Use It or Lose It

by

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“Use it or lose it.”

It is an admonition we know only too well. It tells us that if we don’t continually hone a skill, we gradually (or precipitously!) lose the ability to do it – whether “it” is taking a jump shot in basketball, solving differential equations or playing piano concertos. If we don’t practice our knowledge and skills, they fade.

As in most things, this modern warning is but a weak echo of Torah wisdom!

In *Parashat Ekev*, we read the second paragraph of the Shema (which was introduced in last week’s *parasha*). In the opening paragraph of the Shema, we are told to accept and reaffirm God’s oneness and sovereignty. In *Ekev*, the lesson is on the requirement of mitzvah observance; on our obligation to perform all mitzvot with absolute dedication.  *Ekev* proclaims, *vehaya im shamoa ti’shemu* – literally, “if you hearken, you will hearken”. More than the powerful call to serve that is implicit in the *pasuk*, we are struck by the repetition of the verb, to hearken. *Shamoa ti’shemu*. We have observed on many occasions that no word, no letter, no marking is in Torah except by God’s grace and will. That being the case, we ask ourselves, what is the purpose for this repetition?

Chazal, cited by Rashi, tell us that the repetition emphasizes a vital principle of Torah learning, *im* tishma b’yoshon, tishma b’chadash, if you hearken to what you have already learned (by making sure to review over and over) you will hearken to it anew. As Rashi teaches, by repetition you will gain fresh insights into the Torah you *already know*.

Use it or lose it!

The converse is also true. Just as the verb “to hearken” is repeated in our *pasuk* above, the verb “to forget” is also repeated earlier in *Ekev*. V’haya im shakoach tishkach, if you forget, you shall forget. As Rashi makes clear, once you start to forget, you’ll forget it all!

Rashi tells us, sh’kein ketiv b’Megilah, im ta’azveini yom, yomaim e’ezvecha, as it is written in Megillah, if you forsake me (the Torah) for a day, I will forsake you for two days. How that lesson has been instilled in our Jewish hearts!

Ask any group of yeshiva *bochurim* the most critical point of their yeshiva learning experience and the answer will inevitably be to *chazer*, to *chazer* – to review, to review! The actual learning was important, but it paled alongside the need to constantly return to and reviewthe thing that was learned.

Without consistent review, there can be no real learning.  Chazal declare that there is no comparison learning one hundred times to learning one hundred and one times. That one more time often brings the deepest insight!

Shamoa tishmeu.

The lesson is clear, learning without review is not real learning. Rav Yehoshue ben Korcha teaches in Sanhedrin 99, “Whoever learns Torah, and does not review is to be compared to one who sows and does not harvest.”

V’haya im shamoa.

Keep reviewing! Every year, as we complete the reading of the Torah cycle on Simchat Torah what do we do? We begin the cycle anew! We keep reviewing.

When we complete a tractate of Talmud, we declare Hadran ha’lach – we shall return to you! Without that return, without that review, we risk losing all. As Rashi reminds us, “…it states in *megillah*, im ta’azveini yom yomaim e’ezvecha, if you forsake me for a day, I will forsake you for two days.” In this, Rashi is expressing a powerful lesson indeed. But wouldn’t you know that someone was sure to read that Rashi and immediately ask the tangential question, which *megilah*?

Which was the *exact question* that a yid from the city of Shtefenesht, R’ Zvi Aryeh Kleknir, sent to my grandfather, HaGaon Rav Bezalel Zev Shafran (in Shu’t R’BAZ, Vol. 3, Siman 92)!

R’ Kleknir wanted to know why Rashi neglects to tell us which *megilah* when he was almost always very specific in his references.

My grandfather provided a two-part answer. The first was direct. Rashi’s reference, my grandfather noted, was Megilat Chasidim, as also appearing in *Yerushalmi* [end of Berachot], which clearly states, Yom ta’azveini, yomaim e’ezvecha, Leave me for a day, I will leave you for two.

That was the simple part of my grandfather’s response. The more insightful aspect was when he went on to observe in the second part of his answer that there was a great deal more in Rashi’s response than meets the eye; that the Chasidim of Megilat Chasidim are, in fact, teaching us about something that would likely never even cross our minds in this context.

They speak of how careful one must be to eat three meals, *seudot*, every Shabbat, as taught in *Masechet* Shabbat [116b], “One is obligated to eat three meals on Shabbat”. This, in turn, is based on Shemot 16:5 in which the word hayom appears **three** times – “Moshe said, eat it [the manna] *hayom*, for *hayom* is a Sabbath for Hashem; *hayom* you shall not find it in the field.”

My grandfather insightfully explained that the implication of this is that failing to eat any one of the meals required on Shabbat would result in the loss of two days’ worth of parnasah (sustenance) during the week. This, because each seuda equals two days’ worth of mazon (sustenance), as noted in the Zohar Parashat Yitro [88] in which Rav Yitzchak, referencing Shemot, noted that God commanded us to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy and that God blessed the seventh day. Of the manna in the desert however, it was written, “Six days shall you gather it, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath, on it there will be none.”

If there was no food given on the Sabbath, what blessing was to be attached to it, the Zohar asks?

The Zohar teaches that all blessing depends on the seventh day and that there was no manna on the seventh day because the six other days derive their blessing from it. Therefore, the food on the Sabbath table is blessed through the six days of the week.

The point, my grandfather explained, is that our weekly sustenance and needs were rooted in the manna Jews ate on Shabbat. During our travels in the *midbar*, we received a double portion of *manna* on Erev Shabbat (*lechem mishneh*) for each of the three *seudot*. That is, each Shabbat meal was doubled, equaling six meals which corresponded to the six days of Creation, representing the six days of sustenance for the coming week.

By partaking of each of the *seudot*, we were, essentially, “pulling” our needs from above to our world (*himshichu mezona l’chol yemot ha’chol*). That being the case, by missing one Shabbat meal *yom ta’azveini*, the consequence was yomaim e’ezvecha and the equivalent of forfeiting two days’ worth of the week’s sustenance. That is why, one must be sure to eat all three Shabbat *seudot*!

And *that* my grandfather explained, was the lesson of Rashi’s comment on vehaya im shamoa, quoting what it says in *megilah*, im ta’azveini yom yomaim e’ezvecha.

Just as the need to review and review otherwise we will lose the lessons we have learned, we must be sure to partake of all the seudot God has provided to us or we will lose our sustenance.

We must use it or lose it.