Torah Study as a Spiritual Practice.

prepared by
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1. Rambam 1137-1204- Maimonides Laws of Torah Study 1:8

ח כל איש מישראל חייב בתלמוד תורה בין עני בין עשיר בין שלם בגופו בין בעל יסורין בין בחור בין שהיה זקן גדול שתשש כחו אפילו היה עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה ומחזר על הפתחים ואפילו בעל אשה ובנים חייב לקבוע לו זמן לתלמוד תורה ביום ובלילה שנאמר והגית בו יומם ולילה

Every man in Israel is obligated to study Torah, whether rich or poor, healthy or seriously ill, whether young or old and weak, even a poor person who is supported through tzedakah and knocks on doors, even married with children, must set time for study of Torah day and night as its says (Joshua 1) "you shall medidate upon it day and night"

Chapter 3:8

ה תחלת דינו של אדם אינו נידון אלא על התלמוד ואחר כך על שאר מעשיו לפיכך אמרו חכמים לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה בין לשמה בין שלא לשמה שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה

The first question asked in the judgment of a man is 'Have you studied?' and after that he is asked about other deeds. The sages stated: 'Let a man always study the Torah whether for its own sake or not; even if it is not at first for its own sake, the study leads on to that.

2. פסחים דף נ.ב

דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב: לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצות אף על פי שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה.

For Rab Judah said in Rab's name: A man should always occupy himself with Torah and good deeds, though it is not for their own sake, for out of doing with an ulterior motive there comes doing good for its own sake.

3. תוס. ברכות יא.ב שכבר נפטר באהבה רבה

אבל ברכת אשר בחר בנו וברכת לעסוק בדברי תורה שהן עיקר לברכת התורה פוטרת כל היום וא"ת מאי שנא מסוכה שצריך לברך על כל סעודה וסעודה לישב בסוכה

But the blessings over Torah of *asher bachar banu* and *la-asok bedivrei torah* which are the primary Torah blessings exempt the need to bless before studying the whole day. If you ask what is the difference between this and blessing upon entering a sukkah where one must bless before each meal *leshev basukkah?*

Torah Blessings

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלקינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה:

וְהַעֲרֶב־נָא ה' אֱלקינוּ אֶת־דִּבְרֵי תוֹרָתֶךָ בְּפִינוּ, וּבְפִי עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ וְצֶאֱצָאֵינוּ, וְצֶאֱצָאֵי עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, כֻּלָּנוּ יוֹדְעֵי שְׁמֶךָ, וְלוֹמְדֵי תוֹרָתֶךָ לִשְׁמָהּ: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַמְּלַמֵּד תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלקינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים, וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to engross (busy) ourselves in the words of Torah.

Please, Lord, our God, sweeten the words of Your Torah in our mouth and in the mouth of Your people, the family of Israel. May we and our offspring and the offspring of Your people, the House of Israel -all of us- know Your Name and study Your Torah for its own sake. Blessed are You, God, Who teaches Torah to His people Israel.

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe. Who chose us from all the peoples and gave us His Torah. Blessed are You, God, Giver of the Torah.

4. תוס. ברכות יא.ב שכבר נפטר באהבה רבה
וי"ל דשאני תורה שאינו מייאש דעתו דכל שעה אדם מחוייב ללמוד דכתיב והגית בו יומם ולילה והוי כמו יושב כל היום בלא הפסק. אבל אכילה בסוכה יש שעה קבועה.

We can answer that Torah study is different because one does not put it out of one's mind because one is constantly obligated to study as it is written (Joshua 1) "You shall meditate upon it day and night". This is like studying all day without an interruption. But eating in a Sukkah has a set time.

5. Nefesh HaHayim- Chaim of Volohzin- 1749-1821

ספר נפש החיים - שער ד - פרק יד
בכל עת שהאדם עוסק ומתדבק בה כראוי, הדברים שמחים כנתינתן מסיני, כמ"ש בזוהר ר"פ חקת, ר"י פתח, זאת התורה כו' =תא חזי מלין דאורייתא קדישין אינון עלאין אינון (סתימין) מתיקין אינון כמה דכתיב הנחמדים מזהב כו', מאן דאשתדל באורייתא כאלו קאים כל יומא על טורא דסיני לקבל אורייתא הה"ד היום הזה נהיית לעם( ]בא וראה דברי התורה קדושים הם, עליונים הם, מתוקים הם, כמו שכתוב, "הנחמדים מזהב" כו', כל העוסק בתורה כאילו עומד כל יום על הר סיני לקבל התורה, וזה שכתוב "היום הזה נהיית לעם":

ובפ' אחרי ס"ט א=דתאנא כל מאן דאצית למלוי דאורייתא זכאה הוא בהאי עלמא וכאלו קביל תורה מסיני; ואפילו מכל ב"נ נמי בעי למשמע מלוי דאורייתא, ומאן דארכין אודניה לקבלי' יהיב יקרא למלכא קדישא ויהיב יקרא לאורייתא, עליה כתיב היום הזה נהיית לעם כו'( ]למדנו כל מי שמקשיב לדברי תורה אשריו בזה העולם וכאילו קיבל התורה מסיני, ואפילו מכל בן אדם גם כן צריך לשמוע דברי תורה, ואשר מטה אוזנו לקבלם, נותן יקר למלך הקדוש ונותן יקר לתורה, ועליו כתוב, "היום הזה נהיית לעם" כו'

והטעם שכמו שבעת המעמד המקודש נתדבקו כביכול בדבורו יתברך, כן גם עתה בכל עת ממש שהאדם עוסק והוגה בה, הוא דבוק על ידה בדבורו יתברך ממש, מחמת שהכל מאמר פיו יתברך למשה בסיני ואפילו מה שתלמיד קטן שואל מרבו כנ"ל (פרק ו):
וגם עתה בעת שהאדם עוסק בה בכל תיבה, אותה התיבה ממש נחצבת אז להבת אש מפיו יתברך כביכול כמש"ש, ונחשב כאלו עתה מקבלה בסיני מפיו ית

Nefesh HaHayim Shaar 4: Chapter 14

And each time that a person studies Torah and "clings" to it properly, the words are as joyous as when they were given at Sinai. As it is written in the Zohar: Come and see that the words of the Torah are holy, exalted, and sweet as it is written (Psalm19:11) *More to be desired are they than gold, even very fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb*. One who studies Torah is as if he stands each day at Sinai to receive the Torah as it is written:(Deuteronomy

Chapter 27:9). *And Moses and the priests the Levites spoke to all Israel, saying, Take heed, and listen, O Israel; this day you have become the people of the Lord your God.*

We also learn from the Zohar: Any individual who is attentive to the words of Torah, he is happy in the world as if he received the Torah from Sinai. Even from any person you are obligated to listen to words of Torah, and when you incline your ears to hear them, you give glory to the Holy King and to the Torah and this is what is written *"this day you have become the people of the Lord your God."*

The reason for this is that just as at that holy moment (Sinai), it was as if people were attached to the utterance of God, so too now any time a person studies Torah, he is attached through it to the actual utterance of God, since all of Torah was spoken at Sinai, even that which a young student would ask his teacher.

Now when a person is actively engaged with each word, that word itself is actually hewn as if it is a fiery flame from the mouth of God, and it is considered as if he is receiving it now from Sinai.

Tanach - Psalms Chapter 19

8. The Torah of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
9. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
10. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
11. More to be desired are they than gold, even very fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Tanach - Deuteronomy Chapter 27

9. And Moses and the priests the Levites spoke to all Israel, saying, Take heed, and listen, O Israel; this day you have become the people of the Lord your God.
10. You shall therefore obey (listen to) the voice of the Lord your God, and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command you this day.

6. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik 1903-1993 Torah and Shekhinah in *Family Redeemed*

> At best, the law pertaining to *kevi'at itim,* establishing specifically fixed times and dates, is *prima facie* enigmatic. The question is simple. Why is it necessary to set aside definite hours? What difference does it make how one studies as long as he puts in long hours and as long as the results are good? In respect to other *mitzvot* no rules have ever been formulated about regularity and orderedness. Why should *talmud Torah* be different from other *mitzvot?* Why is a person compelled to answer two questions pertaining to *talmud Torah* on the day of judgment? One question is concerned with the "what," the other with the "how."

At a second glance, it begins to dawn upon us that what appeared at first as incomprehensible reflects an exalted idea which aspires to transcend intellectual formalism and rise to a sublime drama of faith. In this drama we will see presented, under veils, the adventures of restless man, adult and child. Apparently, *talmud Torah* is a dual activity. At one level, the mind is preoccupied with the study of Torah. As such, it is a regular intellectual performance which fits into the framework of the classical formula of learning. At this level, the relationship prevailing between Jew and Torah can be compared to, or rather equated with, the universal subject-object encounter which takes place in any intellectual performance. In essence, the encounter is purely functional, and, using Martin Buber's jargon, exhausts itself in "I" facing "it," which means the absence of relationship.

At the second level, *talmud Torah* becomes a total performance claiming the whole of the personality, and it cannot, as a total performance, be pressed into the classical formula of learning as an I-it confrontation. It is rather, to use again a Buberian phrase, an I-thou relationship. *Talmud Torah* is not just acquisition of knowledge but a personal meeting of the Jew with the Torah. At this level, the Jew cannot just walk into the *beit ha-midrash* unannounced and unexpected and study Torah in his leisure time. As long as the Torah is an it, an object, one can act vis-a-vis an "it" at random; the scientist opens up the door of the laboratory, walks in and picks up the test tube. If the Torah, however, is a "thou," one must arrange a meeting, make a date with her. Otherwise she will not wait for him.

The Jew has a rendezvous with the Torah. Maimonides placed enormous emphasis upon the sanctity of this rendezvous, the significance of keeping the engagement. Neither pain *(ba'al yissurin),* nor hunger or abject poverty *(ani),* nor the dreariness and desolation of old age *(zaken),* nor the aggressive excitement of youth can serve as an apology for breaking the engagement with the Torah. If an hour was designated, the appointment made, the meeting arranged, no excuse is good enough to disappoint the Torah. Any delay, no matter how potent the reason was, is a violation of the precept of *ve-hagita bo yornam va-lailah* (Josh. 1:8), studying Torah day and night.

The question arises again. Why is it important that the Jew have an engagement with the Torah?

It is self-evident that the halakhic emphasis upon a rendezvous with the Torah and the significance of punctuality and promptness in keeping this rendezvous is to be understood as referring to someone else who trails behind the Torah, namely the *Shekhinah.* God, the *Ribbono Shel Olam,* in this case disguised as Mother *Shekhinah,* never separated Herself from Her daughter; veiled in humble anonymity, She accompanies Her daughter princess, the Torah. She is present wherever Her princess happens to be. Can one meet the Mother *Shekhinah* alone without having a date with Her daughter? No! Whoever is eager to invite Mother *Shekhinah* must first set up a meeting with Her daughter, the princess. She always accompanies her; she is the princess' mother, the princess' friend and the princess' chaperone, who does not leave her out of sight. By dating the daughter, one dates the mother as well. "Moses received the Torah from Sinai" (Avot [Ethics of the Fathers]l:l). The Mishnah does not say "The *Kadosh Barakh Hu* gave the Torah to Moses at Sinai." Why? Because Torah and *Shekhinah* are

inseparable. The *Shekhinah* never divorced Herself from the Torah. The latter is still *Torat Hashem,* Her word. Her beloved princess. They never parted company. She lets Moses and Her chosen community share in the great adventure, in the wonderful unitive love affair of *Shekhinah* and *Torat Yisrael.* "When two sit together and engage in Torah, God's *Shekhinah* rests upon them" (Berakhot 6a).

The *mitzvah* of *talmud Torah* begins as an intellectual activity which requires exertion, concentration, absorption, a trained logical mind. The aim of this activity is acquisition of knowledge. However, once the activity is initiated it turns into a great total experience of meeting *Shekhinah,* of having a rendezvous with God. The Jew studying Torah is like a traveler who, within sight of the initial goal, stops to take a breath and then continues with new strength upon his endless journey toward an unknown destination. Knowledge alone, at first very much desired, does not satisfy any more; he is in love with the *Shekhinah.*

In this context another problem is resolved. Have all Jews an equal share in Torah, or is the share proportionate to the accomplishment, to the amount of knowledge one possesses? On the one hand, we know the singular importance we ascribe to *Talmud Torah.* On the other hand, we also know what Moses proclaimed: *"Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morashah kehillat Ya'akov"* (Deut. 33:4). The whole congregation of Jacob owns the Torah — the scholar and the ignorant have the same rights and prerogatives!

The process of learning Torah is both esoteric and exoteric. At the esoteric level the brilliant mind accomplishes more, the dull — less. This cannot be helped. No process of democratization can change the character of education from esoteric into exoteric. There is an aristocracy of the brains, an institution which Congress cannot abolish — an intellectual gesture is esoteric. However, when we come upon the second aspect *of talmud Torah* — as a rendezvous with the *Shekhinah,* as a meeting with God — the act of *talmud Torah* becomes exoteric and completely democratized.

7. Rambam Laws of Study of Torah 3:13

Even though it is a commandment to learn by day and by night, most of one's wisdom comes at night. Therefore, someone who wants the crown of Torah will be careful not to waste even a single night on sleeping, eating, drinking, talking, et cetera, but will learn Torah instead. The Sages said that there is no crying out of Torah except at night, as it is written, "Arise, cry out in the night" (Lamentations 2:19). Anyone who learns Torah at night will be treated kindly during the day, as it is written, "The Lord will command His steadfast love in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, a prayer to the God of my life" (Psalm 42:8).

יג אף על פי שמצוה ללמוד ביום ובלילה אין אדם למד רוב חכמתו אלא בלילה, לפיכך מי שרצה לזכות בכתר התורה יזהר בכל לילותיו ולא יאבד אפילו אחד מהן בשינה ואכילה ושתיה ושיחה וכיוצא בהן אלא בתלמוד תורה ודברי חכמה, אמרו חכמים אין רנה של תורה אלא בלילה שנאמר קומי רוני בלילה, וכל העוסק בתורה בלילה חוט של חסד נמשך עליו ביום שנאמר יומם יצוה ה' חסדו ובלילה שירה עמי תפלה לא-ל חיי

8. Rambam Sefer HaMitzvot 5

WORSHIPING GOD

By this injunction we are commanded to serve God (exalted be He). This commandment is repeated several times in Scripture, e.g., "And you shall serve the Lord your God" (Ex. 23:25); "And Him shall you serve" (Deut. 13:5); "And Him shall you serve" (ibid. 6:13); "And to serve Him" (ibid. 11:13). Although this commandment is of the class of general precepts which are excluded from the 613 commandments under the fourth principle, it nonetheless imposes a specific duty, viz. that of prayer. The Sifre says: "'to serve Him' means prayer." The sages also say: " 'to serve Him' means study of the Law."

והמצוה החמישית היא שצונו לעבדו יתעלה וכבר נכפל צווי זה פעמים ,אמר (משפטים כג כה) ועבדתם את ה' אלהיכם ואמר (ראה יג ה) ואותו תעבודו ואמר (ואתחנן ו יג) ואותו תעבוד ואמר (עקב יא יג) ולעבדו .ואעפ"י שזה הצווי הוא גם כן מן הציוויים הכוללים כמו שביארנו בשרש הרביעי הנה יש בו יחוד שהוא צוה בתפילה .ולשון ספרי ולעבדו זו תפילה .ואמרו גם כן ולעבדו זה תלמוד

9. Joseph Soloveitchik U'vikashtem Misham

Father's lectures were delivered in my grandfather's parlor, where my bed stood. It was my custom to sit on the bed and to listen to my father talk. He spoke regularly about Maimonides. This is what he did: he would open the Talmud and read the passage. Then he would say something like…'This is the explanation of Ri and Tosafists; now we will examine Maimonides to see how he explained the Talmud.' Father would regularly find that Maimonides did not explain the Talmud as they did and that he deviated from the simple approach. My father would say, almost in complaint against Maimonides: 'I understand neither Maimonides' conceptualization nor his approach to explaining the passage.' It is as if Father accused Maimonides himself: 'Our teacher Moses, why did you do this?' 'It would appear' father continued, 'that Rabad is right.' Members of the group would leap from their seats and each one would propose his idea. Father would listen, then reject their words, and say again: 'The words of our teacher are as hard [to understand] as iron.' Nevertheless, he would not say that we should despair. He would lean his head on his fist and sink deep into thought. The group remained quiet and did not disturb him. After a long time, he would lift his head and slowly begin: 'My friends let us see…' and he started to speak. Sometimes he would speak at length, at other times just a short while. I strained my ears and listened to his words. I understood nothing about the substance of what was said. Nevertheless a double impression was woven into my young mind:

(1) Maimonides was surrounded by those who opposed him, enemies who sought to do him harm;

(2) the single defender of Maimonides was my father. Without my father who knows what would happen to Maimonides. I felt as if Maimonides himself were with us in the parlor, listening to father's words. Maimonides was sitting with me in my bed. What did he look like? I do not know exactly. But his countenance was similar to father's good and handsome face. He also had the same name as father—Moses. Father would speak; the

students with eyes fixed upon him would listen intently to his words. Slowly the tension would dissipate; father proceeded with power and strength. New concepts came forth; laws were articulated and formulated with wondrous precision. A new light shined. Problems were resolved and the topic explicated. Maimonides emerged victorious. Father's face shone with great joy. He had defended his 'friend" Moses, son of Maimon. A smile of contentment appeared on Maimonides' lips. I too joined in the joy. I was bursting with happiness. I would jump from my bed and run quickly to my mother's room with the joyous news: 'Mother, mother, Maimonides is right. He has overcome Rabad. Father helped him. How wonderful is father!

But once in a great while my father did not succeed, and despite all his efforts the enemies of Maimonides defeated him. Their questions were as strong as iron. Although my father mustered all his strength, he could not save Maimonides from his detractors. Salvation did not come for Maimonides. Deep in thought, my father would lean his head on the palms of his hands on the table. The students and I, and even Maimonides, waited in great tension for my father's words. But my father would raise his head and sadly state: "There is no answer. The words of Maimonides are difficult. No one is capable of resolving these questions." The shiur ended with no explanation. The students were sad, and even my father was depressed. A sense of despair descended upon all of us. I cried. Even the eyes of Maimonides glistened with teardrops.

With a broken heart, I would walk slowly to my mother and cry out to her: "Mother, father cannot answer Maimonides. What will we do? He did not succeed today." And my mother would tell me: "Don't worry. Father will find an answer to Maimonides. If he does not succeed, then when you grow up perhaps you will find an answer to Maimonides. Always remember, my son, the important thing about Torah is to study it in happiness and enthusiasm."

This was a childhood experience. Nevertheless it is not the golden fantasy of a young boy; these feelings are not mystical. It is a past psychological reality which lives even now in the depths of my soul. When I sit and study Talmud, I immediately find myself in a group of the wise men of tradition. The relationship between us is personal. Maimonides is on my right; Rabbenu Tam is on my left. Rashi sits in front and explains; Rabbenu Tam asks a question. Maimonides decides the law and Rabad criticizes. All of them are in my room sitting around my table. They look at me with love, join with me in conceptualizing, and encourage and strengthen me like a father. Learning Torah is not just a didactic, formal, and technical experience whose purpose is the creation and exchange of ideas. Learning Torah is the intense experience of uniting many generations together, the joining of spirit to spirit, and the connecting of soul to soul. Those who transmit the Torah and those who receive the Torah are invited to meet one another at the same historic juncture.