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Learning Torah

Eternalize your mind





It's a Long Time Obsession

From Sinai to Jerusalem, from Babylon to Cordoba, from Tunis to Cracow, the principal occupation of Jewish people was always learning Torah. Everything else was just a distraction.

So finds a non-Jewish scholar visiting Warsaw during the First World War:

“Once I noticed a great many coaches on a parking place but with no drivers in sight. In my own country I would have known where to look for them. A young Jewish boy showed me the way; in a courtyard on the second floor was the shteebl of the Jewish drivers. It consisted of two rooms, one filled with Talmud volumes, the other a room for prayer. All the drivers were engaged in fervent study and religious discussions. It was then that I found out that all the professions, the bakers, the butchers, the shoemakers, etc., have their own shteebl in the Jewish district and every free moment which can be taken off from work is given to the study of Torah.”

Actually, the visitor was wrong. They were not coach drivers who studied Torah. Perhaps if he had asked them they would have set him straight: They were students of Torah who drove coaches. A.k.a. Jews.

It wasn't just a Polish fad. In Baghdad, storekeepers closed shop after three hours and went to study for the



rest of the day. On the Isle of Elba, Jews had little work, so they studied from dawn to dusk. In the Carpathian hills, Roman Vishniac reports, “I found farmers with primitive tools discussing metaphysics.”

Have It All

What’s the fascination with learning Torah all day? How many times can you read the same book over and over?

Torah goes way beyond “the Book”. Here are some basic categories:

CHUMASH: The Creator’s little instruction manual, but often somewhat obscure—which is why we need the rest of Torah. **EXAMPLE:** “*Be fruitful and multiply.*”

SAMPLE TITLES: THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

HALACHA: Dos, don’ts and what-ifs, with all the dots and points. **EXAMPLE:** “*But first get married.*”

SAMPLE TITLES: MISHNA, MAIMONIDES, SHULCHAN ARUCH, RESPONSUM OF LEADING AUTHORITIES UP TO THE PRESENT.

TALMUD: Discussions, debates and differences of opinion. **EXAMPLE:** “*What if you just clone human beings in a test tube instead?*”

SAMPLE TITLES: THE TALMUD, THE COMMENTARIES, THE COMMENTARIES ON THE COMMENTARIES, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE TALMUD.



AGADA: Parables and stories with hidden meanings. **EXAMPLE:** *“Once the children of a cloned man came before King Solomon...”*

SAMPLE TITLES: EIN YAACOV, MIDRASH, MAHARAL, STORIES OF TZADIKIM.

KABALA: Esoteric knowledge and the inner workings of the cosmos. **EXAMPLE:** *“In order to clone a human being, know these higher unities...”*

SAMPLE TITLES: ZOHAR, THE BOOK OF FORMATION, THE BOOK OF PARADISE, THE TREE OF LIFE.

CHASSIDUS: The inner light and essence of all the above. **EXAMPLE:** *“Is the material a clone of higher worlds?”*

SAMPLE TITLES: TANYA, CHASSIDUS HERITAGE, LIKUTEI SICHOS.

How to do Learning Torah

1. Make a Disturbance

Somewhere along the way, someone introduced the practice of sitting quietly with a book and not disturbing anybody. But that’s not the tradition. Ideally, you sit at a table in a study hall (called a “Bet Hamidrash”) with a friend or two and loudly discuss a text until you’ve gotten everyone else within earshot involved.

Learning alone? Read out loud, as though explaining to yourself. Torah has to be alive.



So when Bruria, a great and gentle scholar, once found a student of her husband learning Torah quietly, she kicked him. He screamed, “I’m learning Torah!”

“You’re not learning Torah,” she scolded him. “You’re forgetting Torah! Because the only way you’re going to remember anything is if you say it with every limb in your body.”

2. Savor the Journey

Learning Torah isn’t like any other study. Other studies are means to gain knowledge. Learning Torah is an end in itself. It’s the experience of asking questions, searching for answers, getting in synch with the minds of the sages—the experience of making contact with a Divine Intellect.

That’s why, in Torah learning, we study the questions just as we study the answers. Because the questions are also Torah.

3. Engrave It On Your Heart

You can write the words of Torah in your brain or you can engrave them on your heart. The difference? Written words can be erased, but once they are engraved, they become part of you. When you learn some Torah over and over, memorize it,



explain it to others and make it part of your life, you and the Torah become one.

4. Anchor Time

Learning Torah sits at the center of Jewish life. Everything else revolves around it. Make a regular time each day to study and schedule everything else accordingly. Shut down your cell phone and immerse yourself.

5. Make It Real

Torah literally means “instructions”. It also means “light”. Torah is meant to shine a light on life and show you which way to go. Whatever you learn, find a practical application and make it happen. Make a regular time to study-try to get in at least an hour a day-and schedule everything else accordingly.

6. Team Learning

Two people learning Torah together is great. More is better. But when ten people learn together, something special happens: The Divine Presence comes to join them and the place where they are learning becomes a holy space.



Just one Mitzvah can change the whole world

10 Mitzvah Campaigns

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