

Learning

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Are you wasting your time?

When you study, are you living or are you dying?

When you learn the Living Word (Torat Hayim), are facts merely going into your head, or does true understanding penetrate into your heart?

Long ago, the Sages of Israel taught that the study of Torah is considered the paramount responsibility, and privilege, of every person. Learning was, and is, considered one of the greatest acts of worship, and devotion, to the Divine.

Yet, just exactly what is the learning that the Sages were so emphatic to emphasize? Was it the memorization of facts? Was it the memorization of words in books? Was learning for the sake of academic knowledge, or was learning meant to be something deeper than mere intellectual acquisition?

In order to answer these questions all one needs to look at is the texts of the Talmuds themselves. The Talmuds employ a profoundly pluralistic, flowing system of learning that cultivates an improvement of one's thinking abilities. The Talmuds were not designed as monolithic texts to be memorized, rather they were designed to serve as role models, and archetypes of expanding human consciousness. The Talmuds are not a rod to rule by, rather they are a river to raft on. The Talmuds were not designed to dictate, rather they were designed to guide, not by rote, but by example. Learning, therefore, was meant to be a process of transformation, not a course of academic study.

All Talmud study begins with basics, which today, for the most part are completely ignored. All Talmudic scholars knew the books of the Bible by heart. Not only could they quote them, they understood how to live them. This is all but a lost art today.

Most today read the Bible, and for that matter the Talmuds, and instead of enabling the texts to be transformational at the soul level, they are instead robbed of their own soul, and delegated to the poor role of being mere academic courses of study, for the sake of lifeless, intellectual accomplishments.

In order to get to the heart of Torah, and thus properly attuned to its life transforming power, one must study the Word itself, by this I mean, the TaNaKh, the

three sections that form the Bible, the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. Learning the Bible, not for knowledge's sake, but rather for the sake of life transformation, is the most important ritual task that we can perform. As the Sages of old said, "Talmud Torah K'neged Kulam."

When learning about the experiences of the ancestors of Israel, we are granted insights into the lives of people not too dissimilar to ourselves. Their struggles reflect our struggles, their hopes reflect our own. Their lives serve as inspiration and warnings to us about right and wrong. Their stories are our stories. Their lives are our archetypes. Long ago did the Sages say, "Ma'aseh Avot, Siman LaBanim," the deeds of our ancestors serve us as signposts [for life].

Yes, learning is the most important thing. But learning is not something that is done from words on a page in a book. Learning begins with exposure, exposure needs to be contemplated, in order to be fully comprehended and understood. Understanding, again, is not an academic process of the intellect, rather it is a deep, intuitive, revelation in one's heart about what is right and wrong, good and bad.

Real learning takes place in the heart, and transforms the soul, bringing it the peace and simplicity it rightfully deserves. This is the meaning of the verse in Psalms (19:1), which states, "the Torah (Word) of God is Temimah (pure, simple), [it] restores the soul."

Words on a page are just ink and paper. The spirit and soul of Biblical lessons, that the words refer to, are all alive, and have a life of their own. Their spirit arises out of its words, flies off the page, and echoes in every theater of life that surrounds us.

Torah is alive! It resonates in everything around us, and within us. Torah does not need to be learned from words on a page, Torah can be learned from everything, everywhere. This is the meaning of the verse in Isaiah (6:3), that says, "the whole earth is full of his Kavod (radiant Presence)."

Torah is learned from the way the wind blows, the way water flows, the way of the mountain, and the way of the flame. Torah is seen everywhere, in nature, and in everything man has made. Everything reflects and echoes the truths that Torah teaches. "Hafukh Ba, V'hafukh Ba, Ki Kulah Ba" (Avot 5:21). Turn it over again and again, [and you will discover, you will see that] everything is within it, [and It is within everything.

Torah is nature, and natural law is Torah Law. The stories of our ancestors, recorded in the TaNaKh echo this message. This is why our Sages taught us to learn, but they meant that we must learn the right lessons, in the right way! Torah is life, so, therefore, we must learn to live! This is what Talmud and the Bible are all about. They are real lessons for real people, just like us!

Before one can swim in the Talmud, one must first learn how to walk tall, upon the Promised Land of the Words of Torah.

So we begin with the Living Word of the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. We learn them, not to ascribe their inked words on a page to memory in our heads, but rather to absorb their wisdom, and allow their living truths to sink down and be absorbed by our hearts.

When we are transformed in this way, we come to see the Living Presence of the Living God in all life, everywhere. This is how we transform ourselves, and this is how we transform our world. We unleash the Kavod, the radiant Presence, and we give sight to the blind, so that we can all see.

This is alone is proper Torah study and Torah transformation!

This is the secret of Divine contact, and the secret of bonding with Heaven.

The secrets are all around us, if only we open our eyes to see.

The Word is Alive, and He who speaks the Word is Alive!

Embracing this Life is how one lives, and we are commanded to chose life!

Learn! Live! Transform! Shine!