

Vayeilech 2016

1.

Importance of listening to Torah

“Gather together the people – the men, the women, and the small children, and your stranger who is in your cities – so that they will hear and so that they will learn, and they shall fear Hashem, your God, and be careful to perform all the words of his Torah.” (31, 12)

"הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף וגרך אשר בשעריך למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו ויראו את יקוק אלהיכם ושמרו לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת."

The Gemara in mesechas Chagiga (3a) relates the following story. Rabbi Yochanon ben Beroka and Rabbi Eliezer ben Chesma went to visit their Rabbi, Rabbi Yehoshua. Rabbi Yehoshua asked them for the chiddush in the Beis Medrash. They responded that they were the students and therefore shouldn't tell the Rabbi 'chiddushim'. Even so, Rabbi Yehoshua responded, it is impossible for there to be a Yeshiva without chiddushim. (There is a similar Gemara in mesechas Shabbos (83b). The Maharsha explains that these Gemaras are not repetitive, rather the Gemara in informing us that chiddushim result even from chazara (review).) They responded that Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaria said the following regarding hakel; the men come to learn. The women come to listen. Why are the children coming? In order to give reward to those who bring them. Rabbi Yehoshua then said 'this precious pearl you tried to hide from me?' (תנו רבנן מעשה ברבי יוחנן בן ברוקה) (רבני אלעזר (בן) חסמא שהלכו להקביל פני רבי יהושע בפקיעין אמר להם מה חידוש היה בבית המדרש היום? אמרו לו תלמידך אנו ומימך אנו שותין. אמר להם אף על פי כן אי אפשר לבית המדרש בלא חידוש, שבת של מי היתה? שבת של רבי אלעזר בן עזריה היתה. ובמה היתה הגדה היום? אמרו לו בפרשת הקהל. ומה דרש בה? הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף אם אנשים באים ללמוד, נשים באות לשמוע, טף למה באין? כדי ליתן שכר למביאיהן. אמר להם מרגלית טובה היתה בידכם ובקשתם לאבדה (!ממני)

There are several questions that arise. Firstly, why did Rabbi Yehoshua like this vort so much? It is a nice Torah idea, but, it's not the biggest chiddush. Secondly, what is the explanation of the reason the women attend? Meaning, if they understand the shiur, then they are included in the category of men who are coming to learn. If they don't understand the shiur, then what is the point of them coming at all? The Meshach Chachma quotes the Yerushalmi (mesechas Yevamos (1, 6)) Rabbi Yehoshua says that he remembered when his mother used to bring his crib into the Beis Medrish in order that he would listen to the Torah. He said that his mother didn't want him to lose out on any precious Torah. **The Ben Yehoyadah explains that it is important and there is a great benefit for women, or any one, to listen to a shiur, even if they don't understand the material being related.** A proof to this is a Zohar (parshas Shelach). There was a story of a tzadik who saw palaces in heaven that women were sitting in and learning Torah. When they were alive they heard Torah from men who were giving a shiur. **Even though they didn't understand the material, nevertheless, their souls gathered the Torah.** (אף על פי שאין מבינים) This only applies to one who listens to Torah. Conversely, one who attends a shiur but doesn't listen will not be positively affected to the same degree. Since the children who come aren't listening, therefore the Gemara says that the reason they come is in order to give reward to those who bring them. This is precisely why this chiddush was so dear to Rabbi Yehoshua. The Mishna in Avos (perek beis) quotes Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakai who says praiseworthy is the mother of Rabbi Yehoshua. (רבי יהושע אשרי יולדתו.) Why is the mother of Rabbi

Yehoshua deserving of praise? As mentioned above she brought the crib of Rabbi Yehoshua into the Yeshiva at a very young age. What was the purpose of bringing this infant to the Yeshiva? He is too young to learn Torah: Based on the aforementioned idea we can easily understand the purpose of bringing an infant to the Yeshiva. **Listening to Torah still affects a person, even if they do not understand what they are listening to.**

2.

Is listening to Torah enough?

“So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel, place it in their mouth, so that this song shall be for me a witness against the children of Israel.” (31, 19)

"ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת ולמדה את בני ישראל שימה בפיהם למען תהיה לי השירה הזאת לעד בבני ישראל."

Why does the pasuk state “place it in their mouth”? The pasuk should have said to place the Torah in their brain. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (Michtav M’Eliyahu chalek beis pages 40-41) relates the following analogy. One who is healthy takes food, places it into his mouth, chews it and eats it. **One who is sick or a little kid differs in this regard; they need others to feed them. Even though they need to be spoon fed, nevertheless, they must chew the food themselves. The same applies to Torah. The Torah can be placed into our mouths. However, we must swallow it. There are no shortcuts to becoming a talmid chacham. There is only one way to become a talmid chacham; through toil. We must yearn to gain Torah knowledge.** (לבוע) The Ketzos Hashulchan (siman 382 sif katan beis) relates certain mitzvas that are impossible to perform via others. For instance, we must wear tefillin ourselves. There is no such thing as someone wearing tefillin on our behalf. Learning Torah is similar. **It is impossible to inject Torah into someone’s mind. The Torah must be learnt by each person individually. There is an obvious qualitative difference between one who merely attends a shiur verses one who attends a shiur, takes notes and reviews his notes.**

Let’s relate another lesson that can be deduced from the aforementioned analogy. **A child, who doesn’t want to eat, will not eat, even if he is spoon fed. The child will be repulsed. If he is forced to eat he will most probably vomit up the food that he consumed. The same applies to Torah. One who doesn’t want to listen to Torah will not listen. He will be repulsed by the Torah that was unwillingly shoved down his throat.** Consequently, he will dislike the Torah more than he did before. With this we can understand the Gemara in Shabbos (88b). The Torah has the ability to kill or cause people to live. Rashi explains that those who learn with vigor are good. However, those who learn in a weak manner, without a proper love for the Torah, are bad. Let’s elaborate on the concept of forcing someone who isn’t interested in learning, to learn. Forcing this type of person to learn can be detrimental. The Gemara in Berachos (7a) states that it is better for one to humble himself/make himself subservient than to get many lashes. Meaning, one who comes to the realization of what the truth is will have more of a positive effect than one who is forced, aka with many lashes.