, why is it that most people aren't dreaming at night about Torah...?

If anyone makes a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul-accounting), he will find that most of his day is not spent about really thinking into his learning.

(Of course, we have to strain our minds too when we try to learn Torah, and we do not mean to negate the simple and basic kind of exertion that one needs to have as he learns Torah. But what we mean is that a person usually doesn't *think* into his learning, and he's usually learning superficially, without thinking into it enough).

If a person wants to learn in a *beis midrash* all day, does he sit calmly the whole day in the *beis midrash*? He might be able to "sit and learn" all day, but often he feels anxious, wishing he could go out and talk on the phone. If he gets a phone call and he has to walk out of the *beis midrash* to answer the phone, he often lingers in the phone a lot more than he has to, and he finds it hard to pull away from his phone and return to his learning.

People often have a very hard time concentrating all day as they sit in the *beis midrash*. Is there anyone here who gets a phone call in the middle of his learning, and is prepared to quickly hang up as soon as he can and return to his learning? If we naturally think in learning, the phone ringing will bother us, because it disturbs our thinking.

How can it be that it has become normal for people to bring cellphones into the *beis midrash* and answer it while they are learning....?!

### ***Returning To The Way Things Used To Be Like***

The whole way of learning Torah today looks totally different than how it used to look like.

How do we change? That's a different question. But one thing is for sure: there is a whole different way that learning can look like, which we do not see today.

There are two big deterrents that the current generation faces. One major deterrent getting in our way are our various problems and difficulties that can bog us down. The other kind of problem we face - which is much more threatening - is that the whole way of learning Torah today looks totally different than what it used to look like.

This applies to any *kolel* and *beis midrash*; it doesn't matter where you learn. This is a problem that affects every place of Torah in the world.

We need to return to the way that learning Torah used to look like. We do not mean to increase our amount of hours that we learn; that would be wonderful too, but it's not what we mean. We mean that the whole way we approach our learning has to change from the way it looks like now.

### ***Utilizing Your Intellect: Uncovering Your Unique Way of Thinking***

When a person learns Torah, he's learning what it says in the Gemara; what is written in the Torah. But two people do not understand Torah in the same exact way. Chazal tell us that each person has his own way of understanding things. This shows us that each person has his own part in Torah which he needs to uncover - his own way of thinking in Torah.

Each Jew has his own unique root thinking when it comes to Torah, which he must discover.<sup>[1]</sup> [1] One can discover it through exerting himself in Torah, together with *davening* to Hashem for it.

We do not mean *chas v'shalom* for one to go overboard with this concept and become a *baal gaavah* (haughty person). A person should not uncover his unique way of thinking in order to increase his ego; this is surely not our intention here.

What we mean is that a person has to exert himself in Torah and uncover his unique way of thought in Torah. This has to be accompanied with *davening* to Hashem for it. A person has to try to get to his unique way of thinking in learning. (Again, let us emphasize that we do not mean for a person to become a *baal gaavah* with this!)

Exert yourself to clarify your own unique way of thinking in Torah. This is besides for the regular kind of exertion you need in learning to be clear in what you learn and to remember what you learn.

There are three kinds of *ameilus* (exertion) in learning we need to have - to try to understand the Torah, to try to remember it well, and to try to clarify the unique way in how you think. We are emphasizing here the third kind exertion in learning that we must uncover, which sharpens our intellect and helps us naturally think in learning all the time: to clarify the unique way of how **you**

think when it comes to learning Torah.

We each received a special part in Torah at Har Sinai. Every year, we each receive a new role in Torah to fulfill.

May Hashem merit us to know our level – to be clear how we our learning differs from the previous generations; and from that, to yearn to connect to the way of learning in the previous generations - and from that, we may be *zoche* to truly connect to the Creator.

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[1] [2] Refer to the author's Hebrew *sefer Da Es Machshavosecha* (דע את מחשבותיך), which has also been adapted into English as "*Getting To Know Your Thoughts*" at the Bilvavi website; refer to Chapters 02, 03, and 04.

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