

תלמוד תורה וחשיבות התורה

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1) The Mishna in (פ"ו מ"ב) פרקי אבות, states: אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן לֵוִי, בְּכָל יוֹם וַיִּזְכַּר יוֹם בֵּית קוֹל יוֹצֵאת, מִהָר חוֹרֵב וּמִמְכָרֶזֶת וְאוֹמְרָת, אוֹי לָהֶם לְבָרִיּוֹת מֵעֶלְבוֹנָה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה. שְׂכָל מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ עוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָה נִקְרָא נְזוּף, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי יא, כב) נָזַם זָהָב בְּאָף חֲזִיר אִשָּׁה יָפָה וְסִרְתָּ טָעַם (משלי יא, כב) *Every day a Bas Kol announces, "Woe to creation because of the disgrace of the Torah!" Because anyone who is not involved in learning Torah is called נזוף, as the posuk in Mishlei (11: 22) says, ... נזם זהב באף חזיר – 'a golden nose-ring in the snout of a pig...'*

נזוף is an acronym for נזם זהב באף חזיר. We need to explain why one who doesn't learn Torah is likened to a golden ring in the snout of a חזיר. What is the connection between them?

The comparison is as follows. A human being is unique in all of creation because of his brain. The human brain is the most complicated entity in all of the universe; it can accomplish more functions than all the computers in the world. Besides thinking, the brain also controls the body, the emotions, and the subconscious. Its breadth of ability in thinking, remembering, and decision-making is beyond comprehension. Why do we have such a unique and complicated organ?

In nature, everything in animals serves as a tool for survival. A beaver has just the right amount of intelligence it needs to survive. Every animal is created this way, from the elephant to the dolphin. But a human being has millions of times more intelligence than necessary for him to survive. Why is this so?

The answer to this is that man was given this additional intelligence in order to recognize the רבונו של עולם and find out how to live life in accordance with His will. This entails thinking about our purpose in life, and studying the Torah, which teaches us what Hashem wants and expects of us – the mitzvos which He gave us.

Thus, the brain that is given to us, this marvelous organ, is meant for us to know Hashem to the fullest extent of human capacity. Instead, how do we use our brains? Since we don't need that extra capacity for survival, we end up using it to devise gadgets to keep ourselves busy, entertained or distracted, instead of thinking about הקדוש ברוך הוא. We end up making ourselves too busy to engage in that which we were really given our brain to accomplish!

Now we can understand the *mashal* of the golden ring in the pig's snout: Let's say someone has a pet pig which he loves dearly. It is so precious to him that he decides to adorn it with a golden nose ring! But the pig itself is merely interested in digging through the muck. The ring is a wonderful tool to aid the pig in its endeavor. It can now use the golden ring to wallow even deeper into the muck than before. This of course, is not quite what the owner had in mind when he

¹ Transcribed from a recording by a *talmid* to the best of his ability.

decorated his precious pig with the golden ring. It turns out that instead of the ring bringing his pig distinction, it increases its disgrace.

Unfortunately, sometimes people are no different.

A human being was “adorned” with a magnificent brain to bring him distinction by becoming ever closer to Hashem. But, if he doesn’t study Torah to accomplish this goal, he ends up using this adornment in a manner that actually disgraces him! This is why one who does not learn Torah is called נזוף. He turns what should be his כבוד into a בושה. He is the same as the pig with a golden ring in its snout.

2) The Mishna continues: ואומר והלחת מעשה אלהים המה והמכתב מכתב אלהים הוא חרות על אל תקרא חרות אלא חרות, שאין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה הלחת (שמות לב, טז), אל תקרא חרות אלא חרות, שאין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתלמוד תורה. This Mishnah tells us that the Luchos are described with the word חרות, engraved, to hint to the fact that one is only truly free (חרות) if he is involved in learning Torah.

Why are we free through Torah? The Torah has so many restrictions – we cannot do *melacha* on Shabbos; we cannot marry whomever we like; we can’t eat what we like. How are we free?

The answer is that with Torah we are free to do that which our *neshamos* bid us to do. Our *neshama* bids us to be kind; to listen to the רצון ה'; it even bids us to listen to the חוקים which we don’t understand. This is because the *neshama* understands that all of these things are what is truly good for us. This is how we become free. Without Torah, we are enslaved to our יצר הרע which bids us to live like animals, to live for כבוד, to live for power and wealth – to live for selfish reasons. The יצר הרע would have us stay away from anything the *neshama* would have us do. By keeping the Torah, which is represented by the Luchos (as they contain the entire Torah in them), we free ourselves to live according to the purpose for which we were created.

The first part of the Mishna teaches us that we have an amazing brain, and we must use it to learn Torah otherwise it becomes an ugly disgrace. The second part teaches us that keeping the Torah frees us to listen to our *neshama*. The *neshama* wants to express itself in the world and we feel satisfied by accomplishing that. The *neshama* helps us perform our function in life and live for the reason for which we were created. Therefore, we are only truly free to the depths of our Neshama when we learn Torah and keep the Luchos, when we live with the Torah engraved into ourselves.

So, in this time leading up to Shavuot, the time of *Kabolas HaTorah*, let us realize the unbelievable and incomparable *zechus* that we have as בני ישראל to have received the Torah and to have been given the ability to learn the Torah. May ה' הקדוש ברוך הוא *bentch* us all in our endeavor to learn the Torah instead of becoming נזוף, and to keep the Torah in order to be free to reach the elevated goals for which Hashem created us.