Happiness and Rest is Natural

We are almost at the end of the Zeman, and I have heard that some people are already in the middle of Bein Ha’Zemanim. However, I have not personally seen that happening in our Yeshivah.

It is natural to want to rest. The Passuk in Bamidbar (10:33) states, “And they traveled from the mountain of Hashem.” Bnei Yisrael learned Torah at Har Sinai for quite some time after Matan Torah, and then they left. Chazal tell us that they were then punished, because they left the mountain quickly, like a child who runs out of school when school finishes. [See the Ramban’s commentary on the Torah there (on Passuk 35) and Tosfos on Shabbos (116a).]

These teachings are referring to the generation that received the Torah and saw Kriyas Yam Suf. They heard Hashem speaking at Matan Torah! Even so, when they were told that it was now time to leave Har Sinai, they did so like a schoolchild, and not with a heavy heart. This teaches us that it is simply a natural need for a person to rest.

Chazal do not tell us anywhere that they resisted learning in the least bit when they were learning Torah at Har Sinai. They enjoyed it immensely, and were totally devoted to their learning! However, when they left, they were happy that they learned, and they were happy to now be able to rest.

We find that Rashi comments on a different Passuk (ibid. 11:1) that when Bnei Yisrael traveled for three days straight, they complained about the difficulty in traveling. This is because people naturally like to rest, instead of working hard and traveling.

Torah Learning Even When Suffering

The Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:8) writes, that one is obligated to learn Torah whether he is poor, wealthy, healthy, suffering (i.e. unwell), young, or very old. He is obliged to set a time everyday and every night for learning Torah, as the Passuk in Yehoshua (1:8) states, “And you will think about it day and night.”

We see from here that one must learn, even when it is not easy to learn. While the Rambam lists issues regarding the person being healthy or not etc., he certainly also means if it is difficult to learn because one has to push himself to do so.

This is how a person acquires the crown of Torah. The Rambam (ibid. 3:6) states, that if a person learns Torah as he should and does not take his mind off Torah, he will merit having the crown of Torah. He should also not expect to be wealthy, as the way of Torah normally is (as stated by the Mishnah in Avos) to eat bread with salt, a measure of water, sleep on the floor, etc.

It is known that Rebbe Akiva Eiger said in his will, that people should only say about him after he dies, that he taught people Torah from the age of sixteen, despite great suffering. He was so sick that doctors viewed him as a walking miracle.

The truth is that he lived in the merit of the Torah that he learned. This is as the Passuk in Mishlei (10:27) states, “Fear of Hashem adds days.” However, he always viewed himself as being obligated to learn and teach Torah.

Torah Instead of Suffering

The Sharei Teshuvah (4:11) speaks about a person who has done the type of sins that require both repentance and suffering. This is as the Gemara in Yoma (86a) states, that serious sins that are punished normally with death or Kares require not just repentance and Yom Kippur to wipe them away, but also suffering.

He explains that such a person should perform Mitzvos that protect him from suffering. He says that Talmud Torah is the
best Mitzvah for such a person to immerse himself in, and it will be especially effective to stand in place of suffering if he learns Torah even when he is tired. This Torah learning is in place of any suffering he would have to otherwise endure.

In general, we know that Hashem sends good people suffering for their own good, in order that they should not have to go to Gehinnom to atone for their sins. This is one of the reasons why it is important to always have the attitude of “Gam Zu l’Tovah” – “This too is for the best,” as even if it does not seem like a good thing to us, Hashem does everything to us with our overall best interests in mind.

However, one can avoid this Heaven sent type of suffering if instead he learns despite being tired. This takes the place of any Heaven sent suffering he would have had to undergone. This is the great merit that a person has when learning Torah despite being tired.

Rebbi Akiva Eiger taught Torah despite suffering. This is perhaps the highest level of learning that one can achieve, and it is why he clearly merited having the crown of Torah.

**According to Our Abilities**

We have previously quoted the Mesillas Yesharim, who at the end of his Sefer states, that anyone can be a completely pious person. Even a working person who is constantly clinging to Hashem, can be as great as a person who is constantly learning Torah.

As long as a person serves Hashem to the best of his abilities, he can become a complete servant of Hashem who is holy and sanctified. If he learns Torah whenever he can, to the best of his abilities, and he clings to Hashem in general, he can be an extremely pious person.

People who learn Torah are holy! People do not speak about this, nor do they feel or think this, yet it is true.

The Nefesh Ha’Chaim (Shar Daled) quotes the Passuk in Mischlei (3:18), “Eitz Chaim Hee La’Machazikim Bah” – “It is a tree of life to those who cling to it.” He explains that this Passuk is a parable to a drowning person who sees a sturdy branch floating by. He will grab onto it with all of his might, and try to make sure that he will never let go until he is rescued!

This is the Torah in our world. It is a sturdy log that is thrown to us, and if he we hold onto it, we will be saved. We are only really alive when we are learning Torah and performing Mitzvos. This is the connection that we have to Hashem. If people let go of Torah and Mitzvos, and get involved in the pleasures of this world, they will unfortunately drown in these pleasures.

The Yetzer Hara is waiting constantly for us to let go of the Torah that we are clinging to, in order to throw all sorts of temptations at us. The only way we can avoid temptation, and thereby avoid Gehinnom, is if we cling to Torah constantly. This will fortify us and give us spiritual strength. Even if a person only learns Torah whenever he can, and the rest of the time he is clinging to Hashem while he is working or doing other things that his life situation mandates that he do, he will be saved from the temptations of the Yetzer Hara.

**We must constantly try to add another second of Torah learning, and another second of thoughts involving fear of Heaven. Anything that strengthens our spirituality, even for a second, is invaluable!**

It is well known that Rav Shach zt”l wrote in his will, that if people will dedicate one second of Mussar thoughts to the Aliyah of his Neshamah, he will be grateful. If a person commits to changing his ways after thinking things over for a few minutes, those few minutes could change the entire trajectory of his life!

**A High Level of Tefilah**

Let us speak about Tefilah. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 98:1) states, that the early pious ones would have such a high spiritual level of clinging to Hashem while they prayed, that it was almost as if their physicality was gone. They would reach a level close to prophesy. Many great people throughout the generations have prayed in a similar manner. They would not hear people who would be speaking to them while they were reciting Shemonah Esreh, and sometimes could not even feel anything during this time.

The Sefer Kuzari (3:5) writes, that when a pious person prays he will utilize all of his control over his body so that he is totally focused on his prayers. He will pray happily and with great alacrity. He will bow down when he is supposed to bow down, and he will sit when he is supposed to sit. He will
pray like a servant to his master, and not make any unnecessary motions with his hands. In short, he will be totally alert to his Tefilah, and will not pay any attention to anything else at all.

A true prayer will not be denied. We say in Shema Koleinu, “And from before You, our King, do not return us empty handed.” If when a person is praying, he truly realizes that he is standing before his King, his prayer will not be returned empty handed.

Great Spiritual Levels of the Righteous

The Chovos Ha’Levavos (Shar Cheshbon Ha’Nefesh ch.3) writes, that a person can become so righteous that he can see without using his eyes, and hear without using his ears! I know of stories regarding my brother, Rav Yaakov zt”l, where he knew what people had done behind closed doors and in private, and told them that they must repent for these sins. He knew these things, despite the fact that there was no natural way he could have known them. This is because he was on this high spiritual level.

It is told that Rebbi Akiva Eiger zt”l possessed this high spiritual level, and printed his Sefarim based on understandings that he received from Heaven while he was awake. There is a hint to this in the introduction of his Teshuvos. His son Rebbi Shlomo Eiger zt”l clarified that this is indeed what his father was hinting at, but he was not allowed to reveal the details of what had transpired.

Additionally, in his Teshuvos V’Chiddushim (ch.66), a letter is printed in which he basically admits to this Heavenly message that was sent to him during a Shabbos during the day, but says that he will not reveal the details in his lifetime.

I have heard that the Chazon Ish also once said that the Vilna Gaon came to him and spoke to him about two matters. One of them was a Torah topic, and the other he would not reveal. This is the high spiritual level that one can reach when he clings to Hashem constantly with Torah, Tefilah, Emunah, and Mitzvos.

Siyata Dishmaya

Whenever one learns Torah, increases his good Middos, or works on his Tefilah, he will receive Siyata Dishmaya in that area.

Rav Yissachar Meir zt”l, the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Ha’Negev, told me that he once went on a fundraising trip to a far-flung Jewish community where people were quite modern. They did not learn much Torah, but they had pity when they saw an old pious man who was collecting money for his Yeshivah. They therefore gave generously.

When he returned to this place one year later, he witnessed these same people engrossed in a Shiur on Gemara. He told me that it was clear to him that because they donated money to his Yeshivah, Hashem gave them Siyata Dishmaya in Torah learning. They therefore started to be exposed to Gemara, and were able to start learning Torah on a higher level.

Similarly, the more a person practices having good Middos, the more Hashem will give him Siyata Dishmaya to have good Middos. This is as the Mishnah in Avos (3:15) states, that everything is according to “Most of the actions.” The Rambam in Pirush Ha’Mishnayos explains that this means that habit forms our nature. Therefore, he says, if a person gives one thousand coins to charity at once, he will not develop a habit of giving. However, if he gives one coin to charity everyday for one thousand days, he will develop a nature to love performing acts of charity and kindness. He will also receive Siyata Dishmaya to become a more giving and kind person.

The Chesed of Avraham Avinu

Avraham Avinu sat outside on an extremely hot day, the third day after his Bris Milah, and waited to see if anyone was in the area, in order to invite them into his tent. Hashem made it even hotter, in order that nobody should bother Avraham. However, when He saw that Avraham was pained by the lack of guests, Hashem sent three angels in the guise of people to visit him. This was in order that Avraham should have the pleasure to serve Hashem by having guests. When Avraham saw them and they accepted his invitation, he ran to prepare a great feast for them.

The Avos D’Rebbi Nasan (ch.7) states, that Iyov questioned why he deserved his suffering because he was constantly hosting guests. This is as the Passuk in Iyov (ch.31) states, “My door to guests I will open.”
The Avos D’Rebbi Nasan continues, that Hashem answered Iyov by saying he did not reach the level of Avraham Avinu. This is because Iyov used to ask each guest what type of food they were used to, and used to serve them that food, whether it was of low or high quality. Avraham would always prepare a great feast for his guests, and did not ask them what they usually ate.

We especially see this by the angels, as Avraham slaughtered a calf for each one of the angels, in order that each of them could have the special delicacy of a tongue of calf with mustard. This was the especially high level of Chesed performed by Avraham Avinu!

May we merit having some part of the spirituality mentioned above, in Torah, Tefilah, and Chesed.

With Heartfelt Prayers

Every single positive spiritual attribute can be improved through prayers. We mentioned other ways to improve various attributes above. However, if a person truly prays from the bottom of his heart regarding his great desire to improve aspects of his service to Hashem, his prayer will certainly be answered. [It is well known that Rav Yisrael Salanter zt”l said that a true prayer for spirituality is never left unanswered. Rav Yisrael even asked his students to pray for him that he should succeed in his service to Hashem.]

It is known regarding many great people that they succeeded to become great because of their many heartfelt prayers to improve in their service to Hashem. There were many young people who loved Torah and had a high level of Emunah, who kept praying until they indeed succeeded to become great.

In the introduction to the Sefer Hisragshus Ha’Lev, a story is related regarding a caretaker of a shul in Chevron. Once, while cleaning up the shul, he heard a young voice crying out from behind the curtain of the Aron Ha’Kodesh of the shul. He could tell that a young boy stood between the curtain and the Aron, and was weeping copious tears and reciting numerous supplications.

When the boy was finished, the caretaker realized that it was young Hershele. “Hershele,” he asked, “Are your parents ill? Is that why you were crying?” “No, Baruch Hashem,” he replied, “They are all healthy.” Hershele then tried to leave quickly, but the caretaker’s curiosity got the better of him. “If your parents are not sick, why were you crying like that?”

Hershele was slightly uncomfortable, but he answered the older man’s question. “I just was asking Hashem to open my heart to his Torah!” This little boy eventually grew up to become the great Rav Hirsh Michel Shapira zt”l.

This prayer was answered because it was said wholeheartedly, and with great devotion. If a person prays that he wants to be pious, and he truly feels lacking, Hashem will certainly answer such a prayer. Hashem will give him Siyata Dishmaya in every area that he requests.

May we all merit this special Siyata Dishmaya!

Dedicated by the Kroll Family, Los Angeles

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