



PRIVILEGES NEED CAUTION

When we feel a sense of closeness, it can lead at times to laxity; not growing in our avodah. The Rebbe teaches us the proper approach to Torah study, and what this all has to do with the month of Elul—the time when the King is in the field.

Chazal say, “אין דברי תורה מקבלין” טומאה—The words of Torah cannot become impure.” This seems to imply that nothing will ever negatively affect the Torah itself.

The truth is, however, that only the Torah itself is untouchable; but for the person who is learning the Torah, this is not necessarily the case. Our *chachamim* tell us, “זכה נעשית לו סם” —If one [learns Torah in the proper manner and] is meritorious, the Torah becomes a life giving potion for him. If he [is not careful to study in the proper manner and] is not meritorious, the Torah becomes a deadly poison for him.”

Therefore one must be extremely careful to ensure that he is learning

in the correct manner, even more cautious than he is with his davening!

True, the Torah is given by Hashem and comes from a most lofty source, and it therefore has less danger of being affected by worldly matters. Davening, on the other hand, is when we, materialistic people, try to connect to Hashem. Being that we are so involved in physicality, it would seem much more likely for our *tefillos* to be negatively affected by worldly things.

It would therefore be assumed that one must be far more careful with davening than with Torah study.

Yet this is not the case. Although in its source the Torah is higher and less likely to be affected by the world, nevertheless, when it comes to our *avodah*, the Torah is in more danger

and must be handled with much more care.

We will better understand this by first defining the difference between the months of Elul and Tishrei, using a *mashal* from Likutei Torah (Re'eh 32, 2):

Elul is compared to a time when the king is out in the field, and Tishrei is like the time he is in his palace, in his full glory.

When the king is in the palace, there's no free entry; one can only gain entrance with invitation, permission, and much preparation. On the other hand, when the king is in the field, he is not in all his glory as in the palace; yet that is precisely the advantage—everyone is able to approach and speak to the king, unashamedly requesting their hearts' desires.

But there is a catch to it as well; a down-side of the the king being in the field. Since the king is kind to each of his subjects equally, no matter what level one is on, one might get the wrong perception. Even if he has



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לזכות
 החתן הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל שיחי'
 ראנעס
 והכלה המהוללה מרת רבקה שתחי'
 יפה
 לרגל חתונתם בשעתומ"צ
 ביום י"ח אב ה'תשע"ו - שנת הקהל
 נדפס ע"י
 משפחת יפה שי'

done nothing at all to improve himself, he may take the king's pleasant disposition towards him as proof that he is safe and can be comfortable with his current status. When the king is in his palace this issue is nonexistent, as there is simply no way to achieve any sort of closeness with the king unless one is on the proper level and has rightfully earned it with his behavior.

In our instance:

Hashem is so close to the Jewish people no matter their level, and greets each with a smile. This is the advantage of Elul. The danger, though, is that when a person sees that despite the fact that he is constantly involved in the mundane everyday life of Elul (regular weekdays), Hashem is still close to him—even revealing to him the Yud Gimmel Midos HaRachamim—he may be under the false impression that it is okay for him to remain in his present situation, and he need not do *teshuvah*.

The same issue can also apply to Torah and *tefillah*:

In davening, the first step is to just stop thinking about one's own ego and simply focus on building a connection with Hashem.

We read the words describing the creations and *malachim* praising

Hashem whilst standing in complete *bittul*. We ask Hashem for knowledge, success and everything else we need, letting the understanding set in that nothing we have can be attributed to us; it is all a gift from Hashem. In davening there is no place for one's personal ego, and therefore the danger of one misusing the davening is not that prevalent.

The Torah, on the other hand, is learned and grasped by the human mind, and a person is obligated to use his own method of understanding to create his own innovations in Torah. When one realizes that even though he is not living the way he must, nevertheless he can learn, comprehend, and create his own innovations in Torah, he might mistakenly think that his current situation is fine, that he need not perfect himself to be truly worthy of being a master of Torah.

This is why one must be so much more careful when it comes to Torah. One must constantly ensure that he is not learning Torah in a destructive manner, never mixing his own ego into the learning.

We now can understand why our *chachamim* tell us that "If one is meritorious, the Torah becomes a

life-giving potion for him, but if he is not meritorious, the Torah becomes a poison for him."

The reward for studying Torah in the correct manner is that it becomes a medication for him. We can therefore surmise, that if he doesn't learn Torah for the right reasons, then he will not have this blessing of the Torah becoming a medication for him. But why go as far as saying that he is punished by it becoming a poison?

The word "*zacha*," which in our context means "merit," can also be read as "*zaka*," meaning cleansing or purification. When a person studies Torah in purity, without letting his ego get involved, then the Torah is a life-giving potion for him. But if one does not purify himself of ulterior motives while learning Torah, the Torah can become a poison, luring him into thinking that he can be the greatest *talmid chacham* without growing in his *avodah*, thereby pulling him down to the deepest depths.

For this reason, the extra caution is all the more necessary specifically when studying Torah. ❶

(Based on *sichas Shabbos parshas Re'eh, mevorchim hachodesh Elul, 5715*)