

Parashas
Va'eira

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כ"ה טבת תשפ"ה
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י"ז ע"י

קהילת שבתי בבית ד'

בנשיאות מורנו ורבנו הרה"צ
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טיב הקהילה

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סגולת עמל התורה

The Merit of Toiling in Torah

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טיב המערכת

וידעתם כי אני ה' אלקיכם

You Will know that I am Hashem, Your G-d

The holy Baal Shem Tov was walking down the street with his grandson, Rabbi Baruch, when he was a child. On their way, they encountered a nobleman who was acquainted with the Baal Shem Tov. The nobleman began to lament that his entire body, from his feet to his head, was covered in sores and pains, and he could find no cure for his suffering.

The holy Baal Shem Tov responded that he saw no remedy for the nobleman's wounds, and that his only cure was to restrain himself from his desires. However, the nobleman could not accept these words—how could such a demand be made of a person? Was it possible to tell someone who wished to fulfill his desires that he must refrain from them? Was he not like a person missing a limb without the fulfillment of his cravings? Then he asked the Baal Shem Tov, "Can you do this?"

The Baal Shem Tov answered: "I was born to elderly parents, so I am not so drawn to material desires. And as for the few desires I do have, a person can still overcome them." After they parted from the nobleman, the grandson, Baruchel, asked his great grandfather: "Saba, why didn't you tell the goy that you are a Jew, and that a Jew can restrain himself from fulfilling his desires?" The Baal Shem Tov replied: "What does a goy understand of the lofty value of a Jew?!"

HaKadosh Baruch Hu told Moses when bringing the plagues upon Egypt that their purpose was "וידעו מצרים כי אני ה' - *And Egypt shall know that I am Hashem*' (7:5). But when speaking about the children of Israel, He said, 'וידעתם כי אני ה' אלקיכם - *And you shall know that I am Hashem, your G-d*' (6:7). We must understand the difference between what the nations must know and what every Jew must know.

The Gemara states (Yevamos 61a): "You are called 'Adam,' but the nations of the world are not called 'Adam.' Why? Because the word 'Adam' consists of 'Aleph' and 'Dam' (א-דם). Blood (דם) is what sustains all living creatures, and their desires are dictated by the nature of their blood, which is why they cannot overcome their cravings and desires. However, man's superiority over animals lies in the letter 'Aleph' (א), which represents wisdom and intellect received from the Master of the World. He, Yisbarach, does not want us to engage in worldly pleasures. When a person overcomes his desires, he merges the 'Aleph' with 'Dam' and becomes Adam—a true human. This quality does not exist in the nations, who cannot overcome their desires and are therefore like other creatures. But 'You are called Adam.' Thus, every time a Jew conquers his desires, he becomes even more of an 'Adam.' And since only an 'Adam' can subordinate his will to the will of the Creator, it is stated regarding the Jewish people: *And you shall know that I am Hashem, your G-d.*

Tiv HaTorah – Va'eira

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֶלְיָבִי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֵל-מֹשֶׁה מִקְּצֶר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה: (ו:ט)

And Moshe spoke accordingly to the Bnei Yisrael, but they did not listen to Moshe, because of shortness of breath and hard work. (6:9)

Rashi explains: But they did not listen to Moshe – they did not accept consolation.

The holy *sefer Or HaChaim*, explains why they did not listen to Moshe. His words are as follows: "Perhaps because they were not Bnei Torah, they did not listen. This is what is meant by 'shortness of breath,' for Torah broadens a person's heart."

From his words, we understand that at that time, *Bnei Yisrael* were immersed in the burdens of labor and bricks. As a result, they had no time to engage in Torah study. Since they were not Bnei Torah, their minds were not expansive enough to grasp the holiness emanating from Moshe's words. As long as they did not see salvation manifest before them, they perceived his words as mere speech of an ordinary person, lacking the power to comfort them.

For Torah is what broadens a person's mind and enables him to attain spiritual understanding both in quantity and quality. Without it, a person lacks the discernment to differentiate between holiness and the mundane—between the speech of common people and the speech of Moses, through whom the *Shechinah* spoke.

As it is stated in the Gemara (*Berachos 40a*): 'Rebbe Zeira, and some say Rebbe Chinena bar Papa, said: Come and see that the way of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, is not like that of flesh and blood. The way of flesh and blood is that an empty vessel can hold, but a full vessel cannot hold. But HaKadosh Baruch Hu is not so—one who is full [of Torah] can hold more, while one who is empty cannot hold at all, as it is stated (*Shemos 15:26*): 'וַיֹּאמֶר אִם שָׁמַעְתָּ שְׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע' - 'If you surely listen—if you listen, you will continue to listen, but if not, you will not listen. Another explanation: If you have listened to the old, you will listen to the new, but if your heart turns away, you will no longer listen.' From this statement of the Gemara, we see that the more Torah a person absorbs, the more he recognizes words

emanating from holiness. But one who is not a Torah scholar, even if he hears words from the mouth of a prophet, perceives them as the words of an ordinary person. Such was the state of Israel at that difficult moment when they received this message. Since they saw no immediate solution to their suffering, it seemed to them as though Moses had fabricated his words.

And if you ask: Surely HaKadosh Baruch Hu knew that *Bnei Yisrael* were in a lowly state and, as a result, would not heed Moshe's words and would not find comfort in them—if so, what benefit was there in bringing them this message at that time?

It can be said that this itself was what HaKadosh Baruch Hu desired—that it be recorded for generations to come, that the success of the Jewish people is dependent specifically on the study of Torah. For through it, they will attain the paths of life, both spiritually and materially. The holiness of Torah expands a person's understanding, and beyond its unique quality of multiplying and flourishing within a person's soul, it also enlightens a person's eyes in all other matters. A generation that is not steeped in Torah loses even its material happiness. As we see in the generation of those who left Egypt: Since they were not Torah scholars, they failed to perceive the *ruach hakodesh* of Moshe Rabeinu. Had they been *Bnei Torah*, his words would have been like life-giving dew and cool water to a weary soul, and they would no longer have grieved over their miserable state.

But only because they were not *Bnei Torah* were they incapable of grasping the holy speech, and they continued to suffer from their misfortune.

And indeed, the people of that generation were not to blame for their state, for they did not choose their circumstances of their own free will. Nevertheless, their condition serves as a testimony and a warning to those who slacken in their engagement with Torah study.

Come and see that even Chazal (*Kiddushin* 82b), testified that one who engages in Torah study is worthy, by its merit, to attain tranquility both materially and

spiritually. Here are their words:

"It was taught: Rebbe Shimon ben Elazar says: In all my days, I have never seen a deer as a harvester, a lion as a porter, or a fox as a shopkeeper, yet they sustain themselves without difficulty. And they were only created to serve me, while I was created to serve my Creator. If those who were only created to serve me sustain themselves without difficulty, then is it not right that I, who was created to serve my Creator, should also sustain myself without difficulty? Rather, I have worsened my deeds and thereby diminished my livelihood, as it is stated (Yirmeyah 5:25): 'עוונותיכם הטו' - 'Your iniquities have turned these away.'"

From his words, you learn that, according to strict justice, Israel is not meant to endure material hardships. For since HaKadosh Baruch Hu has designated them for divine service [*avodah*], they should receive their sustenance from the highest table. And that very Torah, which teaches them spiritual paths of life, is what straightens their steps so that they do not falter—for holy wisdom guides its possessor even in his material affairs.

And even if a person does not merit

that the Torah itself will advise him on how to manage his affairs, he should believe that through the merit of his toil, HaKadosh Baruch Hu will provide for his needs. For this reason, Moshe was commanded by divine instruction to take a full omer of manna for safekeeping, as Rashi explains there (16:32) in the following words: *"In the days of Yirmeyah, when Yiremeyah rebuked them, saying, 'Why do you not engage in Torah study?' they replied, 'Shall we abandon our work and engage in Torah study? From where will we earn a livelihood?' He brought out the jar of manna and said to them (Yirmeyah 2:31), 'O generation, see the word of Hashem.' It does not say 'hear' but 'see'—with this, your ancestors were sustained. The Omnipresent has many agents to prepare sustenance for those who fear Him."*

And on this, Chazal said (*Avos* 3:5): *"Anyone who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, they remove from him the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly toil."*

In the same vein, they also said (*Bereishis Rabbah* 13:7) regarding the *posuk* (*Bereishis* 2:5) *'ואדם אין לעבוד את האדמה'* - *'And there was no man to work the ground,'* in the following words: *"Man was created only for toil; if he merits, he toils in Torah; if he does not merit, he toils in the land. Fortunate is the man who toils in Torah."*

HaRav HaTzaddik Rav Todros Tapilinsky once told me that his mother, who was a great and distinguished woman, used to say to her children during the early years of the State of Israel: *"Know that a person must labor in this world. If you do not toil in Torah and in the service of Hashem, you will inevitably have to work in other forms of labor, and chas v'shalom, the government may have the ability to force you to join the army. Therefore,"* she urged them, *"strive to serve only Hashem through Torah and avodah. Then, besides the eternal reward, you will be protected from all the obstacles of this world."*

From all that has been said, we too must learn how fortunate is the one whose Torah is his occupation.



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A Father Never Gives Up on His Child

Moreinu HaRav relates: A group of former *chareidim* who had fallen into the snares of the *yetzer hara* came to see me. One of them particularly touched my heart. Despite his external appearance—his wild mane of hair, earrings, and other accessories that signified his distance from Judaism—I sensed that deep inside, he longed to return to his roots. I could tell that he had already experienced enough of the emptiness that the *yetzer* has to offer in this world.

Since, Baruch Hashem, I never went through the path of leaving the faith, and someone who has not experienced such struggles cannot truly help him, I told him that I very much wanted to connect him with a certain young man. This young man had once been *chareidi* but had descended to the lowest depths before doing a complete Teshuva. I knew that someone like him would certainly be able to guide this young man on how to return properly and along the right path.

I began searching for the young man's phone number when suddenly there was a knock on the door. I went to open it, and there he was—the very young man I had in mind! He had come unexpectedly, without prior coordination, for something else he needed.

I was so moved that I turned to the young man and said, "Look how much Hashem loves you! I wanted to arrange a meeting between you two, and Hashem brought him straight to my door to help you!"

The young man was overwhelmed with emotion and moved to tears. I explained the situation to the *avreich*, who took a brief look at the young man, then embraced him and exclaimed, "I know him well! He used to be my personal fitness trainer!"

Within just a few minutes, he helped him sort things out, set him on the path back to his father's home, and cleared away the obstacles in his way!

The Sweetness of Torah – During the Days of Shovavim

וְהַעֲרַב נָא, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֶת דְּבָרֵי תוֹרַתְךָ בְּפִינוּ. וּבְפִיּוֹת עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ וְאַצְאֵינוּ, (וְאַצְאֵי צְאָאֵינוּ) וְאַצְאֵי עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּלִבְנוּ יוֹדְעֵי שְׂמֶךָ, וְלוֹמְדֵי תוֹרַתְךָ לְשִׂמְחָה...
 ...שְׂמֶךָ, וְלוֹמְדֵי תוֹרַתְךָ לְשִׂמְחָה...

»Make pleasant, Hashem our God, the words of Your Torah in our mouths and the mouths of Your people, Beis Yisrael, and may we and our offspring ...be among those who study Your Torah for its own sake.«

One of the best and most effective *tikkunim* during the weeks of *Shovavim Tat* (*Shemos, Va'era, Bo, Beshalach, Yisro, Mishpatim*) is to cultivate the *sweetness of Torah*—thereby countering the sweetness of sin and the allure of forbidden desires.

As the holy Ohev Yisrael explains (Parashas Vayechi):

"Our predecessors of earlier generations instituted fasting and repentance during the Shovavim period to rectify and atone the sin of blemishing the Foundation [of the holy covenant] (pegam hayesod). However, in our times, when the generations have weakened, and we cannot undertake the rigorous fasts and afflictions prescribed, anyone who fears Hashem in his heart must exert himself to repent for this grave sin, for it is great beyond bearing, etc., particularly through the study of the Oral Torah, delving deeply into halachah thoroughly and with clarity. In doing so, one gathers the sparks of goodness and holiness that were trapped, extracting them from the klippos (impure husks), as per the pasuk: He swallows wealth but vomits it up (Iyov 20:15). This is the essential means of rectification." (See there for the full discussion.)

It is well known and widely cited how sweetly the *Be'er Mayim Chaim* zt"l interprets King David's words, *My sin is before me constantly* (*Tehillim* 51:5). He writes (*Parashas Toldos*, and elsewhere):

"One should reflect on the intense desire, the fiery passion, and the great pleasure that gripped him when he sinned. As the burning passion and desire consumed him during the transgression, he should direct that fervor and longing toward serving Hashem—through Torah study, tefillah, and good deeds.

"Concerning this, it states (Berachos 34b), 'In the place where penitents stand, even the perfectly righteous cannot stand,' because a perfect tzaddik cannot fathom the intensity of longing, desire, and yearning that a sinner feels, which drives him to pursue their sin. The sinner alone knows how he strove for it, his heart burning within, the many thoughts he entertained, and the lengths he went to achieve the sin. During the act, his entire being—mind, senses, and emotions—was absorbed in the sin to such an extent that if someone had called his name, he would not have responded, nor would he have answered a question. He was utterly disconnected from reality. Therefore, he can know how to channel this intensity, fervor, and passion into mitzvos, serving Hashem with absolute fire, etc.

"Thus, David said, My sin is before me constantly, meaning he constantly kept the passion he felt during the sin to channel it into the same kind of devotion and energy toward serving Hashem."

With these inspiring words, let us open the holy *Gemara* during these exalted days and draw from it sacred vitality for our hearts and souls. By overcoming the internal and external challenges and obstacles to our study, through toil and effort to understand the Torah according to our abilities, we will merit to taste and feel the profound sweetness of Torah. As Chazal teach: "According to the effort is the reward!"

The Righteous Rebbitzin of the Ridbaz

One of the great and righteous *rabbanim* of the Holy Land was Rav Yaakov Dovid ben Zev, the Ridbaz zt"l, who, in his later years, emigrated from Lithuania to serve as the Rav of the holy city of Tzefas. He upheld the yoke of Torah, authoring numerous works across all fields of Torah expertise, including *Sha'alos U'Teshuvos Ridbaz*, *Perush Ridbaz* on the Yerushalmi, *Beis Ridbaz* on agricultural mitzvos, *Nimukkei Ridbaz* on the Torah, and many others. He is referred to by the acronym "Ridbaz" used for his *sefarim*'s titles, standing for "Rav Yaakov David ben Zev."

During his tenure as the Rav of Slutsk, a prominent city in Lithuania, he established the renowned *Slutsk Yeshivah*, also known as the *Kletsk Yeshivah*, which produced great Torah leaders. After he arrived in the Holy Land, he established *Yeshivas Ridbaz* in Tzefas, where *talmidim* focused on studying and clarifying the halachos relating to the land-dependent mitzvos (*mitzvos hatehuyos ba'aretz*).

The depth of his dedication to the holy Torah can be gleaned from stories of his youth when his burning love for Torah already permeated every aspect of his life. He and his righteous wife lived in poverty, subsisting on meager bread and water, yet their lives were filled with immense joy and boundless happiness in the delight of Torah. Often, their meals consisted of dry bread and salted fish, yet they rejoiced in the sweetness of the holy Torah.

His profound diligence in Torah study often filled his nights with the melody of Torah. He used the quiet hours of the night to delve deeply into his studies, clarifying the many halachic questions that arose during his daytime rabbinic duties. His days were occupied with communal responsibilities, *beis din* rulings, and delivering regular *shiurim* in the great yeshivah. Thus, he reserved the nighttime, when the world was at rest, to focus without distraction on his Torah study, fulfilling the phrase from *Maariv*: "For they are our life and the length of our days, and we will meditate on them day and night."

Indeed, over the years, his dedication bore fruit, fulfilling the teaching of Reish Lakish (*Chagigah* 12b): "Whoever engages in Torah study at night, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, draws a thread of kindness over him during the day, as it says (*Tehillim* 42:9), *By day Hashem will command His kindness*. Why does He command His kindness during the day? *Because His song is with me by night*." The Ridbaz's Torah wisdom and leadership earned him widespread admiration, and he was recognized as one of the foremost spiritual leaders of his generation.

However, a significant challenge often arose in the course of these years during his nightly study vigils. At that time, *sefarim* were not as readily available in private homes as today. Like other great *talmidei chachamim* immersed in their studies, his learning spanned many topics and areas. Often, the Ridbaz required access to *sefarim* housed in the *shul*'s library to resolve intricate halachic questions or complex legal disputes.

But there was a major problem. During the late hours of the night, the *shul* was locked and dark, and the city streets were not lit up. The Ridbaz was afraid to venture alone into the pitch-black streets or remain in the darkened *shul* for extended periods.

The righteous wife of the great scholar, *a"h*, saw her husband's profound longing to immerse himself in the sweetness of Torah study during the depths of the night, with no solution to his dilemma. She arose from her bed in the middle of the night, strengthening herself like a lioness to assist her illustrious husband in his Torah pursuits. She proposed that she accompany him to the *beis midrash*, staying with him throughout his learning to alleviate his concerns and allowing him to delve into the depths of his studies with complete focus.

Indeed, "a *talmid chacham*'s wife is like the *talmid chacham* himself" (*Shavuos* 30b), and she, too, deprived herself of sleep, accompanying him on many nights with candles in hand. Upon reaching the *beis midrash*, the Rav took his place while his wife lit several large candles to illuminate his workspace. The *sefarim* began to open

one after another, stacking up on the table, while the sweet and pleasant sound of Torah study for its own sake filled the air. During all this, the rebbetzin sat in her designated place in the women's section, praying and supplicating from the depths of her heart to the compassionate and faithful Father in Heaven, who neither slumbers nor sleeps. She remained there, keeping watch until the Rav concluded his study, and then they returned together to their holy abode.

The two thus merited the fulfillment of the *pasuk* (*Eichah* 2:19): *Arise, sing out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of Hashem; raise your hands to Him for the life of your infants*. The immense spiritual power of Torah study at night is well known from the sacred *Zohar* and other *sefarim*, as it says (*Tehillim* 119:148): *My eyes preceded the night watches, to speak of Your word*.

This is an example of true *messirus nefesh* for Torah! This is the behavior of a devoted and righteous wife of a *talmid chacham*, one whose entire life is dedicated to elevating the Torah's greatness. Only when the sweetness of Torah is tangibly felt in the home, and the very air breathed within the household is infused with the honey of Torah, can such a Torah home be built—a great house of Yisrael!

When the husband returns home from his Torah study filled with vitality and joy for the Torah, his entire being immersed in it, he naturally draws his wife into his Torah as well. The entire household then absorbs the spirit of Torah and longs for its sweetness.

Of course, once one has tasted the goodness of Torah, nothing else in the world compares. This is beautifully articulated by the golden words of the *Or Hachaim Hakadosh* (*Devarim* 26:11): "There is nothing good except for Torah' (*Berachos* 5a), for if people could only feel the sweetness and pleasantness of Torah's goodness, they would go mad with passion and pursue it fervently. All the world's wealth—silver and gold—would be considered as nothing to them, for Torah encompasses all the goodness in the world."