

Nitzvaim: What an Opportunity!

R' Chananya Berzon

The last two posukim of Nitzvim read:

הַעִידֹתִי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת ... כִּי הוּא חַיֶּיךָ וְאֶרְךְ יָמֶיךָ

This day I call upon the heavens and the earth as witnesses that you should choose life ... because that is your life and the length of your days (Nitzavim 30: 19, 20)

Now that we are so involved in the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a serious issue facing the Israeli yeshiva world that creates sobering introspection.

But the truth is in that our experience at Mevaseret - and other rebeim in other yeshivot have similarly expressed - with talmidim is that they went back to the States shortly after Purim, and they immediately found chavrusas to learn with through WhatsApp, Zoom, voice conferencing; they were looking for shiurim constantly. And the Rosh Yeshiva arranged that the yeshiva should continue functioning. A very large group Zoomed with the yeshiva six or more hours daily, until they went away to summer camps, or others to jobs.

The quarantine infused them so much desire to return to yeshiva in Israel, to shteig away, even with all the reasons to be hesitant about it. Registration was above and beyond!

As one talmid put it: it was a real bracha to come to Eretz Yisrael with my friends, learning with my Rebbeim, learning all day. What could be better than this? I love it; it's great!

However, in the Israeli yeshiva's many of the Roshei Yeshivot feared the negative. With talmidim being out of the beis midrash, staying home, wasting their time, being involved with shtuyot; they feared it would be difficult to get them back into the shvung of the yeshiva - shteiging away.

Whichever one we are speaking about, both groups see the Torah as a twenty-four seven pleasure; the geshmak of Torah, the zeeskeit of Torah. And the rebbeim are blessed that they've seen such talmidim!

The Torah Temima brings down the Gemara in Brachot 55a which comments on our posuk, and he has a lot of difficulties with it. I would like to give it a 'drush' twist.

The Gemara reads:

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה ... מִי שֶׁנִּתְּנִין לוֹ סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה לְקֵרוֹת וְאִינוּ קוֹרְא, דְּכִתְיִב: "כִּי הוּא חַיֶּיךָ וְאֶרְךְ יָמֶיךָ".
Rabbi Yehuda said, "He who has placed on his lap a Sefer Torah that he can read, and he doesn't read it, his days are cut short, because it says 'for the length of your days'."

You don't use it, you see no importance or no use for it, then there's no life!

There is a story told about Chaim Wiezmann, the first president of Israel when made his first trip to America. He was going to see Harry Truman, the American president who was very helpful in the UN to establish the independent state of Israel, and he

didn't know with what to gift Harry Truman. So the story goes that he presented him with a miniature Sefer Torah.

Harry Truman responded, "How did you know this is what I wanted my whole life? I can't find enough words to thank you!"

We have a Sefer Torah placed in our laps; we are thrilled to have the opportunity to link to Torah, by learning from it.

May we all understand 'this is your life and the length of your days' and it should be a blessing and protection for each individual who studies Torah, for the mozdof of Torah, and for Am Yisrael.

Amen!