



Over and Over Again

“When He (Hashem) finished speaking to him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two Tablets of Testimony . . .” (Shemos 31:18). The Medrash Rabba (41:6) explains this verse as follows. The entire forty days that Moshe Rabbeinu was on Mount Sinai, he kept learning Torah and forgetting what he learned. He said to Hashem, “Master of the World, I have learned forty days and I don’t know anything!” What did Hashem do? When Moshe Rabbeinu completed the forty days (of learning), He gave the Torah to him as a gift. Rav Dovid Luria zt”l points out an important lesson that we learn from this Medrash. In order to learn Torah, understand what you learned, and remember it, you must receive siyata di’shmaya (Heavenly assistance). The only way to receive this help from Hashem is to pray for it. Another important lesson that we learn from this Medrash is the importance of constant review of what we learn. The Gemora (Eiruvim 54b) relates that Moshe Rabbeinu first taught the Torah that he learned to Aharon, then to Elazar, then to the Elders of the Nation, then to the entire Jewish people. Rebbe Eliezer explains that one must review what he learned four times.

The Gemora then relates a story about Rebbe Preida, who had a student who needed to learn everything 400 times before he understood it! Rebbe Preida patiently taught this student every lesson 400 times. One day, Rebbe Preida informed his student that he needed to go out soon to do a mitzvah. After their usual 400 repetitions of the lesson, the student still did not understand. When Rebbe Preida asked him why he did not understand, the student replied that he could not concentrate because he knew Rebbe Preida had to leave to do a mitzvah. With that, Rebbe Preida told him to pay attention well and they would learn it again. Rebbe Preida sat with the student and repeated the lesson another 400 times! This time the student understood. A voice came down from heaven rewarding Rebbe Preida for his diligence. “If you wish, Rebbe Preida, I will add 400 years onto your life. Or you and your entire generation will merit Olam Habbo (the next world).” Rebbe Preida chose the reward of the next world. Hashem gave him both long life and the next world.

Kinderlach . . .

Our learning requires constant review. We must review what we are learning until we understand it, and then continually go over it until we remember it. This requires patience and diligence. We should not get discouraged children, if we do not understand or remember something the first or second time we learn it. Moshe Rabbeinu did not get discouraged. Neither did Rebbe Preida. Let us all take a lesson from Rebbe Preida who had the perseverance to teach his student 800 times until he understood! The other essential ingredient to success in learning is tefillah (prayer) for siyata di’shmaya (Heavenly Assistance). Without the help of the Merciful One, we cannot accomplish anything. May Hashem answer all of our prayers for success in all of our endeavors.



The Fear That Honors

The huge banquet hall was packed. The Yeshiva’s Annual Dinner was always well attended. This year was no exception. The crowd hushed silent as the emcee rose to the podium to begin his opening remarks. After a few words about the Yeshiva, he began to introduce the first speaker.

“The young man who is about to speak is the top student in our Yeshiva. He has been learning personally with the Rosh Yeshiva for the past year, and he is his closest talmid. He will now give a Devar Torah.”

The young man tried to rise from his seat. He was petrified. All eyes were upon him. He knew that his every action was being scrutinized. His behavior would reflect upon the Rosh Yeshiva. You can judge the Rebbe by observing the talmid. That is what everyone would be doing. The young man would not want to do anything that would cause even the slightest smirch in the honor of the Rosh

Yeshiva. Every action, every word must be perfect. That is the least he could do for his beloved teacher and mentor.

The Mesillas Yesharim, in Chapter 24, explains Yiras Chet (Fear of Sin). This is a very high madrayga (spiritual level). A person feels such a close attachment to Hashem that he does not want to do anything that will reflect badly upon Him. Any trace of sin in a person’s actions is not befitting for a servant of the Almighty. His Honor is reflected by our actions. Therefore, how could we even dream of committing the smallest sin? This is the parable of the talmid of the Rosh Yeshiva. The young man would not want to do anything that lowers the honor of his leader.

The Mesillas Yesharim illuminates Yiras Chet with an example from our parasha. Moshe is instructed to make shemen mishchas kodesh (holy anointing oil), to be used only for holy purposes. He is warned, “It shall not be smeared on human flesh” (Shemos 30:32). The penalty for violation is kares (being cut off from the Jewish people). The Gemora (Horios 12a) related Moshe Rabbeinu’s fear, when he anointed his brother Aharon HaKohen. Perhaps he smeared the shemen mishchas kodesh improperly. Hashem sent down a voice from shamayim to assure him that no sin was committed. Aharon was also afraid that he benefited from the oil. A Heavenly voice assured him also. Moshe and Aharon, our holy ancestors, had true Yiras Chet; a genuine fear of besmirching the Honor of the Almighty.

Kinderlach . . .

Who would want to cause dishonor to his parents? Who would want to cause embarrassment to his Rebbe? Who would want to humiliate her teacher? No one. How much more so, should we want to uphold the honor of Hashem. Just like the top student wanted to maintain the honor of his Rosh Yeshiva. This is a very high madrayga, kinderlach. However, it is worthwhile to know what the goal is. May you all merit reaching it!

Parasha Questions

- What three things were the halfshekels used for? (Rashi 30:15)
- Did they work on the Mishkan on Shabbos? (31:13 and Rashi)
- What is nefesh? (31:17 and Rashi)
- What merits did the Avos Hakedoshim have to save Klal Yisrael? (Rashi 32:13)
- What were the three punishments for the Chet HaEgel? (Rashi 32:20)