

Torah Study and Character Development

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Introduction: The Torah is acquired with 48 methods

The *beraisa* uses the term *kinyan*, acquisition, when discussing these 48 methods. This term is usually used in the context of monetary acquisitions. Why is it used here? What does it mean to acquire Torah? I once heard that just as we are required to formally acquire an object before we take ownership of it, and without that acquisition, the item doesn't belong to us, so too, one who tries to learn Torah without refining his character traits cannot truly take ownership of his Torah learning. Learning Torah without proper character traits can be considered a form of stealing the Torah. People mistakenly think that the *mitzvos bein adam Lamakom* (mitzvos between man and Hashem) and *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro* (interpersonal mitzvos) are two separate areas that don't intersect. In reality, that is not the case. They are completely enmeshed. This is especially true when it comes to learning Torah. If one does not strive to follow all of the values of the Torah, there is something seriously lacking with his learning.

One does not claim credit for himself- אינו מהזיק טובה

לעצמו (#27)

The *Chovas Halevavos* in his introduction to *Sha'ar Avodas Ha'Elokim* writes that *hakaras hatov*, gratitude, is the foundation of all character traits. In fact, the Hebrew word for Jew is Yehudi. The word Yehudi comes from the word *hoda'ah*, to give thanks. The idea that we are known as Yehudim, people who give thanks, speaks volumes about the importance of *hakaras hatov*. Thus, it is most appropriate to begin with a discussion about *hakaras hatov*. I would like to present a few ideas that show how far we go to fulfill *hakaras hatov*.

Hakaras Hatov forced Moshe Rabbeinu to Reinterpret Hashem's Commandment

When it was time for the Jewish people to wage battle against Midyan, Hashem commands Moshe Rabbeinu to exact revenge against the Midyanites (Bamidbar 31:2). Yet we find that Moshe Rabbeinu appoints Pinchas to lead the battle:

Moshe sent them, a thousand from each tribe and Pinchas the son of Elazar the Kohen with the holy vessels and the trumpets in his hand.

Bamidbar 31:6

וישלח אתם משה אלף למטה לצבא אתם ואת פינחס
בן אלעזר הכהן לצבא וכלי הקדש והצפרות התרופעה
בידו.

במדבר לא:ו

The Midrash wonders why Moshe Rabbeinu didn't lead the battle himself and states:

[The verse states] "Moshe sent them," Hashem told Moshe "go avenge," [meaning] you personally, and he sent others? Rather because he was raised (as a young adult) in the Land of Midyan, [Moshe] said, it is not proper that I should cause suffering to those who were kind to me.

Bamidbar Rabbah, Matos 22:4

וישלח אותם משה אמר הקב"ה למשה נקם נקמת אתה בעצמך והוא משלח את אחרים אלא מפני שנתגדל בארץ מדין אמר אינו בדין שאני מצר למי שעשה בי טובה.

במדבר רבה, משות כב:ד

Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to do something and he didn't listen! When it comes to character traits, the Rambam, in the first two chapters of *Hilchos Deios*, writes that all traits must be balanced. Even a trait such as anger can be displayed in limited circumstances. If Hashem would tell someone to express a certain trait in a way that is normally considered a negative use of the trait, there would be no reason to question Hashem's request. Yet when it comes to *hakaras hatov*, Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, *Sichos Mussar* (5732 no. 32), suggests that the trait is so important that Moshe Rabbeinu felt that he must interpret Hashem's command to "go avenge" as a directive to others and not to Moshe Rabbeinu himself.

Being Grateful to a Wrongdoer Who Indirectly Caused Good

R. Chaim Shmulevitz shows us another example of the importance of *hakaras hatov*. After Moshe Rabbeinu killed the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Jewish slave, he fled to Midyan, where he encountered a struggle between the daughters of Yisro and some shepherds. Moshe Rabbeinu chased away the shepherds and gave water to Yisro's sheep. When Yisro asks his daughters why they came home earlier than usual that day, they respond:

They said, an Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds and he drew [water] for us and gave water to the sheep.

Shemos 2:19

ותאמרנן איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרעים וגם דלה דלה לנו וישק את הצאן.

שמות ב:יט

Why did Yisro's daughters refer to Moshe Rabbeinu as an Egyptian? Wasn't he an *Ivri* (a Jew)?

The Midrash states:

This is comparable to someone who was bitten by a donkey and ran to the river to wash his legs in the water. When he put his legs in the water, he saw a child drowning and saved the child. The child said to him, "If not for you, I would have died." The man responded, "It wasn't me who saved you but rather the donkey who bit me and chased me away. He saved you." Similarly, when the daughters of Yisro said to Moshe, thank you for saving us, Moshe said, the Egyptian that I killed is the one who saved you. Therefore, they told their father, "An Egyptian man," meaning, who caused him to come to us, the Egyptian man that [Moshe] killed.

Shemos Rabbah, Shemos 1:32

משל לאחד שנשכו הערוד והיה רץ ליתן רגליו במים נתנן לנהר וראה תינוק אחד שהוא שוקע במים, ושלח ידו והצילו, אמר לו התינוק אילולי אתה כבר הייתי מת, אמר לו לא אני הצלתיך אלא הערוד שנשכני וברחתי הימנו הוא הצילך, כך אמרו בנות יתרו למשה יישר כחך שהצלתנו מיד הרועים, אמר להם משה אותו מצרי שהרגתי הוא הציל אתכם, ולכך אמרו לאביהן איש מצרי, כלומר מי גרם לזה שיבא אצלנו איש מצרי שהרג.

שמות רבה, שמות א:לב

The Egyptian taskmaster was beating a Jewish slave. What he was doing at the time was so evil that it warranted Moshe Rabbeinu killing him. Yet Moshe Rabbeinu's deep sense of gratitude allowed him to see that the Egyptian taskmaster deserved some credit for indirectly causing something good.

Gratitude must be a Personal Expression

Chazaras Hashatz, the Chazzan's Repetition, is a prayer recited by the chazzan on behalf of the whole congregation. Rav Soloveitchik stressed the fact that even though we already fulfilled our personal obligation of reciting the Amidah, *Chazaras Hashatz* is a different type of prayer. It is a *tefillas hatzibbur*, a prayer offered by the whole congregation (see *Nefesh Harav* pp. 124-127). We are supposed to listen to every word of the chazzan (see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 124:4). Nevertheless, there is one prayer that we recite on our own: *Modim D'rabbanan*. Why don't we follow the normal protocol by listening to the chazzan's recitation of *Modim*? Rav Dovid Avudraham explains:

When the chazzan reaches Modim and bows, the entire congregation bows and recites a small expression of gratitude, which also begins with the word Modim (we are grateful) because it is not the way of a servant to thank his master and tell him "you are my master" through an agent. Rather each person must verbally accept the yoke of Heaven personally and if one uses an agent, it is not a full-fledged acceptance ... However, regarding other prayers that are requests, one may use an agent to request one's needs.

Sefer Avudraham, Shemoneh Esrei

וכשיגיע ע"פ למודים וכורע כל
העם שוחין ואומרין הודאה קטנה
המתחלת כמו כן במודים שאין דרך
העבד להודות לרבו ולומר לו אדוני
אתה על ידי שליח אלא כל אדם
צריך לקבל בפיו עול מלכות שמים
ואם יקבל על ידי שליח אינה קבלה
גמורה ... אבל בשאר התפלה
שהיא בקשה יכול לתבוע צרכיו על
ידי שליח.
ספר אבודרהם, שמונה עשרה

It is not enough to feel a sense of gratitude toward those who have been kind to us. We must communicate it to them regularly and in a personal way. As the *Chovos Halevavos* teaches us, regular expressions of gratitude will lead one to refine all of his character traits. This is why it is a critical aspect of acquiring Torah.

A Listening Ear-שמיעת האוזן (#2)

The following approach is found in Rav Baruch Simon's, *Imrei Baruch, Mishpatim* no. 3. The Gemara, in a discussion about compensation for damages that cause bodily harm, quotes a *beraisa* that states the following regarding *sheves*, repayment for loss of work:

If he caused the eye to go blind, he pays the value of the eye (i.e. the difference between what the person would have earned before becoming blind and what he could earn in the future) ... If he caused the person to go deaf, he pays the entire worth of the individual (i.e. what the person would have earned over the course of his lifetime).

Baba Kama 85b

סימא את עינו
נותן לו דמי
עינו ... חירשו
נותן לו דמי
כולו.
בבא קמא פה:

In addition to the technical fact that in the times of the Mishna, someone who was deaf couldn't find any type of employment, Rabbeinu Yonah, *Sha'arei Teshuva* 2:12, notes that the *beraisa* is

teaching us a moral lesson as well: The ability to hear and listen to what others have to tell us is something invaluable.

Chazal tell us that we have two options to filter out information that we shouldn't be listening to. We can cover our ears with our earlobes or we can cover them with our fingers. If Hashem wanted us to be able to block out information we shouldn't listen to, why didn't he design the ear like the mouth that can be opened and closed naturally? Maharal, *Be'er HaGolah*, *Be'er* no. 3, explains that listening is so important that Hashem didn't want to create any natural impediment to our ability to listen.

If an *eved Ivri* (Jewish servant) finishes his six-year term and decides to remain a slave, he must have his ear pierced. Why, specifically, the ear? The Gemara explains:

Why is the ear singled out from all of the limbs of the body? Hashem said, the ear which heard My voice on Mount Sinai saying "For unto Me the children of Israel are servants; they are My servants," and not servants of servants—and this individual went and acquired for himself a master?! He will have his ear pierced.

Kiddushin 22b

מה נשתנה אזן מכל אברים שבגוף אמר הקב"ה אזן ששמעה קולי על הר סיני בשעה שאמרתי כי לי בני ישראל עבדים ולא עבדים לעבדים והלך זה וקנה אדון לעצמו ירצע.
קדושין כב:

This explanation begs a question: If piercing the ear is a punishment for not listening to Hashem's commandments, why do we wait until the end of the six years to pierce his ears? Why not do so right away? R. Chaim Ya'akov Goldvicht, *Asufas Ma'arachos* pp.83-90, explains that a servant has no ability to make his own decisions. He might be able to listen to the commands of his master, but he is not able to process information on his own. When an *eved Ivri* decides that he wants to permanently remain a servant (at least until *yovel*) and he has totally relinquished his ability to listen to information and process it, he deserves to have a punishment relating specifically to his ear. He doesn't recognize the importance of being able to listen.

With this background, we can understand why listening is an important component of acquiring Torah. The pasuk states:

One who turns his ear from hearing Torah, his prayers are considered an abomination.

Mishlei 28:9

מסיר אָזְנוֹ מִשְׁמַע תּוֹרָה גַם תְּפִלָּתוֹ תוֹעֵבָה.
משלי כח:ט

Why should someone who doesn't listen to the words of Torah be punished specifically that his prayers are not answered? Furthermore, what is it about not listening to Torah that makes his prayer an abomination? Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, *Sichos Mussar* (5732 no. 19), explains that we are dealing with someone who specifically doesn't want to listen to someone else's ideas in Torah. He is only interested in his own opinions. When a person takes such an attitude, Hashem takes the same attitude and says, if this person is not willing to listen to others, why should I listen to him? His prayers are now meaningless and are therefore an abomination.

A similar idea is presented by Rav Chaim Volozhiner to explain the following Mishna:

R. Chanina b. Tradyon says: Two people who sit and don't have words of Torah between them, it is considered a

רבי חנינא בן תרדיון אומר שנים שיובים ואין ביניהם דברי תורה הרי זה מושב

gathering of scoffers.

Avos 3:2

לצים.

אבות ג:ב

We usually associate *moshav leitzim*, a gathering of scoffers, as a group of people engaged in frivolity or silliness. These two people could be sitting and engaged in serious behavior, and yet the Torah calls it a *moshav leitzim* just because they don't speak words of Torah. Why? R. Chaim Volozhiner, *Ruach Chaim*, explains that their key word is *beineiheim* (between them). The Mishna is discussing two people and each of them is learning Torah. However, neither individual is interested in listening to the Torah ideas of the other. Each individual is learning on his own. In taking that approach, each one is scoffing at the opinions of the other, and therefore the Mishna considers it a *moshav leitzim*.

Distancing Oneself from Honor-מתרחק מן הכבוד (#34)

The Gemara states:

One who pursues glory, glory runs away from him and one who runs away from glory, glory will chase him.

Eruvin 13b

המחזור על הגדולה גדולה בורחת ממנו וכל הבורח מן הגדולה גדולה מחזרת אחריו.

עירובין יג:

This is the idea of distancing oneself from honor. It is not enough to not pursue honor. If we want to properly acquire Torah, we have to run away from it.

In general, pursuit of honor is considered a terrible thing. As we noted earlier, the Rambam in *Hilchos Deios* writes that our character traits must be balanced. There are two traits that require us to go to an extreme and eliminate them almost completely: anger and haughtiness. Regarding haughtiness, the Gemara, *Sotah 5a*, has a discussion as to whether any form of haughtiness is acceptable and the maximum that is allowed is a *shemini sheb'shminis*, 1/64 of one's character. A person must have self-esteem, but cannot pursue honor.

The obligation to run away from honor is relevant in the area of *talmud Torah*. The Mishna states:

R. Tzadok says: Do not make [words of Torah] a crown to glorify oneself with and not a hatchet to dig with. Hillel said a similar idea: One who uses the crown will waste away.

Avos 4:5

רבי צדוק אומר אל תעשם עטרה להתגדל בהם ולא קרדום לחפור בהם וכך היה הלל אומר ודאי שתמש בתגא חלף.

אבות ד:ה

Torah learning and seeking honor are two contradictory concepts, and therefore Torah learning should not be used as a tool for seeking honor. While Tosafos, *Berachos 17a*, permit learning for the purpose of gaining honor if it will lead one to learning for its own sake, Tosafos, *Pesachim 50b*, prohibit learning for the purpose of boasting to others.

The Chasam Sofer, in his *Teshuvos, Orach Chaim* no. 208, states that one who publishes a sefer for the purpose of gaining honor violates a biblical prohibition. Originally, there was a prohibition against writing down any words of Torah unless one was writing one of the books of Tanach. Any interpretations or commentaries were meant to be passed on orally from generation to generation. The Gemara, *Gittin 60a*, states that when the rabbis saw that parts of the oral tradition would be

lost if they weren't written down, they invoked the verse (Tehillim 119:126) "עת לעשות לה' הפרו" תורתך, It is a time to act for Hashem, they violated the Torah," and permitted writing down the oral tradition. The Chasam Sofer suggests that this leniency only applies to someone who is interested in carrying on the tradition and teaching Torah to others for altruistic reasons. However, if one is writing a sefer for the purpose of gaining honor, the leniency does not apply and one violates the biblical prohibition against writing down the oral tradition.

The Gemara states:

Rabbi Chanina b. Idi states: Why are words of Torah compared to water ... to teach you that just as water sinks from a high place to a low place, so too words of Torah only last through someone who is humble.

Ta'anis 7a

אמר רבי חנינא בר אידי למה נמשלו דברי תורה למים ... לומר לך מה מים מניחין מקום גבוה והולכין למקום נמוך אף דברי תורה אין מתקיימין אלא במי שדעתו שפלה.
תענית ז.

Torah is compared to water, which flows downward. If someone wants to be successful learning Torah, he should emulate water. Water seeks its lowest point and then spreads out. Similarly, one should not learn for the purpose of gaining honor but rather to share it with others. Like water, we have an obligation to disseminate the Torah, not to keep it to ourselves. Someone who is looking for honor doesn't want to share his ideas with his colleagues because he is worried about his colleagues taking away some of his honor. However, someone who runs away from honor will graciously share with others because he understands that this is the ultimate purpose of Torah learning.

The opening Mishna in *Avos* states, "Moshe kibel Torah MiSinai," Moshe received the Torah from Sinai. Why does the Mishna say **MiSinai**, why not **B'Sinai**, at Sinai? What did he receive from Sinai? Rav Soloveitchik noted the Midrash that discusses why Har Sinai was chosen as the location for the receiving of the Torah:

[The verse (Mishlei 29:23) states] "The haughtiness of a person will lower him," this refers to Mount Tavor and Mount Carmel who came from across the world with pride saying "we are the tall mountains and on us, Hashem will give the Torah. [The verse continues,] "A humble person will sustain honor," this refers to Sinai who humbled itself and said "I am the lowest of mountains," and because of this, Hashem sustained its honor and gave the Torah on it and it was worthy of all of the honor.

Bamidbar Rabbah, Naso 13:3

גאות אדם תשפילנו זה תבור וקרמל שבאו מסוף העולם מתגאים לומר שאנו גבוהים ועלינו הקב"ה נותן את התורה ושפל רוח יתמך כבוד זה סיני שהשפיל את עצמו לומר שאני נמוך ועל ידי כך תמך הקדוש ברוך הוא כבודו עליו ונתנה עליו התורה וזכה לכל הכבוד הזה.
במדבר רבה, נשא יג:

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that Moshe Rabbeinu didn't only receive the Torah at Sinai. He learned the message of humility from Sinai and he was the leader of the Jewish people because of that humility. When we run away from honor and think about how we can help others through our Torah learning, we can strive to be like Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest teacher of Torah.

Conclusion

The Mishna, *Sotah* 14a, states that most grain-based *korbanos* are made from wheat, not barley, because wheat is considered food for humans and barley is considered food for animals. The *korban ha'omer*, offered from the second day of Pesach until Shavuos, consisted of barley, and the special *korban* for Shavuos, the *shtei halechem*, was made from wheat. The contrast between the *korban ha'omer* and the *shtei halechem* can be understood when we consider the comment found in the *Zohar Chadash* to *Parshas Yisro*, that when we left Mitzrayim we were at the 49th gate of *tumah* (impurity). On a spiritual level, we were no different than animals. There is no coincidence that there are 49 days in the Omer. Each day of the Omer we are supposed to eradicate a gate of impurity to reach the height of spiritual human beings ready to accept the Torah. During the beginning of that process, we bring a *korban* consisting of animal food and at the end of that process on Shavuos, after we have purged ourselves of our animalistic tendencies, we bring a *korban* of wheat, to highlight the fact that we have developed into spiritual human beings. The days of the Omer are a time to work specifically on refining our *middos* to remedy the lack of *kavod* the talmidei Rav Akiva had for one another. After we have worked on these traits and show respect for one another, then we are ready to accept and acquire the Torah.