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SHABBOS 63B

BY RABBI AVIGDOR BERENSTEIN

The Gemara *Shabbos* 63b quotes the *posuk* in *Koheles* (11:9) : "Rejoice, young man, in your childhood and let your heart be glad in the days of your youth and walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes and know that for all these *Hashem* will bring you in judgment…" *Reish Lakish* says that the joy is about learning Torah and the judgment is if one does not fulfill what he learned. *Rashi* explains that rejoicing in his learning means learning with joy and glad-heartedness, and walking in the ways of one's heart means to understand what is in his heart according to what his eyes see.

It is clear from the *Gemara* that our *Mitzva* is to learn with joy and glad-heartedness. We might ask, why is this so important? What would be so bad if one learns well and understands the *sugya* thoroughly without joy and *geshmak*? Does he not know the Torah? Is his understanding deficient?

The words of *Rabeinu Avrohom min Hahar* (*Nedarim* 48a) are even more intriguing. He writes about the *Mitzva* of learning Torah that "the main commandment is to picture the truth and to relish and enjoy it in one's mind to gladden one's heart and intellect… therefore, a mourner may not learn *Tanach*, because his heart cannot help but be gladdened by it. Therefore, it cannot be said of the *Mitzva* of learning Torah that '*Mitzvos* were not given to enjoy', because the main *Mitzva* is the joy and pleasure of what one grasps and understands in his learning." Not only are we commanded to enjoy joyously, but it is the principal *Mitzva*, and if one does not relish what he has understood, his fulfillment of the *Mitzva* is incomplete, to the extent that *Rabeinu Avrohom min Hahar* rules that '*Mitzvos* were not given to enjoy' does not apply, because the pleasure is an essential part of the *Mitzva*.

Hagaon Rav Avrohom Bornstein of Sochatchov *ztz"l* (1838-1910), author of *Shu"t Avnei Nezer*, in his introduction to his *Eglei Tal*, offers an explanation and a reason for this: "I have heard some mistaken people say that if one produces novel thoughts while learning and exults in them, his learning is not as sincere as that of one who learns simply, without enjoyment, solely for the *Mitzva*, because his personal pleasure is mixed into his learning. This is a common error; on the contrary, the main *Mitzva* is to rejoice and exult in one's learning, for only then is the Torah absorbed into one's blood and by enjoying words of Torah, one becomes attached to the Torah… If one learns for the sake of the *Mitzva* and enjoys it, his learning is sincere and completely holy, because the very pleasure is a *Mitzva*."

From these words we see why it is indispensable to enjoy learning, to relish understanding an idea's sweetness, to enjoy a deep grasp, and to derive pleasure from the clarity and straightforward logic embedded in every word of Torah, for these emotions have the spiritual quality of unifying the Torah and the learner and causing the Torah to be absorbed into his blood.

Similarly, the *Chazon Ish (Kovetz Igros* Vol. III, Letter #1) writes "The union of Wisdom and Man is impossible without yearning and desire. Words of Torah are precious; cherishing them has the power to open the brain and heart to absorb wisdom, understanding, and knowledge."

Indeed, every day we *daven* and beseech *Hashem* specifically about this in *Bircas HaTorah: "Hashem,* please make the words of Torah pleasurable in our mouths…" Not just that we should learn, not just that we should know, right after thanking *Hashem* that we received the Torah, we beg Him that its words should be pleasurable to us, that we should feel its sweetness so we will become attached to it and, consequently, we and our descendants will always learn Torah.

Hagaon Rav Chaim of Volozhin *ztz"l (Ruach Chaim* on *Pirkei Avos* 6:6) mentions another benefit of learning Torah with joy. "One who learns with joy will learn much more in an hour than someone who is sad will learn in a number of hours." If so, learning joyously helps one learn faster and understand better, besides helping one remember more effectively.

How does one learn with sweetness? How can we tap into it? Although Torah is inherently sweet, as many *pesukim* attest, how can we feel that sweetness so that it will help us want to learn more and more?

We mentioned *Rashi's* commentary "to understand what is in his heart according to what his eyes see". What does this mean? Are we to understand as we please, according to our perception? Aren't we obligated to try to understand the Torah's objectively true meaning?

This week, *Klal Yisroel* marks the first *yahrzeit* of the revered *Rosh Yeshiva* of Ponovezh, Hagaon Rav Yerachmiel Gershon Edelstein *ztz"l*. Every one of his thousands of students, those who heard his public speeches, or who read his weekly articles based on the private talks he gave in his home remembers his stirring words, repeated on all types of occasions, at the beginning or end of a *zman*, as a preparation for accepting the Torah, during vacation, and any other time.

The Rosh Yeshiva *ztz"l* would reiterate that one must learn Torah with curiosity, with interest, and with enthusiasm. Unlike studying secular wisdom in which one just strives to accumulate the facts to use them later, one must be interested about Torah, ponder its significance, understand that it is a guide for life, and be curious to know both the Law and its underlying reasons.

How does one achieve this? He would always stress that each person must learn according to his nature, in the way that is most comfortable for him, not necessarily like those around him, not to be bound by others' decisions and tastes, but to choose the subject matter and style that appeals to him and brings him joy. Clearly, this will arouse his interest, so he will learn not out of obligation but joyously. Just as, *l'havdil*, one who reads a fascinating book or peruses exciting news does so willingly and continues thinking about it when he walks or lies down, Torah also can and does have the same effect, but only if it is learned in a way that interests him.

Some people enjoy learning a topic in all its depth; their nature is to delve deeply until they reach the root of the matter; otherwise, their learning is tasteless to them. They should definitely learn that way; it will surely bring them great satisfaction.

Others are only happy when they have seen all a topic's details, its structure, its ideas, and how they all connect to each other, until he reaches the core concept that sheds new light on the topic.

Others connect to a topic by analyzing it through the lens of practical application, how it affects the *Halachah* in a variety of cases, and the ramifications of seemingly theoretical questions.

Others, after identifying a concept in one topic, are inspired to seek other topics where it may appear, and if it does not, they question why it does not apply there.

There are others who simply enjoy the basic understanding of a topic; every additional page they learn fills them with joy; they are thrilled with the learning, the review, and the knowledge.

And so, on and on, every person can find the way in which he connects to the Torah and can feel its joy. And, as the *Rosh Yeshiva* drilled into us, each person must learn according to his nature, to find what works for him, what he enjoys. He should not worry about what others may think or what is prestigious; he should just focus on what interests him in any given topic, and he will reach intense satisfaction and connect to the Torah until he cannot stop learning.

This is what *Rashi* means, not that one should understand the Torah according to his vision, rather that he should learn according to how he sees to what his heart is drawn and what catches his interest, because then he will be attached to the Torah.

The N*etziv (Haamek Davar Bamidbar* 15:41) elucidates the above-mentioned *posuk* in *Koheles*. "For the path of constantly serving *Hashem* is not the same for all people; some dedicate themselves to learning Torah all day, some to doing *Mitzvos*, and others occupy themselves with acts of kindness. Also, not everyone learns the same way, and in performing *Mitzvos*, we find that different Sages were particularly meticulous about observing different *Mitzvos*, one about *Shabbos* and another about *Tzitzis*, etc. Similarly, different people do kindness in different ways. If someone will ask which path of learning or *Mitzvos* he should choose, *Koheles* is telling us that he should follow his heart's desire, because if his heart is drawn to certain ways, certainly his *mazel* sees that it is good for his soul's abilities."

It appears from the *Netziv's* words that the reason to follow one's heart's inclinations in choosing a style of learning or a particular part of *Hashem's* service is not just to be more successful, but also because it indicates his Divine mission, his purpose of his coming to this world.

May *Hashem Yisborach* guide us to understand our heart's inclinations and our proper path, and may He grant us strength and fortitude to learn Torah that way, so that we and our descendants may always be attached to the holy Torah.