

חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

Esh Kodesh

PIASECZNO · BERESHIT, ESH KODESH

True mastery of Torah means that one's very essence becomes transformed by it, so that a person who is genuinely a "ba'al Mikra" or "ba'al Mishnah" can overcome the yetzer hara (evil inclination) even at times of feasting or distress, especially when fixed times for Torah study themselves serve to arouse and strengthen him. Since the world was created for the sake of Yisrael and the Torah, even amid hardship we hope that this original purpose will soon be revealed, and that Torah study—especially through set shiurim (study sessions)—will help us withstand whatever impedes us, whether indulgence or suffering. AI SUMMARY

For it is found in the Gemara, Sanhedrin 101a: Our Rabbis taught: One who recites a verse from Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) and the like, as if it were a song, and one who recites a verse at houses of feasting not in its proper time—because the Torah [girded itself in sackcloth and stood before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said]: Master of the universe, Your children have made me like a harp upon which clowns play. He said to her: My daughter, at the time when they eat and drink, with what should they occupy themselves? She said to Him: Master of the universe—if they are masters of Mikra (Scripture), let them occupy themselves with Mikra; if they are masters of Mishnah, let them occupy themselves with Mishnah; if they are masters of Talmud, let them occupy themselves with the halachot (laws) of Pesach on Pesach, with the halachot of Atzeret on Atzeret, and so forth.

Now, it requires explanation: what is the question that the Holy One, blessed be He, asks of the Torah—at the time when they eat and drink, with what should they occupy themselves? Does He Himself, blessed be He, not know with what they will occupy themselves? And why did the Torah specify in such detail—"if they are masters of Mikra..." "if they are masters of Mishnah..." "if they are masters of Talmud..."—and not simply say, in general, that they should learn, for certainly each person will learn whatever he is capable of?

Indeed, the Torah itself, which said "ve-dibarta bam" (and you shall speak of them), likewise did not specify in detail what each person should learn, since each one knows on his own what he ought to learn.

And perhaps this is a merit (zechut) that the Holy One, blessed be He, found for them — an excuse for the Torah reading of verses in houses of feasting, at the time when people are eating and drinking, when the yetzer hara (evil inclination) rules over them then, for a lion does not roar from a box of straw as it does from a box of flesh. With what, then, should they occupy themselves? And about this the Torah said, "If they are masters of Scripture..." etc.

For we have already discussed that one who studies Torah, yet whose very essence does not also become transformed into Torah and holiness, is only like a chest in which books happen to be found — he himself remains wood, just as he was. And this same distinction may also be seen in the midrash (Midrash Rut, chapter 2, and Yerushalmi Chagigah, chapter 2, halachah 1): when Rabbi Meir wished to save Acher ("the Other," i.e., Elisha ben Avuyah) from Gehinnom, he said, "We save the case of the scroll along with the scroll; we save Acher for the sake of his Torah." That is, he likened Acher only to a case in which a scroll happens to be found, and nevertheless he saves him just as one saves the case of the scroll together with the scroll.

But this is not so regarding a true talmid chacham (Torah scholar) and tzaddik (righteous person). Of such a person the Gemara says (Makkot 22b): "How foolish are those people who stand up before a Torah scroll, yet do not stand up before a great man!" — that is, they likened him to the Torah scroll itself, and even more than that — not to the case alone.

This is what the Torah answered: if they are "ba'alei mikra" (masters of Scripture), then if they themselves have become masters of Scripture, then even at the time when they are eating and drinking, they will not allow their yetzer (evil inclination) to incite them. If they are "ba'alei mishnah" (masters of Mishnah), and so forth — then even one whose yetzer does incite him, nevertheless, since they themselves are masters of Mikra, Mishnah, etc., they must overcome it. And furthermore, the Torah said: let them occupy themselves with the halachot (laws) of Pesach on Pesach, with the halachot of Atzeret on Atzeret, with the halachot of the festival on the festival — so that the time itself will also arouse them. For this is a great matter, to set for oneself fixed times for Torah, since then, even if a person himself forgets or has obstacles, nevertheless the time itself arouses him and strengthens him to overcome the obstacles.

So too now, when we have many impediments — not from eating and drinking, but rather, on the contrary, from troubles and suffering, Heaven have

mercy — nevertheless, every person, even the merchant and the craftsman, used to have fixed times for Torah study. Therefore, the times of these set shiurim (study sessions) will themselves help him not to neglect them. And indeed, now that we have more free time, we need, at the start of this period, to establish for ourselves even more shiurim than before. And may Hashem have mercy and save us, so that we may be able to engage in Torah and avodah (divine service) amid expansiveness.

We return to the above: since they are essentially masters of Mikra (Scripture) and masters of Mishnah, they are therefore able to overcome also the hindrances — whether of satiety from eating and drinking, or, God forbid, of distress. "Bereishit bara Elokim et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz" (In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth) — for the sake of Yisrael and the Torah. And since the very essence of the world is for the sake of Yisrael and the Torah, therefore even though there are times when, God forbid, the world stands against Yisrael and the Torah, nevertheless we hope to Hashem that speedily it will again be revealed that the essence of the world is to save Yisrael and the Torah, and that the first intent of creation will be revealed — that everything exists for the sake of the Torah and Yisrael. Amen.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5)