

Hidden Torah Secrets

PARSHA INSIGHTS - KI SAITZAI (5757)

IS ALL OF TORAH TRULY RELEVANT?

One of the most discussed topics in today's *parsha* [Torah portion] is the *ben sorer umoreh* [the stubborn and rebellious son] (*Perek Chof Alef* [chapter 21], *Psukim* [verses] 18 - 21). In the Oral Torah, a *perek* of *Mishna* and *Gemara*, the eighth chapter of *Sanhedrin*, is devoted to its intricate laws. Let us examine a popular remark found in the *Gemara Sanhedrin* 71A.

R. Shimon wonders: if the rebellious son merely (stole money for the purchase and then) ate about three ounces of meat and drank five ounces of wine, why should his parents help sentence him to death by stoning? He has hardly done anything wrong! **It must be that an actual case of *ben sorer u'moreh* [rebellious son] never really occurred.** "It never was, and it is never going to be." If so, what was the purpose of the Torah to write that whole section? "*Drosh v'kabel sachar*" [study the *parsha*, delve into its complexities, master its concepts, and you will be rewarded]. R. Yonasan replies that this is not so - "I saw him (a real case of *ben sorer u'moreh*) and I sat by his grave!" In other words, R. Shimon maintains that there really was never a *ben sorer u'moreh*, but R. Yonasan differs with his opinion.

We will focus on R. Shimon's conclusion. Apparently, the Torah is here to be learned, even if the situation we are studying will never arise and become practical. The study itself is a *mitzvah* [good deed].

The *Anaf Yosef*, a commentary on *Agada*, is quite bothered by this idea. Since the purpose of Torah study is to bring us to ACT properly, what benefit is there in learning something that will never be a reality? I have overheard people asking a similar question. Let us say someone is learning *Gemara Bava Kama*, for example. He might wonder: since I never have owned an ox, and I doubt I ever will, what requirement is there for me to learn the sections dealing with damages inflicted by one's ox? In truth, the *Anaf Yosef* is asking similarly, but his point is even more perplexing. He is wondering about a case that NEVER will happen, according to R. Shimon. That is even more puzzling than the common question of "Why should I learn what does not apply to ME?" Consequently, we need to address the general issue. Why did the Torah write some *halachos* [laws] which will never happen, and why should we bother studying them?

"This is not a question", answers the *Anaf Yosef*. Every single *mitzvah* and component of the Torah, besides its simplest meaning (which might not appear relevant), contains within it a hidden element and source. The infinite wisdom of Hashem certainly grasps these esoteric concepts, though humans might not fully understand them. Nevertheless, we need to learn ALL sections of the Torah. These secrets of Torah, present within all its facets and *mitzvos* [good deeds/commandments], are rooted in the essence of G-d Himself. In simpler terms, there are hidden parts of all the Torah; these are part of Hashem's "personality" and essence. They need to be learned, even though their laws do not appear relevant to us.

Thus, anyone who studies Torah, even if he does not practice the *dinim* [laws] learned because this would be impossible to do, such as *ben sorer u'moreh*, accomplishes something quite magnificent. "One who delves into Torah, although he does not perform (deeds based on that actual study), is probing the glory of G-d's sanctity, and **he attaches his intellect to Hashem.**" Yes, this is the idea of learning even the parts of Torah that might never become relevant in practice. In doing so, one is clinging to G-d Himself, linking his soul and mind to the Creator. It can be likened to plugging one's personal cord into an outlet, completing a spiritual circuit to the Master of the Universe.

With this idea, the *Anaf Yosef* interprets a famous *Gemara* in *Shabbos* 88B and 89A. You are probably aware that Moshe ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah. One approach is that G-d lowered the Heavens over *Har Sinai* [Mount Sinai] by *Matan Torah* [the giving of the Torah], as mentioned in *Rashi* on *Parshas Yisro*, 19:20, and Moshe entered therein. Moshe encountered some fierce opposition when he attempted to "wrestle" the Torah away from the *malachim* [angels], who felt it belonged in the upper realm and not on earth. One could ask: Why should the angels want the Torah so badly? Why did Moshe need to debate with them so vigorously, finally convincing them that humans NEED Torah for their very survival? Using the theme developed above, it is not complicated. Even though the angels knew they could not fulfill the Torah based on its simple meaning and

rudimentary *mitzvos*, there is another dimension to Torah. As stated before, one can grasp and attach oneself to Hashem's *Shechina* [Divine Presence] and His very essence through Torah study. THIS is what was attractive to the angels; they could "sink their spiritual teeth" into the succulent profundities of Torah. In fact, continues the *Anaf Yosef*, the angels must have felt that they were MORE deserving of the Torah, since they are totally spiritual beings, better able to cling to G-d through those hidden dimensions of Torah knowledge than humans are. As a result, it was no easy task for Moshe to persuade them to part with it so *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] could officially accept it. If so, how did Moshe win the debate with the angels? He showed that the Jews could benefit from BOTH aspects of Torah knowledge: the plain meaning of the words, which lead to fulfillment of the *mitzvos*, PLUS the secrets of Torah knowledge which link one directly to the *Shechina*. This is not so by angels, who only enjoy ONE benefit from Torah - the profound study and connection to the *Shechina*. Human beings, who can gain fully from Torah, from its simple AND deeper meanings, deserve it more than the angels, who can only get half of this satisfaction. Thus, the Jews deserved to receive the Torah more than the angels did.

This is also hinted to when the Torah says "*lo bashamaim hi*" ["it (the Torah) is not in Heaven"] - (*Devarim* [Deuteronomy] 30:12). It does not belong with heavenly beings.

In summary, there are two parts to Torah study.

Number one: We must learn in order to perform and fulfill the *mitzvos*. The rationale for this is easiest for people to understand. We study the *psukim* [verses], Oral Torah, early and late authorities (*rishonim* [earliest commentators] and *achronim* [later commentators]), and *halachic* [legal] codes pertaining to areas such as *Shabbos* [the Sabbath], *kashrus* [laws pertaining to proper Jewish foods], *tzitzis* [four-cornered garments], *tefillin* [phylacteries], *Yom Tov* [holidays], *davening* [prayer], and family purity, in order to keep these precepts properly.

Number two: We learn Torah for the sake of learning Torah, even areas which will never apply to us, and even *dinim* which might never apply to anyone, such as *ben sorer u'moreh*. The purpose? To attach ourselves to G-d, to cling to His presence and be close to Him. Angels are only capable of the second type of Torah study; that is why Moshe won the debate and got the Torah for humans, who need both parts of *limud* [learning of] Torah.

Ben sorer u'moreh is a fascinating portion. Let us learn it in depth, along with the other sections of Torah. Even R. Shimon, who holds it never occurred, urges us to delve into it with all our energy, just like the "practical" laws of the Torah. Learn and receive your reward!

By Rabbi Moshe Heigh

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