

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

SUCCESS IN TORAH STUDY

The following are a number of letters written by the Rebbe to bochurim from various yeshivos, in response to queries regarding overcoming hardships, both personal as well as those presented by the environment, that stand in the way of devoting oneself to learning Torah diligently.

DETERMINATION

In this letter the Rebbe encourages a bochur who was feeling downcast from his perceived lack of ability in learning. The Rebbe provides some concrete ideas on how to rise above such worries, and instead focusing on continuing to grow and learn.

In answer to your letter dated the fifteenth of Shevat, the Rosh Hashanah for trees, which also has a bearing on people, as the *posuk* says “כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה” – “A man is like a tree in the field.” A person has certain areas within himself which are like a tree. Just as a tree grows from a seed to a sapling and from a sapling to maturity, in these areas as well one is supposed to build on the education they received when they were younger; not to change the actual substance of these activities, but simply to make them grow.

In your letter you bemoan the fact that your intellectual capabilities are not on par with those of your friends in yeshiva, causing you to feel downcast and dejected, and this brings you to the question: what is the ultimate purpose?

The story of Rabbi Akiva (Avos Dirabbi Nosson 6) is well-known: he started to learn Torah at forty years of age. The push that ultimately gave him the impetus to take such a drastic step was when he saw that small drops of water were steadily dropping on a rock, and had eventually worn a hole in it, as the *posuk* says (Iyov 14:19) “אֲבָנִים שֶׁחָקוּ מֵיִם” (“Stones which the water eroded”). He eventually became the leader and teacher of the entire Jewish people, with thousands and tens of thousands of pupils. In fact, *Chachamim* tell us (Sanhedrin 86a) “סתם משנה תוספת כו' וכולי אליבא דרבי עקיבא” “[The author of] an anonymous Mishnah is... and all are taught according to the views of Rabbi Akiva”.

Although it is certainly true that Rabbi Akiva is incomparably loftier than any one of us, the Torah however, is not a story book ח"ו; in fact, the very word “Torah” is related to the word for teaching – “hora'ah”. It most certainly contains a life-lesson for all those who are commanded to study it.

It may appear that one's study of Torah is analogous to water falling upon a stone that leaves no visible mark; but the above story teaches us that nevertheless, through determination, diligence, and disregard of the *yetzer hora's* beguilements, the greatest heights can be achieved. Surely, you can apply this to your own situation.

In the future, you should redirect your focus from the assessment of your own intellectual capabilities to diligent

learning of our Torah, which is a “Toras Chayim” (a Torah of life), and specifically learning together with friends – “*Dibuk Chaveirim*”. This will almost certainly help with the headaches that you get while learning as well.

Ask your Rosh Yeshiva to help find the right *chavrusa* for you, and when you will learn with joy, you will eventually have joyous tidings to share as well regarding your learning.

It would be worthwhile to check your tefillin, and you should say a few *kapitlach Tehillim* every weekday after davening, preferably according to the monthly quota.¹



DISCIPLINE

In this letter the Rebbe addresses a student in a yeshiva that lacked a framework and staff, causing him to lose direction as well as purpose. The Rebbe encourages him to move beyond what his environment lacks, using instead the powers that Hashem has provided him with, to overcome any hardships in his path. The Rebbe also stresses the indispensability of studying Chassidus and davening.

In response to your letter dated 3 Teves, describing the yeshiva that you currently attend, you write that the yeshiva lacks a *mashgiach* to guide the *bochurim*, as a result of which you lack direction and fulfillment, and have no enjoyment in learning, etc.

As is well-known, our *Chachamim* tell us that the *Yetzer Hora* is highly skilled in his profession; he approaches every individual in a tailor-made, personal fashion.

One of the *Yetzer Hora's* foremost tactics is propelling the feeling of despair. To paraphrase, “I have no enjoyment nor diligence, and I do not see the way forward; consequently there is no purpose in trying to accomplish that which is extremely difficult or well-nigh impossible”.

The *Chachamim* tell us “בראתי יצה"ר בראתי לו תורה תכלין” – “[Hashem says] I have created the *Yetzer Hora*, and I have created Torah as the remedy”. The holy Torah is a “תורת חיים”, a Torah that addresses life in all its aspects, even the most physical and coarse. The Torah informs us about these persuasions of the *Yetzer Hora* so a person will know who their source is, and what is their cause.

In truth, these arguments are without basis since Hashem does not demand from his creations that which they cannot accomplish. Hashem assists the person to overcome his *Yetzer Hora*, as well as to even overcome his negative environment. If

one only desires, and puts effort into it, the *Tanna Dvei Eliyahu* tells us that his actions can reach even those of Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov.

This is especially pertinent when referring to a young man from *Yerushalayim Ir Hakodesh*, who also dwells “in the tents of Torah”. If there is no *mashgiach*, that should only serve to awaken within you a desire to become your own “*mashgiach*”. (You should make a point to push yourself, and go beyond that which comes naturally; since a person’s self-love tends to conceal their own deficiencies from themselves, as you surely know.)

However, Hashem’s help is always needed, particularly in our generation of “*Ikvisa demshicha*”, when thick darkness prevails over the Earth. It is therefore imperative to learn *P’nimius haTorah* every day, since it is the “tree of life” (Zohar Hakadosh 3:124b, Iggeres Hakodesh siman 26), and gives no place for “*Sitra achara*” or anything that defies Hashem’s will. Davening is vital as well; not just davening in purity [by going to mikvah], but also giving a coin to tzedakah beforehand and thinking introspectively into the concepts explained in Chassidus that you will have learned. You should also recite the daily Tehillim as divided according to the monthly cycle.

All this will bring about the fulfillment of the beginning and focal point of davening; namely, the *brocha* of “החונן לאדם דעת”, “He who grants man *daas* (understanding)”, through which a person can differentiate between light and darkness...

May Hashem grant you the merit, that in addition to the three uniform daily studies instituted by the [Friediker] Rebbe in Chumash, Tehillim and Tanya, you will also set up a regular time to study Chassidus, from who’s “tree of life” you will receive additional vitality in learning *Nigleh*, and exemplary fulfillment of the mitzvos in your daily life.

With blessings.²



PREFERENCE

Lack of diligence in the past should not stop someone from turning over a new leaf; studying is made easier by focusing on the subject that is the most motivating at the time.

Regarding what you wrote about your lack of diligence in the study of *Nigleh*; it is well known how meticulous our Rebbeim were about applying oneself to learning *Nigleh D’Torah*. Our *Chachomim* have taught us that “one who claims that he has toiled, yet not succeeded, is not to be believed”. Consequently, if

you only truly desire it, it is certainly within your ability to try and succeed.

Obviously, due to the interruption that you had in these studies, it will be hard in the beginning. It will get easier with time, however, provided that you invest the required effort according to your capability.

The same applies to the study of Chassidus, which surely can be improved further as well. With the permission of your teacher and *Mashpia*, you should divide your time set aside for reviewing the material in a way that won’t require you to learn the same subject for too long a time at once. Rather, you should alternate between topics of study, which will - at least in the beginning - perpetuate your desire to learn. As is known that our *Chachomim* have said, “A person should always study the area of Torah which appeals to him most”³



GUIDANCE

Nigleh and Chassidus are both equally important parts of the yeshiva seder, and neither supersedes the other. Outside of seder it is important to focus on the most relevant topic, followed by that which one finds interesting; consulting with a mashpia is crucial:

...Regarding the subject of how to divide one’s energy between the studies of *Nigleh* and *Chassidus*:

It is obviously understood that one must, first and foremost, follow the *seder* that his Yeshiva has established for each respective subject.

Concerning how to use one’s time outside of the *seder hayeshivah*:

In addition to the study of Chitas, and the required study of relevant Halachos, it depends on what appeals to him and interests him most (at the time). This is especially true when the study is in-depth...

...P.S. What was written above - despite the detail - is only a general strategy. For more individualized advice one should consult his *Mashpia*, who will guide him according to the traditions which have been passed down by the *Mashpi'im* of *Tomchei Tmimim* throughout the generations.⁴ **D**

1. Igros Kodesh vol. 14 p. 398

2. Ibid. vol. 10 p. 244

3. Ibid. vol. 9 p. 61

4. Ibid. vol. 20 p. 53