

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Bluma *bas* Akiva *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Remaining Involved

PARSHAS KI SEITZEI 5777

Consider the following profiles. Reuvein and Shimon, to all appearances, were following the same basic path. They were both young men of high caliber, wholesome in their character and equally diligent and devoted to their Torah studies. When they grew up, however, their ways parted somewhat. Both remained fully committed in their observance and dedication, but Reuvein became a *maggid shiur* (Torah lecturer) in a yeshivah, while Shimon went into business.

Now, there was some background to these developments. That is, Reuvein’s father was a Rosh Yeshivah, and Reuvein took a position in his yeshivah. Shimon loved learning and teaching just as much as Reuvein and was equally capable. But he did not share the same connections as his counterpart, which made securing such a position a much less likely prospect. When his family’s needs grew, he sought guidance from his mentors as to the best course to address them, and –given his set of circumstances – was steered in this particular direction.

Seemingly, nothing so untoward. Each reacted to his specific conditions and situation and acted accordingly. The matter worth contemplating, however, relates only to attitude. At the end of the day, Reuvein is able to remain ensconced within the sacred walls of the yeshivah, learning and disseminating Torah. Shimon sets aside his spare moments for learning, as well, but a sizeable portion of his day is spent involved in mundane matters. Does that affect his status in some way? Is he on a “lower” level than his contemporary, simply due to circumstances of his birth? What is the Torah’s view on the issue – how should Shimon view his situation?

Side Benefits

This matter touches upon the central issue we have been examining the past number of weeks: namely, the competing endeavors of constant Torah study vs. involvement in procuring sustenance. As we shall see, more insight in this regard can be gleaned from this week’s *parshah*, from a somewhat unlikely quarter.

Amongst the many laws featured in the *parshah*, we find one that deals with the situation of a laborer hired to work in his friend’s field. The Torah takes into account the fact that such a worker is constantly exposed to plentiful produce and will most likely become hungry. Addressing this reality, the Torah states: כִּי תָבֹא בְכֶרֶם רֵעֶךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ עֲנָבִים כְּנִפְשֶׁךָ שְׂבַעֲךָ – “When you come in to the vineyard of your fellow (as a laborer [*Rashi*]), you may consume grapes as you wish, to your fill” (*Devarim 23:25*). Thus, we see that he is indeed sanctioned to partake of such produce.

Many of the parameters to this law are discussed in the seventh chapter of Bava Metzia. For our purposes, we focus on a particular Mishnah appearing there (7:4), which states:

לֹא אָמְרוּ אֲלָא בְשַׁעַת מְלֶאכֶה, אֲבָל... אָמְרוּ פּוֹעֲלִים אוֹכְלֵי בְהֵלִיכְתּוֹ מֵאֲמֹן לְאֲמֹן.

“(The dispensation allowing the laborer to partake of the produce) was only said with regard to the actual time of (his involvement with the) labor. However...they (also) said that the laborers may eat as they walk from one row to the next.”

We see, then, that restrictions were placed upon their ability to partake: it is only while engaged in actual labor that they may eat of the available produce. However, as stated in the Mishnah, they are also allowed to eat while travelling from a row they have completed to another row – even though, technically speaking, they are not at that time performing any labor. Nonetheless, since they are involved in an activity related to and leading up to actual labor (i.e., walking to the next labor site), it is accounted to them as if they are engaged in the real work effort.

Striving for the Same Goal

The Chafetz Chayim (*Shem Olam, ch. 5*) perceives this Mishnah as shedding much light on the issues mentioned above, for the underlying principle is the same. A person is considered to be involved in “the job” even during those moments when he is not actually engaged as such but is still performing its supporting activities. And so it is when it comes to the essential endeavor of learning Torah. Obviously, anyone endowed with the opportunity to engage in actual Torah study is truly blessed. But what we see from here is that even when one must tend to those matters that further and support the overall mission, he too is considered to be *actively engaged in actual Torah study*. One’s circumstances might dictate that he must devote time to procuring sustenance. But his situation takes on a whole new aura if he simply intends that his earnings will facilitate his children’s learning (and even his own during set hours of spare time). As such, even his hours of labor will be considered, in Hashem’s eyes, as if he was learning Torah.

Elsewhere (*Sichos HaChafetz Chayim*), the Chafetz Chayim cites further evidence to this notion from the narrative of R’ Chisda’s demise (*Mo’ed Kattan 21a*). One of Torah’s properties is that it protects and preserves life. Now this presented a challenge to the Malach Ha’maves (Angel of Death) in the case of R’ Chisda; the time of his passing had arrived, but the Malach Ha’maves couldn’t accomplish his task due to R’ Chisda’s constant learning. He remedied the matter by knocking down a tree in R’ Chisda’s vicinity; the resulting distraction interrupted his learning, enabling the Malach Ha’maves to perform his work. The Chafetz Chayim wonders, however, why this step was necessary. After all, didn’t R’ Chisda eat and sleep? Why didn’t the Malach Ha’maves take advantage of those moments of non-Torah activity? Thus we see, concludes the Chafetz Chayim, that even those moments were off-limits to the Malach Ha’maves. When R’ Chisda engaged in these activities, he did so for the purpose of garnering strength to learn Torah; as such, even when he ate and slept, it was accounted to him as if he was learning.

In any event, as it relates to Reuvein and Shimon of the opening scenario, we see that they can still be regarded as equals. For while Shimon must involve himself in other pursuits, if his thoughts are on Torah, he is likewise accredited for engaging constantly in learning.

The Ramchal closes his classic work, *Mesilas Yesharim*, with some well-known remarks. It could be that he was also alluding to this idea, when he writes: “Thus it is possible for even one engaged in work of low prestige to be considered entirely pious – to the same extent as one whose mouth never ceases from involvement in Torah study.”

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