

Last Shabbos was the first day of Rosh Hashono. There is an amazing halacha that we fulfilled by not blowing shofar this year. It is a mitzvas assei in the Torah to blow shofar on Rosh Hashono – even on Shabbos. But, on the outside possibility that sometime in the future, someone might carry a shofar on Shabbos, Chazal cancelled the mitzvah of the Torah to blow shofar on Shabbos. It doesn't matter if most people will never be in a situation which would tempt them to carry a shofar on Shabbos. Chazal said it wasn't worth all the tekias shofar in the world for the minute possibility that someone in the future might be mechallel Shabbos. This shows us the extreme sensitivity of Chazal to shemiras Shabbos of every Jew. This is a very important limud to all of us about the importance of Shabbos.

This Shabbos is Shabbos Shuvah when Parshas Ha'azinu is typically read. It is Moshe Rabbeinu's final address before the brochos. There is a statement in the beginning of the parsha – 'ki Shem Hashem ekroh, hovu godel l'Elokeinu'. The gemara interprets this posuk as the source of the mitzvah of birkas haTorah. The Ramban counts birkas haTorah in his list of mitzvos assei deoraisoh. The Ramban explains that when one learns Torah one must acknowledge recognizing the incredible gift we received when we got the Torah. When a person learns Torah he needs to make a brocho on it – thanking and acknowledging the gift of learning. It is a chiyuv deoraisoh.

It is interesting to reflect that birkas hamazon is also a mitzvah deoraisoh we make after we finish eating and are satisfied. We thank Hashem for the enjoyment we received. But birkas haTorah is a brocho we make before we learn. We have to thank Hashem just for privilege to be able to learn His Torah. Some rishonim even say one is forbidden to learn Torah before making a brocho. If I don't recognize the incredible gift that is Torah learning, I do not have the right to learn it.

Torah is not just like any subject of study. It is a gift that Hashem gave to Klal Yisroel. The Rambam writes that Torah is the greatest good Hashem gave us in this world – it is the main mitzvah which allows us to earn olom haboh.

If you don't recognize that it is a gift, you don't have the right to learn.

Chazal tell us that the cause for destruction of the first beis hamikdosh was the three severe aveiros of avodah zoroh, gilui arayos and retzichah. Another gemara seems to contradict this by saying that churbon was brought about by the sin of bitul Torah. Which one is it? The commentators explain that the power of Torah learning is so great that even if one has violated the most severe sins, his dedication to learning Torah can protect him from punishment. The churbon habayis could have been prevented if Klal Yisroel did not neglect limud Torah.

Another gemara says it wasn't bitul haTorah as much as it was not making the brocho of birkas haTorah before learning. What does this mean? The Taz explains that the gift of Torah was not appreciated enough to motivate them to make a brocho on it. It was taken for granted and treated as an ordinary subject. Before they ate food, they thanked Hashem. They appreciated tasty food and a solid meal. They naturally said birkas hamazon afterward. But learning Torah was taken for granted. It cannot be taken for granted. When people don't thank Hashem for the wonderful gift of Torah, it brings churbon.

Limud Torah is a very important thing. But people have different ways of going about it – some more seriously and some less so. After Moshe says the shiroh, he tells Klal Yisroel to 'pay attention' to all the things he has been telling them. We all know that it is easy to get distracted

while learning. "Spacing out" is a widespread phenomenon that we are all familiar with. Rashi explains that to 'pay attention' means your eyes, ears, and heart have to be oriented to divrei Torah. He brings pesukim from Yechezkel where Hashem tells the novi to pay close attention to the details of the dimensions of the Beis Hamikdosh. Rashi makes a kal vechomer. If the dimensions of a physical structure which can be seen and measured need so much attention, how much more so do divrei Torah which are very subtle and difficult, demand our absolute focus and attention.

One can ask: why can't I get an Artsroll gemara, curl up comfortably on my couch, and casually go through Shas? They made it so easy – why do I need to exert myself so much?

The next posuk gives the answer: 'ki lo dovor reik hu michem ki hu chaye'chem'. Rashi explains that the toil and effort you must invest in limud Torah pays off. There is great reward in store for those who invest in getting a deeper understanding.

The Rambam says the reward for Talmud Torah is commensurate with the effort. Only if you make that great effort, lose sleep, break your head, cross the ocean, come to Nahariya – will the reward for your learning be so great.

Then Rashi provides another pshat to this posuk. There is nothing in Torah that is lacking deep, important ideas. Nothing in Torah is trivial.

The Yeshiva learned Brochos last summer zman. By the end of the zman I think people in my shiur realized how deep and challenging the sugyos in Brochos really are. Nothing in Torah is superficial or easy if you try to understand it properly. If you think there is something simple anywhere in Torah, you aren't really getting to the depth and scope that is hiding under the surface.

I have studied most of the wisdoms in this world – science, mathematics, philosophy, literature. I have seen the extent of human-based wisdom. I can tell you that when I sit down to understand a blatt gemara, a difficult Milchamos, it goes far beyond anything developed by any other human field of study.

Rabbi Berel Wein told me the following story about Mori v'Rebbi z"l. Rabbi Wein was the head of OU Kashrus and my rebbi was the halachic authority behind OU Kashrus. They had to consult with my rebbe about a new food technology and its implications for kashrus. All the kashrus supervisors were supposed to come down to a meeting in the Manhattan office of the OU. My rebbe agreed but he said there was a group of philosophy professors from Columbia University who wanted to meet with him to discuss philosophy. He told Rabbi Wein to arrange the OU meeting for three thirty and he would arrange the meeting with these professors at three. He asked Rabbi Wein to come in at 3:30 and say that Rabbi Soloveichik had an important appointment. Rabbi Wein agreed and did what my rebbe requested, and the professors expressed deep disappointment to have their meeting cut short. They remarked to Rabbi Wein that they had never heard such deep insights. As they were walking down the hall to the kashrus conference room, my rebbe remarked to Rabbi Wein that all the depth in philosophy he just discussed with those professors doesn't come to one line in the Ramban.

This is Hashem's wisdom. Nothing is trivial or simple-minded. The famous example is the posuk which tells us that Timna who was the sister of Lotan, became a pilegish to Elifaz the son of Eisov. On the

surface, such information seems completely unnecessary. Why do we need to know this piece of Eisov's family history? But Chazal didn't treat it as trivial. They realized that the Torah is telling us that Timna herself was a member of a royal family, but she was so desperate to join the family of Avrohom, that she was willing to degrade herself and become a concubine to a member of his household. So esteemed was the family of Avrohom in the eyes of kings and rulers.

These two peshatim in Rashi are connected.

People often get overly-impressed with modern science and other wisdoms. They look up with reverence to famous scientists and philosophers. The great minds and rich, powerful people of the non-Jewish world are idolized by the public. I once went fundraising for the yeshiva, and the Jew who accompanied me to meet a billionaire asked me if I was impressed by his vast wealth and influence. I responded that I am more impressed by my boss. Hashem is wealthier and more powerful than any human being.

Before you get impressed by all these things, remember you have the unique opportunity to learn Hashem's Torah. His infinite wisdom goes beyond anything found in any other discipline.

Simchas Torah celebrates the second luchos we received on Yom Kippur. The posuk tells us that when we learn Torah we can rejoice with Hashem Himself. We can have a close, intimate relationship with Hashem whenever we try to understand his Torah. With every posuk in Torah, every Rashi, every rishon, every acharon, we are connecting to Hashem's mind – we are entering the inner chamber. This is an incredible thing.

I have a grandson who routinely visited the yeshiva to learn Bava Kamma with me four years ago. There I was, a grandfather in his 70's learning with his 9 year old grandson Bava Kamma. I learned with him on one level. I learn with 20 year olds on a deeper level, and then with myself on yet another level. The Torah is without limits and constrictions – the levels of depth are never-ending. The more depth

you have, the more you appreciate how much more depth there still is yet to achieve. When I was young, I used to think that as I would learn more Torah, the balance of Torah that I didn't know would get smaller and smaller. As I grew older, I realized that the more I learn, the balance of Torah knowledge that I am lacking gets larger and larger. It is not trivial in the slightest.

The parsha begins with birkas haTorah – understand and appreciate the unbelievable gift Hashem gave us by giving us His Torah. It ends with Moshe Rabbeinu imploring us to pay close attention to Torah. Put toil and effort in learning it and you will reap incredible reward. You will be able to convey it to your children. It is so deep and fulfilling.

Then the posuk says Torah is your life – it is the highest value. Through limud haTorah, we achieve our life's goal of connecting to Hashem. Everything else in our life is just a means to an end. Anything we do outside of learning is either a distraction from real life or a means to being able to go back to learning.

The parsha ends with a final message. Torah is many things and affects our lives on many levels. Combining the pesukim with Rashi, what emerges is that besides the reward for learning that we will receive in the next world, which for some people is too abstract and doesn't motivate, the pesukim also tell us that Torah learning secures our existence in this world. We shouldn't think that the key to safety and security is having military superiority and advanced weaponry. If you want to know what will bring stability and safety to Klal Yisroel in Eretz Yisroel, don't think that it is by making peace treaties with Arab nations. It is by Jews sitting and learning Torah. We can respond to the people who challenge us and say the people learning Torah in yeshivos don't contribute to the security of Israel. The posuk tells us that learning Torah is the reason we survive. This is why Chazal tell us that bitul Torah, or not appreciating the gift of limud Torah, is the cause for churbon and golus.

Whatever we don't appreciate gets taken away from us.