

The Path To Follow

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How Can We Taste The Flavor Of Torah?

It is written, “When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall cast light toward the face of the Menorah” (Bamidbar 8:2), as it is written: “For a mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is light” (Mishlei 6:23). Only a person who learns at the Beit HaMidrash can elevate himself in the study of Torah and taste its flavor. There, the flame ascends on its own. Parsha Beha’alotcha begins with the letter beit, which alludes to the Beit HaMidrash and yeshiva, telling us that a person can only taste the flavor of Torah when he sits down to study at the Beit HaMidrash. One who learns Torah elsewhere cannot be compared to one who learns Torah at the Beit HaMidrash.

The Sages have said that when a talmid chacham sits down to study Torah at the Beit HaMidrash, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits before him and studies with him. This is alluded to in the verse, “the seven lamps shall cast light toward the face of the Menorah.” In fact the term “seven” alludes to Shabbat, which is the seventh day. Just as no one can taste the flavor of Shabbat before having properly observed it, likewise no one can find flavor in words of Torah before having entered the Beit HaMidrash and distanced himself from this world. Hence it is written, “the seven lamps shall cast light” in order to teach us that the Torah – comparable to Shabbat, which is a foretaste of the World to Come – casts light before the face of the Menorah. In other words, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits before one who learns Torah, Hashem being designated by the Menorah.

This is why the Sages have said, “Now Aaron did not bring an offering with the other princes, and so he thought: ‘Woe is me! Perhaps it is on my account that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not accept the tribe of Levi?’ The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore said to Moshe, ‘Go and tell Aaron: Do not be afraid! You have in store an honor greater than this!’ ... The offerings shall remain in force only as long as the Temple stands, but the lamps shall always cast light toward the face of the Menorah” (Bamidbar Rabba 15:6). When Moshe Rabbeinu heard G-d’s command, he transmitted it to Aaron, and Aaron transmitted it to the Elders, until all the Children of Israel heard it. However since Moshe alone had ascended towards G-d, he was the only one to hear this command. Aaron too, since he heard it from Moshe, who heard it from G-d, felt it more intensely than everyone else.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Aaron: “You have in store for you an honor greater than this,” for the lamps shall always exist. As we have said, these lamps allude to the Torah, which will exist forever.

The Foundation of the Entire Torah

According to what has been said, I will attempt to explain the teaching of the Sages which states that the mitzvah of Shabbat is unlike the other mitzvot. Moshe heard all the other mitzvot from G-d and transmitted them to Aaron, who transmitted them to the Elders, who transmitted them to all Israel. As for the mitzvah of Shabbat, Moshe did not transmit it to Aaron. Rather, he explained it before Aaron, the Elders, and the entire Jewish people so everyone would hear it directly from him. In other words, since

all of Shabbat is a foretaste of the World to Come, only Moshe himself could explain it to Israel, for he had been on the mountain without food or water, nourishing himself only from the splendor of the Shechinah. It was Moshe who had a foretaste of the World to Come, for in the World to Come there is neither food nor drink, and the tzaddikim sit with crowns upon their head and rejoice in the splendor of the Shechinah. Since Moshe tasted the flavor of the World to Come, he could therefore transmit the mitzvah of Shabbat to the Children of Israel, since Shabbat is a foretaste of the World to Come. As for Aaron and the Elders, who had not been on the mountain or had a foretaste of the World to Come, they could not transmit the mitzvah of Shabbat to the Children of Israel.

To what can this be compared? It is like two people before whom a dish is presented. The first tastes the dish, while the second does not. The second person says to the first, “What does it taste like?” Since the first person has tasted the dish, he can describe its taste. Although the second person has not tasted the dish, nor has it entered his mouth (since only the first person tasted the dish and can describe its flavor), the second person can understand what it is like only to a certain degree. However when a third person joins them, and the third asks the second what the dish is like, although the second will repeat what the first person told him, the third person will not be able to understand, since the second never tasted the dish. How can he describe to others what he himself did not taste? Likewise for Shabbat, which is a foretaste of the World to Come, only Moshe could transmit it to the Children of Israel, for he had tasted of the World to Come upon receiving the Torah.

Let us say that Shabbat is the foundation of the entire Torah. Whoever observes Shabbat and enjoys a foretaste of the World to Come can fulfill the entire Torah, which was given in the World to Come. When a person desecrates Shabbat, however, it is a sign that he does not fulfill the other mitzvot, and he has the same status as a non-Jew, for he renders wine forbidden. In fact it is written, “Between Me and the Children of Israel, it is a sign forever” (Shemot 31:17), on which the Sages have explained: “Between Me and the Children of Israel – not between Me and the nations of the world” (Mechilta, Shabbata 1). They also say, “A non-Jew who observes Shabbat is liable to death” (Sanhedrin 58b).

Why? It is because whoever has not tasted of the World to Come does not have the right to fulfill mitzvot, and a man can only taste the flavor of the World to Come through Shabbat. Just as all a man’s work must, in his eyes, already be done prior to Shabbat, likewise he must feel the same when he studies Torah and fulfills mitzvot. When someone desecrates Shabbat, it is a sign that he cannot sense this, and therefore he does not have the right to fulfill Torah. Hence the Sages said, “Shabbat is equivalent to all mitzvot” (Shemot Rabba 25:12), because a man who observes Shabbat has a foretaste of the World to Come and realizes that he must view his work as having already been completed. He can then learn Torah, and his learning will endure.

In his youth, Rabbi Chaim Friedlander Zatzal (who later became the mashgiach of the Ponevezh yeshiva) studied in the Lomza yeshiva, where he set aside time each day to study halachot from Chayei Adam. This learning took place as he waited in line for netilat yadayim, and because of it he was able to complete the entire book. Sometimes his prayers were so lengthy that he was late in arriving at the dining hall to eat. On those days, he neglected his meals so as not to hold up his learning.

Rabbi Chaim was extremely careful to use his time as effectively as possible. Every moment and every place were good for learning Torah. When he ate, he would commonly answer letters that he received. When he participated in staff meetings on students' education, he would review his writings while at the same time listening to statements that did not require his input. He would attend meetings on education and Judaism during the afternoons of fast days, in order to use his time in a practical and calculated way.

He was once in the waiting room of a hospital during the operation of his son. In the midst of all the stress and critical importance of that painful time, he took in his hand a new book that had just been published. He skimmed it and on the spot inserted bookmarks for himself in certain places. He participated in family celebrations such as weddings, but would sit far from the parents of the other side. He would then take out a small book (of the pocketbook variety, so as not to be noticed) and study from it.

One day a certain avrech was traveling with him on a long journey through the night. He thought he could use this opportunity to speak with the mashgiach about current issues, but he was disappointed. Rabbi Chaim came prepared for the journey with a small flashlight, and under its light he began to study a certain book. During the trip, the flashlight began to dim and eventually went out. The avrech's hopes were revived, for now he could finally start a conversation with the mashgiach. Imagine his surprise when Rabbi Chaim calmly opened his bag and took out a spare flashlight!

His Mouth Never Stopped Learning

Near the end of his life, the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian Zatzal lived in Kfar Chassidim, where he would address the yeshiva students. During a certain period of time, he acquiesced to the desires of many people by going to the trouble of traveling to Petah Tikva, where he gave Mussar classes to the students of the Lomza yeshiva.

One student who accompanied him to Petah Tikva several times recounted that the journey was long, tiring, and complicated. They had to take a bus from Kfar Chassidim to Haifa, and from there they had to take a taxibus to Tel Aviv. Then, for an extra charge, the taxi driver would take them to Petah Tikva.

During the long and exhausting journey, the lips of Rabbi Eliyahu murmured mishnayot by heart, for his mouth never stopped learning.

Return to the Previous Kollel

In his eulogy for Rav Shach Zatzal, the gaon Rabbi Betzalel Pinchasi Shlita said: "For a certain time, I studied in a well-known kollel with avrechim who were great in Torah. During the course of my studies, I asked Rav Shach Zatzal if I should go to another kollel in a distant place, for I had the impression that I would have greater success in learning there. Rav Shach agreed that I should go to the new yeshiva.

"Fifteen days later I called Rav Shach, and he asked me: 'How is the learning going?' I replied, 'In the previous yeshiva, I was like the tail of

a lion, but here I'm like the head of a fox. But thank G-d, we're learning well and I sense that I'm growing due to the responsibility that rests on my shoulders to prepare suggiot and know them perfectly.'

"The Rosh Yeshiva adamantly replied, 'Nevertheless, speak to me about the differences between one kollel and the other.' I told him all kinds of small details, but he still wasn't satisfied. He wanted to know even more, until finally I told him that in the previous yeshiva, as we returned home, we continued speaking about Torah in the streets. Here, in the shuttle that returns us home, the avrechim speak among themselves about mundane matters.

"He replied, 'If that's the case, then return to the previous yeshiva!'"

It's From Torah That We Live!

The gaon Rabbi Betzalel Goldstein Zatzal was a striking character from the Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood of Jerusalem. Everyone knew him by the name "Betzalel the milkman," since he earned a living distributing milk to people's homes, which was common at the time. Rabbi Betzalel not only made his work secondary, but was constantly immersed in Torah. As he walked with milk cans in his hand, the Talmud along with Rashi and Tosaphot were on his lips.

The following story, told by the Maggid of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shalom Schwadron Zatzal, a resident of Sha'arei Chesed, testifies to the fact that Rabbi Betzalel was completely immersed in Torah:

"It often happened that as Rabbi Betzalel was on the road distributing milk, he had a question regarding what he was learning. Then, if he encountered a talmid chacham, he would immediately forget his work and engage in a scholarly discussion. It happened more than once that he completely forgot to distribute his milk, which prompted his regular clients to start buying milk elsewhere. The result was that he was left with merchandise that he could not sell, and he was also without money! Therefore as soon as I saw him from a distance carrying milk, I would usually avoid him, lest he stop working and lose his means of earning a living.

"As I was walking along the alleys of the Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood one day, I saw Rabbi Betzalel not far away with milk cans in his hands, trying to walk down the sloping street. He had a pensive look on his face, and he was immersed in thought. I realized that he was preoccupied with a question on the Gemara, and that he would certainly stop me. That's why I immediately turned into another alley. However he saw me and began to run after me. 'Rabbi Shalom! Rabbi Shalom! I have a serious question on Tosaphot!' While he was still some distance away, he began to describe his question in detail: 'In Tosaphot Bava Metzia, it is said that...' but I pretended not to hear and continued to distance myself from him. Rabbi Betzalel did not give up, however, for he continued crying out towards me: 'What's happening? Why are you running away? Did my question upset you?'

"I thought to myself that if this is how it's going to be, I had better explain why I was running away. I therefore approached him and said, 'Rabbi Betzalel, if I stay here with you to listen to your question, you'll lose your income because you live from selling milk!'

"Rabbi Betzalel looked at me with fire in his eyes and said with a decisive tone: 'Rabbi Shalom, it's from Torah that we live!'"

Contemplation

It is written, “Wait, and I will hear what Hashem will command you” (Bamidbar 9:8).

The law of the Passover offering outside its designated time had escaped Moshe, but it was not considered a fault on his part, as opposed to the situation regarding the daughters of Zelophehad.

In terms of the latter subject, Rabbeinu Bechaye bar Asher wrote: “This is because the inheritance of the daughter in cases where there are no sons is something that depends on contemplation. They must take precedence over the father’s other inheritors. Even the nations without Torah have similar laws, and in all places we find that direct descendants are the first to inherit, whether they be sons or daughters. Since this had escaped him, he was imputed with fault.”

As for the Passover offering that has been moved from Nissan to Iyar for those who were impure, it required a tradition, not contemplation, to change one month for another. It was for this reason that he was not imputed with fault.

In Both Cases

It is written, “According to the word of Hashem they would encamp, and according to the word of Hashem they would journey” (Bamidbar 9:23).

This verse is explained allegorically by Rabbi Michael HaCohen in Le-haniach Beracha:

We know what the Ba’alei HaMussar have said: There are some people who, when they are at home, pay attention and put an effort into observing Hashem’s mitzvot, and it would be difficult for them to transgress Hashem’s word. Yet when they are outside of their city, in a place where nobody knows them, they act differently and allow themselves to transgress tradition and the ways of Hashem.

There is also the opposite case, namely people who fulfill mitzvot only when they are in strange surroundings, where nobody knows them. Yet they act without restraint around their friends and the residents of their own city, as everyone in modern areas do. Neither the former nor the latter act properly. Hashem’s mitzvot must be observed at home and abroad, for the whole earth is filled with His glory, and He is everywhere in Heaven and on earth.

This is the meaning behind the Torah’s warning to observe mitzvot where we encamp – at home, where we live – an allusion to the second case, and also when we journey, an allusion to the first case. In both cases, we must observe Hashem’s word.

Part of the Mitzvah

It is written, “Two cubits above the face of the ground” (Bamidbar 11:31).

Rashi states, “They flew at a height that they reached a person’s heart, so it would not be difficult for them to gather them, neither to rise nor to bend down.”

In the book Uvacharta Bachaim, Rabbi Chaim Falagi Zatzal wrote that this detail is mentioned in the Torah in order to teach man a lesson: When he wants to give bread to a poor person, the latter must not have to lift or bend down. It is part of the mitzvah for the giver to ensure that it is easy for the recipient to receive it.

Humility

It is written, “The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any other person on the face of the earth” (Bamidbar 12:3).

The tzaddik Rabbi Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov Zatzal once asked his students, “Throughout the Torah, among the 613 mitzvot, why do we not

find a positive commandment to be humble? We only find one verse that compliments Moshe for this virtue, as it is written: ‘The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any other person on the face of the earth.’ Now this virtue weighs as much as all other virtues combined, so why is it not among the 613 mitzvot of the Torah?”

He replies, “The foundation of humility is for a person is be small and insignificant in his own eyes, considering himself as nothing at all. If he desires to consider humility as a positive mitzvah, and before accomplishing it to say *leshem yichud*, this is not true humility. This is because he considers himself to be humble on one hand, yet on the other hand he is fulfilling a mitzvah, which is far from being insignificant!”

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin said, “If a person believes that he has fulfilled the mitzvah of humility, he is already far from it, for it consists of not realizing that one has attained humility!”

In the Light of the Parsha

Moshe’s Level

It is written, “Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles. At the image of Hashem does he gaze” (Bamidbar 12:7).

This is surprising! Does the Torah not state, “No man can see My face and live” (Shemot 33:20)?

There is no other “image” than the holy Torah, the image by which the world was created, as the Sages have said: “When a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill, but with the skill of an architect. Moreover, the architect does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams in order to arrange the rooms and the doors. Thus G-d looked into the Torah and created the world” (Bereshith Rabba 1:1).

This teaches us that Moshe Rabbeinu perfectly understood the holy Torah. Looking always designates comprehension, as King David said: “Unveil my eyes, that I may perceive wonders from Your Torah” (Tehillim 119:18). King David asked Hashem to allow him to perceive the Divinity that He had placed in him, as it is written: “He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Bereshith 2:7).

We know by tradition that the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of the body correspond exactly to the number of positive and negative commandments of the Torah, which a man only attains if he studies Torah and fulfils the 613 mitzvot throughout his life.

This is the level that Moshe reached, for he truly perceived Hashem.

Guard Your Tongue!

The “Dust” of Lashon Harah

Some things are forbidden insofar as being the “dust” of Lashon Harah. An example is someone who says, “Who would have expected So-and-so to be where he is today?” or, “Stop talking about So-and-so. I don’t want to tell you what’s happening with him,” and other such statements.

Likewise, praising someone in the presence of someone who dislikes him also constitutes the “dust” of Lashon Hara, for it will cause the listener to speak ill of the person in question.

– Chafetz Chaim

The Sanctity of the Synagogue

It is written, “So that there will not be a plague among the Children of Israel” (Bamidbar 8:19).

A serious epidemic broke out in the city of Ostrova. The Rav of the city and his court decreed a day of fasting and prayer, and also proclaimed throughout the city that if someone suspected a resident of not conducting himself correctly, to come and tell the Beit Din. In this way they would know the cause of this evil, which was sowing death among Jews, and thus fulfill the verse: “Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem” (Eicha 3:40). They would therefore know what they needed to rectify in order to halt the epidemic.

In the city was a Jew who usually came to pray in synagogue, but had stopped coming prior to the epidemic. After the Beit Din’s proclamation, two people from the city decided to follow him and see what he was doing. They followed him for a full day and night, and at midnight they saw him leaving his home and heading for the gates of the city, at which point he went into the forest and disappeared. The two men returned to the city, and on the following day they went to the Rav and told him what they had seen on the night before. It was dubious enough to arouse the Rav’s suspicions, but he told them that since they had not actually seen anything, to follow him that evening as well. If they saw him leaving for the forest, they were to come and tell the Rav, for he also wanted to follow him.

That night, when the two men saw the Jew in question leaving his home, they summoned the Rav to join them in following him into the forest. As the three of them watched, they saw that he stopped at a certain place deep within the forest, at which point he sat on the ground, took a siddur out of his bag, and began reading tikkun chatzot. As he was reading, bitter tears began to flow down his face, melting the hearts of the men who had followed him.

As they stood there in silence, what surprised them the most was the fact that another, unfamiliar voice was also reciting tikkun chatzot at the same time. They could not see anyone else, but they heard a second voice. The Rav decided that there was no reason to suspect this Jew of wrongdoing, and waited until he had left the forest before asking him what all this meant, and who was the second person whose voice they had heard. When he emerged from the forest, the three men approached him and the Rav said: “We followed you because we’re looking for the reason why the epidemic struck the city. When we saw you praying, we stopped suspecting you. However it’s surprising to see that you went into the forest alone, and yet we heard two voices reciting tikkun chatzot.”

The man was evasive, not wanting to answer the Rav’s question. However the Rav ordered him to reveal his secret, and thus having no more choice, the man replied that it was natural for him to grieve over the destruction of the Temple. Because of the great satisfaction that this brought to Heaven, he was given the gift that the prophet Jeremiah, who had seen the terrible destruction of the Temple with his own eyes, would join him in reciting tikkun chatzot. That was the second voice which they had heard.

Upon hearing this, the Rav asked the man why, if he possessed such merit, he could not stop the epidemic or ask the prophet Jeremiah for its cause. The Rav also asked him why he did not come to pray with the community in synagogue. “Tomorrow I will come to synagogue

for Shacharit, and all your questions will be answered,” the man said calmly and modestly.

Upon witnessing all this, the two men who had accompanied the Rav could no longer contain themselves. Hence they told everyone in the city that there was a hidden tzaddik among them, and that he would come to synagogue the next morning for Shacharit. The next morning, all the inhabitants of the city gathered in synagogue to see this hidden tzaddik, and they stood outside a long time before the beginning of prayers in order to see him. When the time came to pray, however, the tzaddik had still not arrived.

The Rav ordered the prayers to begin, not to delay them on his account. In the middle of Pesukei d’Zimra, while the community was praying aloud with fervor as they awaited his arrival, the tzaddik entered the synagogue crowned with his tallit and tefillin. A loud noise was suddenly heard, and there was tremendous commotion in synagogue, for several people were seized with great fear upon seeing him, and they fainted. The tzaddik went to a certain corner in order to pray, as he used to do in the past.

At the end of Shacharit, the Rav approached him and asked that he explain the great fear that had taken hold of the people as he entered the synagogue. He then reiterated the questions he had asked on the previous night, which had to be answered when he came to synagogue.

The tzaddik began answering: “It is written, ‘All the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will fear you’ [Devarim 28:10]. Rabbi Eliezer the Great said, ‘This refers to the tefillin of the head’ [Berachot 6a]. Tefillin have the ability to inspire fear, and the reason why the faithful were seized with such great fear is because whenever I wear tefillin, I am very careful not to utter any profane words, and I guard their sanctity as should be. As for those who are not careful with their words when wearing tefillin, those who treat them with neglect and act frivolously, they lose the sanctified attribute of the fear that is in them.

“The reason that I avoided coming to synagogue is also because people do not pay attention to not speaking profane words. This is a place of great sanctity and reverence, and I cannot tolerate such behavior. I also want to avoid any chance of speaking profane words in synagogue myself, which is why I could not come here to pray. Furthermore, all this is the cause of the terrible epidemic that has raged in the city: People are not careful about avoiding profane words in synagogue, especially when wearing tefillin. If you put an end to this, the epidemic will immediately stop.”

Having finished speaking, the man left and disappeared. When the Rav heard all that he had to say, he ordered it proclaimed throughout the city that he would give a sermon in the large synagogue, which everyone was to attend. When they had all gathered there, the Rav spoke with tremendous fervor and emotion on the issue of sanctity, on the fear and respect expected in synagogue. He also mentioned the sanctity of the tefillin and how important it is not to speak profane words in synagogue. Finally, he described everything that had happened, at which point all the people began to moan bitterly.

They all committed themselves to observing the prohibition against speaking profane words in synagogue, especially while wearing tefillin. They also engraved on the synagogue’s wall, in large letters, that it was forbidden to say anything profane. From then on, people paid great attention to this, and after they committed themselves to observing it, the epidemic immediately stopped and the Jews of the city rejoiced once again.