

## DAILY CHESHBON HANEFESH #10

This week we learned three new tools: We learned we have to have Hakarat Hatov for the fact that we have:

- a wonderful body that works so well
- a Sechel , intelligence
- the Torah

The fifth tool takes the previous three tools and integrates them into a goal, so to speak. It tells us to make a Cheshbon Hanefesh and see how lazy we are, how lax we are, when it comes to trying to understand Hakadosh Baruch Hu's Torah. [The fourth tool tells us to recognize Hashem's tremendous Chessed in giving us the Torah.] **The fifth tool tells us to search within ourselves to see how lazy we are in trying to understand the Torah, and not only that, but also how satisfied we are with our *mis*-understanding of it.**

The Chovot Halevavot gives the following mashal:

If a king gave you a book that had important instructions on how to function when working in the kingdom, and if this book was a little bit confusing to you – you were unsure of the meanings of some of the words; perhaps some of the letters were unclear; or maybe you didn't really understand the instructions – you wouldn't be satisfied with a superficial understanding of the book. You wouldn't excuse yourself and say it's too hard. You'd make it your business to know what you have to do; furthermore, you would even torment yourself trying to understand the instructions.

If that's what you would do for a mere mortal, aren't you more obliged to do this to understand Hakadosh Baruch Hu's book, which is your very life? The Chovot Halevavot quotes from the book of Devarim 30:20: "It is your life and your length of days." Indeed, as we explained yesterday, how vital Torah is! The question is, **How can a person allow himself to neglect the Torah and be satisfied with a superficial understanding of the text rather than a more in-depth understanding of the text?** This tool, says the Chovot Helevavot is to realize that, notwithstanding this gift of the Torah, which is G-d's revelation and instruction, we are lax in trying to understand the instructor and his instructions.

The point is, if something is really important to you, you are going to put a lot of effort into it. If it's not important, you won't. The amount of effort you put into it reveals a lot about you. We know that when great Gedolim didn't understand a piece of Gemarah or a commentary of one of the Rishonim on the Gemarah, they would even visit the kever (the grave) of a great Tzaddik and daven for divine assistance in understanding the meaning of that Gemarah.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin relates that the Vilna Gaon would fast for days on end if he was stuck on a piece of Gemarah and didn't have a clear understanding of it commensurate with his own level. Once Rabbi Chaim Volozhin came to visit the Vilna Gaon, and the GRA's rebbetzin said to him: "My husband has not eaten for three days!" Rabbi Chaim sat down with him, and went over the Gemarah with him; and just by being with Rabbi Chaim and speaking it over, the Gaon came to an understanding of that Gemarah and had such great joy in understanding it, that he was once again able to eat.

It's not just with Gedolim that we see this fervor. It is told of Jonas Salk, that quite often he'd go to work with his lunch and come home with his lunch. He was so busy looking for the various

cures and vaccines he is famous for inventing, that he had no time to eat. That is how we should understand the Vilna Gaon, albeit on a much greater level. There was just no time for eating if you didn't understand a Gemarah.

I heard from Rabbi Bechhoffer a wonderful analogy, which helps us further appreciate this enthusiasm: He says, mitzvot are to Torah as limbs are to a person himself. What does this mean?

There are many levels integrated into the makeup of a person. Biologically, we have an epidermis and below it, veins and muscles and below them, bones and below them, vital organs. We find that the more internal the part in the body, the more important the organ is.

This is also true psychologically. A person has a part of him that he shows to the whole world. Then there is the part of him that is "below" the external "skin." You don't show the whole world your insecurities, you don't show them the doubts you are grappling with. Perhaps you would share them with a select few. As we delve deeper into the person, we find the core of the person's personality – the essential "you" that you won't let anybody touch.

The same is true for Torah. There is the external, plain meaning. Then there is the meaning behind those plain ideas; for example, what we learn from Rashi. Deeper than that are the halachot and the messages we derive from them. As we delve deeper, we get to the ultimate understanding – the internal and highest aspects of Torah.

It is important to realize that, in all understandings and relationships, we start from the superficial and progress to the deeper aspects. We can ask, Why did Hashem make the Torah so hard for us to understand? Why didn't he write out the instructions of the Torah with all the explanations incorporated?

A simple answer is that it would have been too much to write. But there is a more profound answer:

The methodology for understanding Torah teaches us how to understand other human beings. You get to know Torah just like you get to know other people. You relate to Torah the way you relate to other people. Furthermore, you have to relate to Torah the way you relate to your spouse. That is how deep the relationship with Torah has to go. It is a personal relationship that goes to the core of the human being. The Eishet Chayil we recite every Friday night is really an allegory to explain our relationship with Torah.

The Gemarah in Berachot page 6B, says, "If a person dances at a wedding and makes the bride and groom happy, his reward is that he will merit to learn Torah." In other words, G-d will give him divine help to enable him to understand Torah. What is the connection between dancing at a wedding and learning Torah? The Gemarah explains that we learn how the two are related from the fact that, when the Torah was given at Sinai, the word "kol" – "voice" – is mentioned five times. Also, at the blessings recited at the marriage of the Chatten and Kallah, the word "kol" is mentioned five times. An analogy is therefore made between a wedding and the giving of the Torah.

That is a clever observation. But what is the deeper meaning? The comparison uses the word "kol" – "voice." How does "voice" relate to "words"? The answer is that sound is an unbroken tone; words, however, are sounds that are cut down. When we cut the sounds into a certain sequence, we get words. In order to convey a message, a person has to cut his sounds into

words. The thinking that goes on inside the person isn't done merely in words. A "thought/feeling language" revolves inside the person. Feelings inside are not felt with language, and they can't necessarily be transmitted to someone else unless they are cut into words. The unmitigated experience of everything the person is thinking and feeling must be translated into words. You have to take the innermost "voice" that comes from the depths of you and cut it down into words in order to transmit the message to others.

Sometimes words are simply not adequate. You've heard people say, "I just don't have the words to explain it." In communication, the key is that the listener must learn to listen, not just to the words, but also to the voice – both in Torah and with one's spouse. With other people, who are not as close as your spouse, you do not have to go that far: you can get by with the external diplomacy that is found in words. But with your spouse, you have to learn to listen to the "voice." That is also how you have to learn Torah: if you go with the words alone, you have, at best, a superficial understanding, and not only that, but also the words may be misleading. You have to learn to listen to the "voice" of the Torah and understand the sounds behind the words, just as you do in your relationship with your spouse.

For example, you come home after a hard day's work and you see that your wife does not seem to be in the best mood, and you ask her, "How was your day?" and she answers, "Fine." That word "fine" says one thing, but the tone she uses is very different. You have to pick up on that nuance and relate to it. The same applies to Torah. You read a certain word and it doesn't make sense. Realize that Hashem purposely made the Torah hard to understand. Once we attain the understanding of Torah, it means we have penetrated to the "voice" of Torah. That success will be the role model for us to know how to handle personal relationships, especially with our spouse. The effort we make in plumbing the depths of Torah shows how much we care about understanding Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Reading the "diary" is not enough; we have to understand the feelings behind the words. If we can do that, we can improve our relationship.

***Today's Exercise:***

1. When you learn a segment of Torah, make it your business to ask a question on what you have learned. If you learn a whole segment and don't have any questions about it, it means you haven't penetrated the superficial level. Write down your question. Take stock of all the questions you have. You don't necessarily have to have the answers. Our Rabbis say, The question of the wise man is half the answer. You may have one question, and then another, and another. Often one question will be the answer to another.
2. Try to learn something a little more challenging. Don't be satisfied with simple readings. Appreciate that this is one of the reasons we repeat the Torah portions every year: Each time we read them, we get a deeper understanding of them.
3. Don't be satisfied with the question you have come up with or the fact that you are grappling with a more challenging passage (#1 and #2). Rather, make it your business to ask someone who is more knowledgeable than you – a mentor, a Rebbi – and find out what the answer is. Doing that will show how important Torah is to you, and how important your relationship with Hashem is. And then, when you say Eishet Chayil on Friday night and you apply what you have learned to your relationship with your wife, your relationship will be much deeper and much more satisfying.