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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
VAYECHI 5778

בְּשִׁיטְיָחָה

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS

Struggling for Serenity

How would you describe a relaxed life? No responsibilities. No hard work. The freedom to do whatever you want, when you want it. However, we see from this week's *Parshah* that to feel truly relaxed, a person has to take a different approach.

When Yaakov Avinu blessed his son Yissacher he used the phrase "וַיִּרְאָה מְנוּחָה כִּי טוֹב," that "He saw tranquility, that it was good."¹ The Medrash explains² that this is in reference to learning Torah, an attribute for which *Shevet* Yissachar was well known. Learning Torah, says the Medrash, is what causes the *Shevet* of Yissacher to feel tranquil and serene. However, doesn't this sound counterintuitive? Isn't the main ingredient for feeling relaxed "letting go" of responsibilities? Learning Torah is a responsibility, and the entire time, you're learning about what your responsibilities are!

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander³ explains that the relaxed feeling we experience when not doing anything is short-lived. In general, when people live their lives with no structure and are not occupied with a mission, they feel unaccomplished and therefore unsettled. In fact, because "idleness leads to insanity," a spouse may not demand that their spouse not do any work.⁴

Conversely, when people live their lives within a structure and have a mission they feel fulfilled and thereby feel satisfied and internally calm. When we introduce the most meaningful mission that *Chazal* have taught us – learning and living by the Torah – that is the only thing that causes us to feel accomplished and thereby tranquil and relaxed. Now we can understand Yaakov Avinu's comment to his son Yissachar - only through his learning Torah he attains tranquility and serenity.

Of course it is important for everyone to take breaks and vacations when needed. But the idea of striving for the 'ultimate goal' of having nothing to do is a falsehood. While it may appear that the formula to live a tranquil and serene life is to be free from responsibilities, our *Chazal* teach us that it is quite the contrary. Having a structure in our day and filling it with the ultimate mission of learning Torah and doing *Mitzvos* is the true source of a tranquil and serene life.

**Learning Torah
and doing
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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Discussing the love and joy of Torah is one thing, but how do we truly tap into this great happiness and pleasure that the Torah has to offer?

Rabbi Zions once ran into Reb Elya Svei (1924-2009, Rosh HaYeshiva of Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia) at a wedding. Rabbi Zions asked the Rosh HaYeshiva, "What is the biggest challenge that American students face nowadays?"

Without hesitation, Reb Elya answered, "They want to enjoy themselves. They don't have the time or wherewithal to spend the time sitting and focusing on learning."

"And how does one develop that?" asked Rabbi Zions. "From where will they get the ability to enjoy learning?"

"They need a Rabbi. Not just a Rabbi who teaches Torah. A Rabbi who teaches the children how to enjoy Torah."

A Rabbi can model the enjoyment of Torah, and make it enjoyable for the students. And students should seek out someone who enjoys learning, to show them how to gain the most from their learning.

1 Bereishis 49:15

2 Bereishis Rabbah 98:12

3 Sifsei Chaim on Bereishis, p. 548-549

4 Mishnah Kesubos 5:5

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MORE THAN BRILLIANCE

For Love of Torah by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman is an excellent book on the topic of Torah. It is replete with *Divrei Torah* about the importance of Torah, and inspiring stories, such as the one that follows.

Reb Aharon Kotler (1891-1962) was the *Rosh HaYeshiva* (dean) of Beth Medrash Govoha, in Lakewood, New Jersey. His genius and love of Torah was known to everyone, and he was especially known for his diligent and persistent study. Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky, *Rosh HaYeshiva* of Torah Vodaath testified that although he entered the *Beis Medrash* every day at 5:00 in the morning, and left at 11:30 in the evening, Reb Aharon was always there before him, and had always left afterwards.

One day, a student passed by the office of Reb Aharon Kotler and saw him dancing - all alone! The student watched in amazement until Reb Aharon noticed him and requested that he ask one of the yeshiva's outstanding students to come to the office.

Reb Aharon spoke privately with the second student for some time. When their discussion ended, the first student approached the second, related what he had seen, and asked why Reb Aharon had summoned him. The second student replied, "It has been more than twenty years that Reb Aharon has strained himself to understand a comment of the *Gra* to *Choshen Mishpat*, chapter 28. Today he finally arrived at what he is certain is the correct explanation.

"This is why Reb Aharon danced. He summoned me to relate the explanation that he had come up with."

A student passed by the office of Reb Aharon Kotler and saw him dancing - all alone!

1 Reb Eliyahu of Vilna (1720-1797)

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Torah was given on Shabbos because toil in Torah leads to rest.¹
- Our *Neshamah* can only be happy when feeding it spiritual "food" such as learning Torah and doing *Mitzvos*.²
- One who accepts upon oneself the 'yoke of Torah,' has the 'yoke of livelihood' taken away.³ This is partially due to the fact that one who toils in Torah is more likely to be happy with what they have.⁴
- Much like it is impossible to describe the taste of wine to someone who has never experienced it, the joy in life that one experiences through toil in Torah cannot be described, it must be experienced.⁵

1 *Kli Yakar Bereishis* 49:15

2 *Mesillas Yesharim Perek* 1

3 *Pirkei Avos* 3:5

4 *Rabbeinu Yonah ibid*, s.v. ועול דרך ארץ

5 *Lev Eliyahu* Vol 1, p118-119