

# Derekh HaLev The Way of the Heart

By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok  
Copyright © 2005 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.

## On The Proper Way To Study Torah And Live A Torah Life

General rules are the ones most often overlooked and forgotten. Foundations upon which all stand, essential as they are, are most often ignored. As we begin, let us remember, *"Rahmana Liba Baei – G-d requires the heart"* (San. 106b).

Problems arise as a course of life; yet, when focus is clear, problems are addressed with ease. When the general rules are not followed and the foundations are imbalanced, focus is clouded; problems arise and fester. Situations turn into crises. Crises can only be successfully addressed by a return to the general rules and a repair to the foundations.

Without such fundamental address of issues, crises turns into disease and disease spreads at epidemic proportion. Soon everything is affected. Soon the festering problems can no longer be ignored. However, being that the general rules and the foundations have been ignored for so long, focusing on the true source of the problem is not possible. There is so much static in the way that one cannot clearly focus in on the true issue at hand. As we begin, let us remember, *"Rahmana Liba Baei – G-d requires the heart"* (San. 106b).

There is a right way and a wrong way for one to study Torah and live a Torah life. There is a right way and a wrong way for one to walk the Torah path and be called religious. The sayings of our Sages on these matters are numerous, with every student of Torah able to quote many. Yet, the academic acumen of the students of Torah is not here the issue. What one has absorbed in one's head is not at question. What is at question and what stands to be the essence of a festering problem is not what is in the head, but rather what is not in the heart.

There is a serious growing crisis today within the religious world and this is the loss of heart. The heart is what is inside a person, and defines one's character and directs one's behavior. The religious world today has fallen victim to the same deceptions of their secular counterparts. The heart of the religious person is a void and empty of true love for HaShem as is that of the secular.

To make up for this loss, external expression and appearance has become the essence and foundation of definition of what is religious and who are the religious. When faced with the challenges towards Torah today, the religious reinforce their external walls of separation whereas at the same time their hearts are completely open to secular compromise. Today



when faced with the serious challenges to Torah beliefs today, all too many religious choose to raise their voices in fundamentalist cries rather than reinforce their arguments for the value of sincere Torah simplicity.

Interestingly but there seems to be a correlate rule joining the two. The more one reinforces one's external religious motifs, the more one's heart is removed from sincere Torah devotion and one step closer to secular psychological influences. This fact will be hotly contested within the religious world, but to no avail. The proof is plain for all to see.

The chauvinist and arrogant attitude of the fundamentalist is alive and thriving amongst those who call themselves Torah Jews. One's dress and appearances does not make one "frum," rather it is a matter of character. Torah in the heart defines who is religious. Torah in the head only defines the hypocrite. (*Torah b'lev perush dati, torah b'rosh perush tzavuah*).

There is a proper way to study Torah, an order, a sequence of course study specifically designed to build the Jewish soul and make it strong and mature. This path was outlined long ago in Pirkei Avot 5:21. "*At five one studies TaNaKh (Mikra); at ten Mishna (Halakha); at thirteen the Mitzvot, at fifteen Gemara.*" This is a proper path of ascent, of building character and teaching ethics.

Only once one has fully studied TaNaKh and embraced all its heart oriented ethical issues, and only once one has studied practical day-to-day Halakha (Mishna) so one know what to do and how to walk the proper path, only then is one introduced to Gemara and higher levels of academic development.

As is clear from the Mishna, learning the ways and matters of the heart, must precede other intellectual developments by a period of ten years. This very stable and foundational path of our Sages is the proper way to study Torah and to cultivate the Torah life. This path was walked successfully for centuries by so many. Only in our many sins, this tried and true obligatory path as outlined by our Sages is not followed today. Because of this modern aberration in Torah study our whole Torah learning path is imbalanced with numerous of our youth falling off the sacred path.

When this proper Torah path is followed, the individual soul is a true student of Torah, strong of character, stable and able to face's life's adversities armed with the mighty sword of Torah in one's heart. Only when Torah is truly in one's heart can one be called a true "ben" Torah, a child of Torah, one who embraces the "image" of Torah and who properly reflects it into the world. This is the accomplishment of a life-long path. One who wishes to make this achievement and every Jew should seek it, must realize that accomplishment only comes with effort. As it says in Pirkei Avot 5:27, "*in accordance to the effort, so is the reward.*"

If one desires to be long-distance runner, one does not immediately enter into a marathon. If one wishes to serve into the military Special Forces, one does not simply join and embark on a dangerous mission. If one wishes to be a brain surgeon one does not merely walk into the



operation room. Areas of expertise in life require training to deal with said areas. All goals are achievable for the one willing to make the effort and investment necessary to achieve those goals.

Not everyone wearing a track suit is a marathon runner. Not everyone with a green beret is in the Special Forces. Not everyone with a white coat is a doctor. Now, let's expand on this. Not everyone with a black hat is a sincere student of Torah. Not everyone with a long black coat is a qualified Rosh Yeshiva. Not everyone who looks religious actually is.

A sincere religious individual is one with a comprehensive religious training and who lives up to that training. A sincere religious individual must be defined EXCLUSIVELY as the one who acts religious, not just looks religious.

We all agree with these words, yet the fact that I say them and proclaim the message of religious sincerity has cost me dearly with attacks to my integrity and my reputation. While my call for religious sincerity should be warmly embraced and welcomed by all in the religious community, let me share with you how in fact it is received, specifically by some of my fellow Rabbis and yeshiva head, the one's who should be leading this charge themselves.

In the eyes of a number of my peers, I have a proverbial three strikes against me. In others words, for three reasons I and our yeshiva have been marginalized. I am viewed as "non-mainstream" which is a religious slang term for not being properly "frum." The three strikes against me are, I am religious Zionist, I am proudly "old-school" Sephardic and I commit the unpardonable offense of teaching proper Kabbalah. Any one of these things alone would make my peers frown at me, yet all three together have left me out in the cold.

I admit I am fighting an uphill battle. I have a hard time just to get people to take matters of the heart seriously. Most nod their head in polite acknowledgment of how important this is, and then their attention is lost, they are more attracted to the latest tidbit of Talmudic pilpul (intellectual dance of ideas) and are bedazzled by academic pieces of information in the same way a smoker craves his next cigarette or a drinker his next drink. Try to keep your average Torah student focused on matters of the heart and you will soon realize you are speaking a foreign language to him.

Torah students today are taught to think with their heads and to ignore their hearts. Of course this will be denied and all types of academic proofs will be mentioned to show how wrong this is, yet the mere exercise of academically trying to address matters of the heart proves what I am saying right over and over again.

Matters of the heart have nothing to do with religious Zionism. This is a political issue. The reason why the average frum person is not a religious Zionist is also indicative of our problem. You see, religious Zionism can be summed up as a simple matter: it is the love of the Land of Israel. Herein is the reason why religious types today have a hard time with this.



Love of the Land of Israel is an emotional bond, one that is tied up in the heart. Those whose hearts are cold and have no love certainly cannot have any emotion towards the Land. Indeed, they have no sincere love towards HaShem or even Torah. Love for them is an intellectual concept expressed by rigid rote of following the leader and for them has nothing to do with the heart. No wonder why the average layman religious Jew is so blind and so lost.

The same problem manifests itself today within the Sephardi-Ashkenazi conflict. For the most part, the Ashkenazim have totally won out over the Sephardim in almost every arena. Today almost every Sephardic yeshiva is so in name only. Almost all Sephardic yeshivas today teach according to the Ashkenazi teaching model, totally ignoring the way Sephardim have run yeshivot for centuries.

Today almost all Sephardic Rabbis have been educated exclusively in Ashkenazi yeshivot and know no other method of Torah teaching and study other than the Ashkenazi. Almost all Sephardi Rabbis today dress like Ashkenazim, learn and teach like Ashkenazim, culturally behave like Ashkenazim, speak Yiddish like Ashkenazim and do everything else indistinguishable from their Ashkenazi brethren.

Mind you, the Ashkenazi path of Torah is by no means a bad path, on the contrary, it has produced numerous great Torah leaders. However, the Ashkenazi path itself has become skewered and many walking it have become lost in the externals of the path, and blind to the inner beauty that once made it so rich and vibrant.

That which made the old Ashkenazi path so beautiful was what it once shared alongside the Sephardim, a healthy focus on matters of the heart. When this was left out, the good old path merely became old. The Sephardi path has always emphasized matters of the heart. This is true even with regards to Talmudic study.

Whereas in Ashkenazi yeshivot, the Agadic sections of the Talmud were skipped over and not studied because they offered no intellectual challenge, in the Sephardi yeshivot they were studied in depth with all their lessons of morals and character taken to heart. I still teach my Gemara classes in this way. I am the only Sephardi Rav that I know who does so; and I am snickered at by my peers for what one told me was a waste of my student's time.

Last but not least, we all know how Kabbalah today is viewed in the Yeshiva world as practically something "foreign" to Torah (G-d forbid). It is ignored and actually held as repulsive by many of my fellow Rabbis. Granted, we can quote sources to fill a dozen books about the value, legitimacy and importance of Kabbalah. But these are all words falling on deaf ears today.

Rabbis and Rosh Yeshivas for the most part are complete strangers to Kabbalah study and emphatically teach their students to distance themselves from its study. Mention study of Kabbalah today in a traditional yeshiva and you might as well have said you're considering



converting outside the religion. The response you will get from the one will only be equal to the response you get from the other.

Granted the Kabbalah cults today have given Kabbalah a terrible name. Yet, we do not fight cults by surrendering to them what is holy. We do not surrender our sacred TaNaKh to the Christians because they have adopted it and twisted it to their own use. We can certainly not allow our hijacked Kabbalah to remain in the hands of its abusers who pervert it and twist it into something so utterly not Jewish. The only way to rescue our sacred Torah is by claiming it back from the hands of its abusers. We will never succeed in doing this all the while that Torah students are ignorant and oblivious to the problem.

I therefore raise the voice of alarm. I cry out to all who will hear, FOLLOW THE PATH OF TORAH CORRECTLY – RECLAIM THE HEART! Focus again on those areas of study not aimed at the intellect but rather at the emotions. Heal the heart; restore the love and fear of G-d to its rightful place.

Today talk of such things makes me sound like an idiot in the ears of some of my peers. Yes, this is what I have been told. I cannot tell you how many times I have been told to shut-up and not talk about matters of the heart. I cannot tell you how many times some of my peers have told me “off the record” that no one will take me seriously because they are just not interested in all this “heart talk.”

So, here I sit in my office running my online cyber-yeshiva. I have my small circle of students here and through our phone classes. And then I have all of you online, thousands of you, most of whom embrace this message, and most of whom have not the courage to stand in the lime-light to pass it on. And yet, to countless more, our yeshiva is ignored.

There is an old joke, how does one get the attention of a stubborn old mule? Answer; hit him in the head with a “two-by-four.” Well, sometimes this is not a joke, but rather sound and unfortunately necessary advice.

We will not be able to fix the epidemic problems of religious hypocrisy and shallowness amongst our religious peers unless we are willing to take whatever action is necessary to get their attentions. Even if this means rocking the boat or tipping the boat over, it doesn't matter. The sleepy crew is heading towards the rocky rapids. We are already experiencing serious rumbles throughout the Torah communities. Our captains are asleep at the helm. They are not willing to change course and make the necessary adjustments to save the ship. As such they are leading the ship to certain disaster.

The religious Torah community is infected with a plague of hypocrisy. The younger generation is worse than the old. They see the hypocrisy loud and clear and are seeking all other avenues of fulfillment. Drug use is rampant, immorality is epidemic. Cheating spouses, cheating in business, cheating on taxes, have become almost the norm instead of the exception. And as long as one makes a nice donation to the Shul or Yeshiva, he is



considered a Tzadik, in spite of all his other repugnant behavior. This is how we reinforce evil within our midst.

We bow down before the modern idols of power, prestige and position. We all praise our modern golden calves. Yet, "who is for HaShem, let him come to me." No one is coming. We are all silenced into complacency. Just eat your chulent on Shabbos, study your Daf Yomi and make sure your praise your Rabbanim, make sure your check to them is on time. Chuckle a bit in Yiddish, make fun of everyone else, and you're on the inside. And once on the inside everything else is OK, you don't have to listen to the crazy ranting of Rabbis like me. No, just do what everyone else is doing, ignore the rest, and this is what you are taught is best. The question is, is it right? The answer is, no, it is not.

Being religious is not merely a cultural alternative to being secular. Being religious is supposed to be the answer to all the problems with being secular. When religion does not perform this sacred task, it is not being true Torah. Walking a Torah path is a daily struggle; it is not supposed to be easy. Once it has become easy for you, rest assured that you are no longer on the Torah path, and the life you are leading is a lie.

Cover yourself as you will with all your cultural accouterments. You will hide and you will deceive, yourself and others, but your heart will always be exposed as a raw nerve before HaShem your Creator. And while you have no emotional attachment to this concept, I know you have a negative emotional reaction to my saying these things. Well, that's just too bad. Things need to change, and one of those things needing to change is you!

As I mentioned above, Sephardim have traditionally followed the directives of Torah learning as outlined in Pirkei Avot. Sephardim always placed great importance on learning all of TaNaKh. Its lessons were embraced and inscribed in the heart at a very young age. We need to re-embrace this lost learning. TaNaKh must be studied again and taken to heart. TaNaKh can and should be learned first without any commentaries, so that its lessons can be taken into the heart first and only later into the head academically.

Books about character and ethics should be taught in public classes and expounded upon by the Rosh Yeshivas. Ethics and character have to be taught in class and by example. Classes that outline Torah thought and ideals have to become the main focus in learning.

Yeshiva students need to refocus their Gemara learning and place emphasis on learning the Gemara for the sake of learning the Halakha. For one without the other is meaningless. I mentioned above the old Sephardi way of Gemara study. Let me enumerate it here.

When Gemara is studied, rather than argue and debate it in dialectic pilpul style, one should simply learn what the Halakhic views detailed therein are. Then, one should follow up the Talmudic conclusions in the standard commentaries, the Rif, Rosh, RaMBaM, Tur and the Beit Yosef. One then continues to study the Shulkhan Arukh followed by the applicable Aharonim. This is how Torah is supposed to be studied.



In this manner one Torah and Halakha learns properly. One understands the Halakha, its parameters and limitations. With this type of knowledge one comes to understand Halakha, Talmud and Torah. One sees and knows the beginning and one sees and knows the end. One's learning is round and complete. One sees the greater picture. One is therefore more grounded, more settled, and obviously more learned. Alas, this old time Sephardi path has fallen along the way side.

Today our Torah scholars do not walk this sacred ancient path. As such our Torah scholars today are no scholars. As such they are empty leaders; even as our Sages of long ago warned us would inevitable be the case. In Sha'ar HaPesukim 44c (Yerushalmi Edition 1912), the Ari'zal gave the following dire warning based upon the pasuk in Yishayahu.

*"And HaShem said: because this people have approached Me with its mouth and with its lips it has honored Me, yet its heart is far from Me and their awe of Me is [without thought,] by the commandment of those who have learned it. Therefore, behold I will add to the wonders, wonder upon wonder, and wisdom of its Sages shall be lost and the ability of the Intelligent to understand will be concealed" Isaiah 29:13-14.*

*And it says, Inasmuch as this people have drawn close with its mouth and with its lips it has honored Me, meaning from the lips outwards; yet the heart is far from me and their awe of Me bares no sincerity, rather it is like a common custom observed without thought, that they have accustomed themselves to do. Therefore I will pay them back measure for measure.*

*Therefore is it written: behold I will add to the wonders I will show this people, wonder upon wonder, [to do a thing that is most unnatural and that is] and I will remove the wisdom from its Sages and [ability] of the Intelligent to understand will be concealed*

*They will continue [to hold positions of authority] and to be regarded as Sages and to be called such, even though now they have no wisdom or intelligence. Being that people have grown accustomed to calling them Sages, therefore they will continue calling them such, as a matter of custom observed without thought. Therefore does it say, I will remove the wisdom from its Sages and the [ability] of the Intelligent to understand will be concealed."*

Woe to us that we live in the days that has seen this matter fulfilled in our midst.

Woe to us in our many sins that we are silent in our ignorance; we are at bliss in our blindness. Like the proverbial ostrich, we stick our heads deep into the hole in the ground so that we do not have to see any of the problems surrounding us. There is just one problem with having your head in the hole, your neck is exposed and the world is all to full of those waiting to proverbially chop your head off. And how many of our youth have fallen along the way side simply because they have followed their Rabbis directions to do just this, and they have suffered so terribly because of it.



General rules are the ones most often overlooked and forgotten. Foundations upon which all stand, essential as they are, are most often ignored. Let me conclude as we began, to remind you *“Rahmana Liba Baei – G-d requires the heart”* (San. 106b).

Unless we learn and embrace this most vital of lessons, we will continue to repeat the mistakes of the past, and reap the awful punishments that they lead to. We must change the way we think as individuals. We must force change for the better upon our communities. We must return to the tried and true ways of our Sages, and embrace heart learning, embrace TaNaKh study and proper Talmud study. We must refocus on the important matters and seek out our Creator with sincerity and devotion.

We can no longer afford laziness and arrogance. Those who want to chuckle at this message will be many. They will dismiss it and anyone embracing it. They will cackle like geese and continue to stick their heads in the sand. They will continue to be horrible role models and serve as reason to many to turn away from Torah and sincere devotion to HaShem.

So then, ask yourself, by which do you wish to be embraced, by those who speak Torah sincerely in the heart, or by those in the “mainstream” who mock them. Stand up like a man, Hillel says, or place your head in the sand like an ostrich. Learn to live or learn to die. The choice is really that simple. Mock it all you like. You’re being watched, and indeed you will be judged. Take that to heart, if you have any heart left.

For those of you who do want to make a difference, just remember, you alone cannot change the world, but this is no excuse not to try! Now, go do the right thing.