

Va'eschanan 2016

1.

### Health

“But you shall greatly beware for your souls.” (4, 15)

"ונשמרתם מאד לנפשותיכם."

The Chofetz Chaim (Al Hatorah pages 225-226) is bothered by the wording of this pasuk. Since the pasuk is commanding us to guard our bodies and be physically healthy, why does the pasuk use the language of “your souls?” **When we are involved with our physical pursuits, for example, when we eat healthy, exercise, and sleep, we need to make sure that we don’t destroy our souls in the process.** One might incorrectly think that guarding his body is a mitzvah, but in reality he is actually destroying his soul. **For example, someone wants to eat healthy and decides to have a salad, but he didn’t check if it has bugs, is harming his soul!** That’s why the pasuk says guard your souls. We are not in our own domain, we are merely messengers of Hashem and we need to follow His laws. Even at a time when we are dealing with physical activities, we need to be careful it’s done in a kosher way. This applies to any area of health where there is a potential prohibition involved, for example, **someone who goes to the gym in order to work out. It is important to exercise, but at the gym there may be people who are dressed immodestly. Furthermore, there might be people who are speaking inappropriately. These factors precede and therefore it would be prohibited to go to such a place.**

**It is a mitzvah to maintain proper health.** The Chofetz Chaim says a person needs to guard his body like a wagon driver who is constantly paying attention to his horses (footnote maaseh L’melech 3). The Chofetz Chaim was makpid (stringent), even in his later years to walk four amos (cubits, 6-8 feet) after he ate (Shabbas 41). There were several times when the Chofetz Chaim saw talmidim (students) who were learning late at night. He would go into the Beis Medrish and turn the lights off! In the biography of the Chofetz Chaim (page 74) it’s related that this time was at midnight. This was done in order that the talmidim would go to sleep. **Some people think learning very late into the night demonstrates hasmada (diligence), but these people fail to consider and properly assess how this may negatively affect the next day. In reality it may be the yeitzer hara (evil inclination) who is telling us to learn late. The yeitzer hara is tactfully causing us to be mevatel (cancel) much more Torah we could have learned the next day!** Take for example Thursday night mishmar in yeshiva. Yes, mishmar is really beautiful, but a person should cheshbon (calculate) how staying up late will affect his learning the next day. Friday is a long day and should be utilized properly. It shouldn’t be a time to sleep all day and recuperate from the night before. One can easily learn for six hours on a Friday when Shabbas is late! However, this can all be lost because of staying up very late for mishmar! Also, consider how staying up late will affect our middos towards others because we are tired and don’t have patience.

2.

### The sweetness of learning

“And these matters that I command you today shall be upon your heart.” (6, 6)

"והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך."

The question is why does the pasuk say these? The pasuk said earlier you should love Hashem your G-d. The Yalkut Shemoni (839) explains “these” is coming to teach us to fully focus on the matter of loving Hashem and then we will successfully be able to recognize Hashem and place Him in our hearts.

Rav Pincus zasa”l (Tiferes Shimshon page 50) quotes the Gemara in Pesachim (7b) that quotes Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav, by all mitzvos we first recite the Beracha and then immediately we perform the mitzvah. (אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל כל המצות מברך עליהן עובר לעשייתן). For example, first we say the bracha on Tefillin, and only subsequently we tighten the knot. However there is one exception; Birchas Hatorah. Every morning we thank Hashem for our ability to be osek b'Torah (involved with learning) (אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה). However, afterwards we don't start learning immediately, rather we interrupt by saying והערב נא (א' אלהינו את) (והערב נא דברי תורתך בפינו ובפי עמך בית ישראל. ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו וצאצאי עמך בית ישראל, כלנו יודעי שמך ולומדי דברך תורתך בפיו ובפי עמך בית ישראל. ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו וצאצאי עמך בית ישראל, כלנו יודעי שמך ולומדי דברך תורתך בפיו ובפי עמך בית ישראל). Before we actually begin learning we ask Hashem to make the Torah sweet for us. Why is berchas HaTorah an exception in that we do not begin the mitzvah immediately after reciting the beracha? **These words possess the secret ingredient to success in learning Torah; making the Torah sweet.** (עיקר ההצלחה בלימוד התורה) (הוא על ידי עריבות בלימוד). We interrupt with והערב נא because if a person wants to succeed in Torah, he has to enjoy it and taste the sweetness of what he is learning. **This is one of the main purposes of a Rebbe; to impart and inject the sweetness, desire, and awesome feeling one attains from learning Torah into his students.** This is the reason behind the practiced minhag (custom) of smearing honey onto the letters of the Hebrew alphabet when children begin learning Torah. They smear honey on the Hebrew letters in order that the children will recall the pasuk “Honey drops from your lips, o bride, honey and milk are under your tongue.” (Shir Hashirim (4, 11)). Meaning, the sweet honey symbolizes and will easily and naturally remind them of the sweetness of Torah. **In order for a Rebbe to transmit the love of Torah to his talmidim, he needs to love the Torah himself.** If he doesn't, there is no way he will be able to impart this sweet feeling to the next generation. If a talmid doesn't view his Rebbe as an intermediary between him and Hashem, it will be very hard for the child to learn from his Rebbe. This is why we say והערב נא in the middle of birchas Hatorah; it is not an interruption, rather it is a prerequisite, condition and necessity for one to be successful with his learning.

A way to feel the sweetness of Torah is being happy and enjoying learning. The Brisa in Pirkei Avos (perek six) enumerates 48 ways to acquire the Torah. One of them is through being b'simcha (happy). Rav Chaim Volozhiner (Ruach Chaim page 214) says **someone who learns joyfully for one hour is much more effective than one who learns for many hours amidst sadness.** (הלומד בשמחה בשעה אחת ילמוד יותר הרבה ממה שילמוד בכמה שעות בעצבות). Similarly, the Eglei Tal in his introduction writes that he heard a common error people made when it came to learning Torah. He heard some people saying that one who gets a geshmak (enjoyment) and simcha from his learning, isn't in the category of one who learns Torah lishma (for its own sake).

This is a tragic mistake because **the main mitzvah of learning Torah is to get a geshmak and simcha from it! Through learning in this manner, the Torah will become absorbed in one's limbs.** (ומדי דברי זכור אזכור מה ששמעתי קצת בני אדם טועין מדרך השכל בענין לימוד תורה הקדושה ואמרו כי ) הלומד ומחדש חדושים ושמח ומתענג בלימודו אין זה לימוד התורה כל כך 'לשמה' כמו אם היה לומד בפשיטות שאין לו מהלימוד שום תענוג והוא רק 'לשם מצוה', אבל הלומד ומתענג בלימודו הרי מתערב בלימודו גם הנאת עצמו. ובאמת זה טעות מפורסם ואדרבא כי זה היא עיקר מצות לימוד התורה להיות שש ושמח ומתענג בלימודו ואז דברי תורה (See also Shu't Eretz Tzvi siman 92.) **(נבלעין בדמו.** ומאחר שנהנה מדברי תורה הוא נעשה דבוק לתורה. Rabbi Meir Arava (Meir Oz chelek 3 page 62) explains that it is for this reason that berchas HaTorah is berchas hanehnin (we will elaborately explain and return to this concept.). Similarly, Rabbeinu Avraham min Hahar (Nedarim 48a) says the main fulfillment of the mitzvah of learning is the simcha and enjoyment a person gets when he toils and finally understands what he struggled to understand!

Rav Zilberstein Shlita in the introduction to Sefer V'haarev Nah (chelek 1 page 22) says we see from the aforementioned Eglei Tal that the highest level of learning lishma is specifically when one gets a simcha from it! Rav Chaim Pinchas Sheinberg Zasa<sup>1</sup> says, only the sweetness of Torah could annul the 'sweetness' of the yeitzer hara (evil inclination). As the Gemara in Kidushin (30b) says Hashem created the yeitzer hara and He created the Torah as the antidote/spice to fight the yeitzer hara (בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין). If a person has a wound and doesn't bandage it up, it will get infected! Torah is the band aid that covers up and heals the wounds caused by the yeitzer! Torah is the treatment that prevents the cancer of the yeitzer from spreading! That's why V'haarev nah is inserted right in the middle of birchas HaTorah! The Torah will have the biggest effect when it is learned b'simcha! Rav Zilberstein said, based on Rav Hunter Zasa<sup>1</sup> the more geshmak and sweeter the Torah is in our eyes, the more we will be able to understand it and accept its words! (כלל שהתענוג מדברי תורה גדל והולך כן ) (הולכת וגדלה ההבנה וההשגה).

Rav Zilberstein continues (chelek beis page 17) and quotes the Sfas Emes who says **V'haarev could also be translated as guarantor or mixture! When we say V'haarev nah we are asking Hashem to mix Torah into our divrei rashus (optional activities). What does this mean? When a person needs to do something optional he should mix it with Torah. For example, if a person is waiting on line or waiting in the doctor's office, he should be learning from a small pocket safer! We are asking Hashem in V'haarev nah to mix the Torah with whatever other activity we may be involved!** The Sfas Emes quotes the Mishna in Kerisos (15a) as his source. The Mishna relates that Rabbi Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua were in the marketplace buying an animal for a party for their son and Rabbi Akiva was asking them questions. Why did the Mishna feel the need to inform us that they were in the market place buying an animal when Rabbi Akiva was asking them Torah related questions? Mishnayos are typically written concisely; why is this Mishna seemingly unnecessarily lengthy? The Tosefos Yeshainim answers that the Mishna is praising these chachamim (scholars). Even though they were busy and involved with divrei rashus, they were still learning Torah! Another source for the Sfas Emes, explains the Yad Rama, is a Gemara in Sanhedrin (91a). The Gemara relates an incident where Rav Hamnuna lost his animals and went looking for them. In the interim, Rava came and asked Rav Hamnuna Torah related questions. Why does the Gemara mention that Rav Hamnuna was looking for his lost animals? Again, it is to show us that even when the

chachamim were involved with mundane pursuits, they were always careful to incorporate Torah into them.

Rav Zilberstein continues (page 20) and cites a question that was posed to Rav Chaim Kanievsky. Someone asked why don't we say all the praises located in Ahava raba in V'haarev nah as well? Rav Chaim answered there is no need to list all the praises and requests here, because V'haarev nah incorporates them all. The request to learn Torah with sweetness includes all the praises and requests that are detailed Ahava raba. One who learns b'simcha will surely understand what he is trying to learn! ('הלומד בעריבות ממילא מבין!!!') Further on (chelek 3 daf 20), Rav Zilberstein quotes the Alter Mi'Kelm who says the yearning and desire a person has for Torah, will lead him to be successful with it. This can be compared to physical desires. Just as one who has physical desires will do whatever it takes to satisfy his lusts, so too one who desires/yearns for Torah and spirituality will do whatever it takes to reach his goals. The more one yearns and desires spirituality, the closer he will get to the gloriousness of the Torah. Rav Tzaddok postulates, why the biggest trouble makers when they were young turn into massive talmedai chachamim (Torah scholars) when they are older? The secret to their success is that they took all their desires and yearnings that they had for physicality's and channeled it to spiritual pursuits and Torah learning.

-Learning Torah isn't always easy. In fact, many times it is difficult. Rav Shimon Schwab (Iyun Tefila 80) quotes the Taz who says that one should toil in learning until he understands it. **Even though it may be challenging, nevertheless we need to do whatever we can to overcome these challenges. We must distance ourselves from whatever is distancing us from learning Torah.** This is as well the job of a Rebbe; to teach his talmidim that anyone can come to love and acquire Torah if he exerts himself properly. As Rav Eliezer Papo (Pele Yoetz, erech Yeshiva) says: **the Torah will eventually be sweet for someone who begins learning. Even though it may be difficult and bitter in the beginning, in the end it will surely be sweet.** (אף ) Rashi (Shemos 19, 5) says if a person accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah it will become sweeter than honey, but as the Mechilta says, all beginnings are hard. (אם עתה תקבלו עליכם יערב לכם מכאן ואילך, שכל התחלות קשות.) That's why we say **V'haarev nah in the middle of birchas HaTorah! We are davening for sweetness in learning because many times in the beginning it can be difficult! This is analogous to a very cold pool. In the beginning it is freezing, but after a few minutes of swimming you warm up.** One won't feel the geshmak immediately; only after he persists will he feel and taste success from his Torah learning. The yeitzer is constantly distracting us from learning, but we are asking Hashem to make it sweet for us to be able to overcome any obstacle! We must be patient. Just as a physical tree doesn't grow over-night, so too, spiritual trees don't grow over-night. The Torah is referred to as a tree, as stated in the pasuk in Mishlay (3, 18) "it is a tree of life to those who grasp it." "עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה." Becoming a talmid chacham takes time.

Many people commonly go to Israel and start learning. Their parents tend to get worried. Why do they protest the learning as opposed to the child's half an hour shemonah esray? It is because the main job of the yeitzer is to disrupt Torah learning. However, if the child remains strong, he will merit much reward as it says in the Mishna in Avos (end of fifth perek) according to the exertion will be the reward. (לפום צערא אגרא)

Rav Schwab writes (Mayan Beit Hashoava Beshalach 16, 31) he was once merited to be in the Chofetz Chaim's house on Shabbas parshas Vayakhel, Pekudei 1930. Many people were gathered there and the Chofetz Chaim quoted the Shemos Raba (25, 3) that says the taste of the Mann changed based on the thought process of each individual. Whatever the individual thought about, the Mann tasted like it. The Chofetz Chaim proceeded to ask what would happen if one wasn't thinking at all when he ate the Mann. What did it taste like? He answered that something spiritual like the Mann receives its flavor based on the amount of thought that's put into it. (דבר (רוחני מקבל טעם לפי ערך המחשבה. If one didn't think about anything, it wouldn't taste like anything. With this we can answer why V'haarev nah is in birchas HaTorah. Just as the Mann had a delicious taste, only if the proper thought was put into it, so too regarding learning, if we focus on our learning then it will taste amazing. If we don't, then the learning won't be enjoyable at all. (ללמוד תורה ונותן דעתו על מה שלומד ומתעמק במחשבתו להבין דברי תורה אז מרגיש את המתיקות שבתורה.) When we recite berchas HaTorah we are essentially asking Hashem to grant us the ability to be fully focused on what we learn; this will enable us to taste the delicious flavor and sweetness of the Torah. (The Gemara in Brachos (57b) relates that the sweetness of honey is 1/60th of the sweetness of Mann.)

-What is the status of Birchas Hatorah? Is it a birchas hashevach/hodah, a bracha of thanks; is it a birchas hamitzvah, a bracha we say over a mitzvah, or a birchas hanehenin, a bracha we say over the pleasures of this world? **The Steipler (Kehilas Yaakov Brachos Siman 22) answers that Birchas Hatorah is both birchas hamitzvah and hanehenin.** (תלמוד תורה שאני משאר מצוות דיש לומר דבתלמוד תורה מלבד שהברכה היא ברכת המצוות ככל מצוות שבתורה יש בה גם כן דין ברכה כעין ברכת לומד תורה שאלו מצוות לא ניתנו לנו ליהנות (mitzvos were not given for our pleasure) as stated in Rosh Hashanah (28a). However, the Shulchan Aruch says one who vows not to benefit from his friend, isn't allowed to use his friend's sefarim! The Taz explains the difference between these halachos is as follows; the klal (general rule) of mitzvos לא ניתנו לנו ליהנות doesn't apply to Torah learning! As we mentioned above, learning Torah lishma is specifically when it gladdens him and brings him pleasure. Similarly we know it is forbidden for a mourner to learn Torah, as well as it is forbidden to learn Torah on Tisha B'Av. This is because learning Torah brings a person to a state of simcha! As the pesukim in Tehilim (19, 9-11) say "the orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart etc., they are more desirable than gold, than even much fine gold; and sweeter than honey, and drippings from the combs." From here we see that birchas HaTorah is really a birchas hanehenin! The Steipler suggests an additional proof from the text of the bracha. We start birchas HaTorah like any other birchas hamitzvah thanking Hashem for commanding us to be involved with learning Torah. We are not making a beracha on the Torah itself, but rather on the learning of the Torah. We recite a beracha acknowledging and thanking that we have the ability to perform mitzvos. This is diametrically opposed to birchas hanehenin where we are not making a bracha on the action of eating the food, but rather we are making a bracha on the food item itself. For example, we say borei pri haetz (who creates the fruit on the tree), which is a bracha on the fruit itself. We are thanking Hashem for creating fruit. However, as we know, birchas HaTorah continues with V'haarev nah and אשר בחר בנו. This is like the style of a birchas hanehenin because we are saying a beracha on the Torah itself. So we see Birchas Hatorah

contains an element of birchas hanehenin as well! If this is so, then why don't we say a bracha achrona after learning just as we say a bracha achrona after any birchas hanehenin? The answer is because we are never finished learning! Even when we take a break from learning in order to fulfill our physical necessities, it is only a break and we are never really finished. We merely temporarily finish learning. Dissimilarly, regarding other birchas hanehenin, when we are finished, it's over and we therefore need to say a bracha achrona.

This concept of berchas HaTorah having the status of berchas hamitzvah predates the Steipler. The Ramban (Sefer Hamitzvos, mitzvah asef 15) similarly writes that just like we are commanded to make a beracha before we eat, so too Hashem commanded us to say a beracha before we learn Torah. This is done in order to thank Hashem for the good he gave us! Similarly, the Levush (siman 47, seif 1) writes that just like a person is required to say a bracha before attaining pleasure, so too it is for this reason that berchas HaTorah must be recited. One needs to be very careful to say birchas hatorah properly to show that the Torah is important in his eyes and he gets pleasure from it. The Levush continues (seif 6) and writes; we say V'haarev nah in order that the new Torah we learn shouldn't make us forget the Torah we learned previously. Many times when a person eats something, it diminishes and overpowers the taste of what he previously ate. That's why you should eat your favorite food last in order that the flavor stays with you the longest. The Levush is saying we are davening that the new flavor attained from the new Torah learning shouldn't push away the old enjoyable flavor that came from the old Torah that was learned. (נתפלל שלא ידחה טעם מפני טעם, כמו שהוא הענין בדברים הנהנין הגשמיים, רק ישאר בפינו) (ערבות הטעם הראשון עם ערבות הטעם האחרון).

-We previously quoted the pasuk in Tehilim (19, 9-11) that said "the orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart etc., they are more desirable than gold, than even much fine gold; and sweeter than honey, and drippings from the combs." Why is the Torah compared to treasures and honey? The Radak answers that diamonds are very precious. This is why people desire them greatly. However, a wise person understands that learning Torah is even more valuable than diamonds. (אבנים יקרות, והאדם יתאוה אליהן, והמשכילים יתאוו יותר לתורה ולחכמה.) Similarly, Shlomo Hamelech writes in Mishlei (3, 15) "It is more precious than pearls, and all your desires cannot compare to it." ("יקרה היא מפנינים וכל הפצ' לא ישוו בו.") Why? Money only lasts in this world. Torah knowledge lasts in this world and in the next world as well as related in Avos (perek vav). Similarly, money could get stolen or lost as it says in Avos (perek beis), מרבה נכסים מרבה דאגה; the more possessions the more worry. Rav Ovadia Bartenura explains this is because he will be worried maybe his property will get lost or stolen. Torah wisdom can never be lost or stolen. Additionally, one who gives away money no longer owns that money. Torah knowledge differs in this regard. Someone who teaches others, not only doesn't lose out, but actually gains more Torah wisdom. (See Kedoshim 2016.) Why is Torah sweeter than honey? Honey is the sweetest food. Even so, you can't have too much of it. One who is overinvolved in any physicality will eventually get sick of it. Dissimilarly, learning Torah, the more a person learns, the sweeter it is!

The Gemara in Megilah (7b) says there is always room for dessert (רווחא לבסימא שכיח). However, you still get full after eating dessert and you can't eat any more. Conversely, by Torah you can never have enough. The more someone learns, the more he will crave to learn. Rabbi Naftali Jaeger once quoted the Gemara in Brachos (35b) that says a lot of wine will increase one's appetite, but a little amount of wine satiates a person. (טובא גריר, פורתא סעיד.) As a side point,

Tosfos (in mesechas Moad Katan (11a)) says that times have changed and the Gemara in Berachos is no longer true. Similarly, the Rosh (mesechas Pesachim perek yud siman 29) and Beur Halacha (siman 471) explain that this depends on the person. It is really case dependent. The Gemara in Taanis (7a) says that wine alludes to the Torah. One who learns a little bit of Torah will be satiated and won't want to learn more. Conversely, one who learns a lot of Torah will thirst and desire more Torah.

-The pasuk in Yirmiyah (9, 11) states "For what reason did the land perish and become parched like the desert without passerby?" The Gemara in Nedarim (81a) answers because the Jews weren't learning Torah. The question on this is; they were learning Torah, so what does the Gemara mean? Rav Yehuda explains in the name of Rav this means that they didn't recite birchas HaTorah. How can this be? The Ran explains that really they did recite birchas Hatorah, but the Torah wasn't important in their eyes. They therefore belittled berchas HaTorah. (כלומר ) שלא היתה התורה חשובה בעיניהם כל כך שיהא ראוי לברך עליה שלא היו עוסקים בה לשמה ומתוך כך היו מזלזלין (בברכתה). The Levush (Siman 47) and the Chasam Sofer explain that they weren't learning Torah lishma; rather they were just treating Torah as any other subject. Another explanation is offered by the Piskei Teshuvos (Siman 155, footnote 33 quoting the Degel Macheneh Ephraim (in Parshas Beshalach) as well as the Otzer Chaim (at the end of parshas Vayeilech) in the name of the Baal Shem tov), who explains what the Gemara means. They didn't say the beracha of V'haarev nah! They didn't daven for the sweetness of the Torah and they didn't enjoy the Torah as they should have!

The Taz (siman 47 sif katan 5) writes that **when one says V'haarev nah he should have in mind that the Torah should be sweet and geshmak.** (יש לכוון כשאומר הערב נא שתהיה התורה מתוקה ) The Kaf HaChaim writes **it's crucial to understand the words of davening!** (מעיקר ) (עלינו. The Kaf HaChaim writes **it's crucial to understand the words of davening!** (מעיקר ) (עלינו. (הזהירות הוא שצריך להבין פירוש המילות Before davening it's a good idea to take a siddur and go through the entire davening. Write in every word you don't know in order that you will actually understand what you are saying! Just a mere five minutes a day will add up and do wonders. Please do not underestimate the value of this 'trick.' This will automatically help one's intent in davening.) **Say them slowly word by word in order that you don't even miss a letter.** (ולאמרה ) **Say it with an intense desire and realize you are saying a bracha on the Torah which is our life and the length of our days in this world and the next!** (וגם צריך לאומרה בחשק נמרץ וישים אל לבו אשר הוא מברך על התורה אשר היא חיינו ואורך ) The Piskei Teshuvos (siman 47 os alef) recommends premeditating prior to reciting berchas HaTorah. **Before saying the berchas HaTorah we should pause a moment and think about what we are about to say! Think about the greatness of the Torah and how sweet it is and how much pleasure we derive from it, more than anything else in the entire world!** (הנאתם של ההולכים בדרכיה חשובה מתוקה וערבה לאין ערוך יותר מכל שאר הנאות ) (העולם. We will then merit true eternal life. The Bnei Yissoschor (chodesh Sivan maamer 5 milas hatorah os 13) quotes the Ramban who says someone who never tasted the undoing of doubts never tasted simcha in his life (לא טעם שמחה מימיו). (בתורה) The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (Devarim 27,11) writes **if people would feel and recognize the sweetness and geshmak from learning, people would go crazy like mad men. People would run after it and push through any obstacle to learn. People wouldn't think about money or anything else because they would crave and desire Torah! The Torah encompasses all good.** (אם היו )

**בני אדם מרגישין במתיקות ועריבות טוב התורה היו משתגעים ומתלהטים אחריה ולא יחשב בעיניהם מלא עולם  
(כסף וזהב למאומה כי התורה כוללת כל הטובות שבעולם.**

Thank you Yair Moshe Ausubel for typing this up.