

To Love the Torah

Chapter 1

Why young people can find it difficult to learn Gemara

1. Nowadays there seem to be many young students who find that learning Gemara does not attract them as it should. Judging by the ones with whom I am personally acquainted, I am convinced that it is not in any way because they dislike mitzvos, or are not interested in learning Torah. On the contrary, I see that they are boys who genuinely want to do what Hashem requires of them.

2. The first possible reason for this disturbing trend is that they simply do not realize how tremendously important it is to learn Gemara. They sincerely want to know what is so unique about learning Gemara and why it is held in such esteem, and they would be more than grateful to anyone who could come and explain it to them. The surest proof that ignorance is to blame for their disinclination to learn, can be seen once they do come to appreciate the true worth of learning Gemara. Then, as soon as they start to understand the powerful effect it has on them, they begin to feel the attraction to learning Gemara no less than anyone else.

3. Another difficulty standing in the way of many students is that they think they will never manage to understand Gemara in depth. They see it as hopeless and give up even before they start. Although they are mistaken; the chances to succeed in learning Gemara, for anyone, are very high. Nevertheless such a negative attitude is obviously very discouraging and prevents them putting much effort into learning Gemara.

In the following pages we will attempt to elaborate on these two points. We would like, first of all, to clarify how vitally important it is to learn Gemara, and then to demonstrate how each and every student has the potential to learn Gemara productively and meaningfully.

4. There are also many parts of the Gemara which appear to be complicated or difficult, and they can be problematic for some students. They don't understand why they should exert themselves to understand these texts and prefer to concentrate on the more straightforward sections of the Gemara. What they don't realize is that there is so much to be gained from the actual עמל, the toil and effort. If they would only know about the spiritual benefits and the refining influence to be derived from the actual learning and from striving to understand, it would completely change their attitude, and make them enjoy their learning much more.

5. Throughout the generations of our history, learning Gemara has been the ultimate pleasure and joy for all Jews. Jews from all walks of life, from the simplest to the most learned, were always happy to sit down and learn a 'daf Gemara'. Essentially it is no different today. The spiritual delight that learning Gemara affords can still belong to every Jew. The obstacle standing in the way of today's youth is simply that they lack the knowledge of certain basic facts - facts which are the key to the wonderful happiness that lies in learning Gemara.

In the following pages we will, with Hashem's help, elaborate on the subject and discuss ways and means to overcome the afore-mentioned difficulties. There are sources in the writings of our Sages for all we have written, and they will be listed elsewhere. In these pages, however, we have tried to write in simple terms and without quoting the sources and proofs, so that the reader should find the text easy to read and understand.

Chapter 2

Every moment learning Torah strengthens a Jew's relationship with Hashem and enhances his soul, and this is the quintessence of the mitzva of learning Torah

1. The first thing one has to know before beginning to learn Torah is that there is a fundamental difference between the Torah and other branches of knowledge. When studying any other subject the purpose is to gain erudition, and whatever you stand to benefit from the extra wisdom. Torah is different. Not only is the actual knowledge incomparably superior to any secular form of knowledge; unlike any other studies or science, the learning itself has an uplifting and improving effect on the person involved in it.

2. The supremacy that learning Torah has over other sciences is something which Hashem put into the very fiber of the universe. It has been there ever since He created the world, so that every instance of learning Torah and any knowledge of Torah, automatically reinforces the bond between the soul of a Jew and His Creator. It also brings forth the אור עליון, the Light from Above, i.e. spiritual advantages which strengthen a person and increase his ability to improve himself spiritually.

It is possible that at the time of learning you might not always feel the inspiration from Hashem. Nonetheless, whether perceived or not, it is always present, even if physical limitations temporarily prevent you from being aware of it. In time you will undoubtedly come to feel that Divine inspiration, at least partially; for it is only natural that in this world a person is unable to appreciate more than a fraction of what his soul really gains from learning Torah.

3. It goes without saying that a man's relationship with Hashem and the brilliance of the spiritual Light from Above can be experienced on different levels. The intensity of the experience will be determined by the quality of the learning. There are a variety of factors that affect the way you learn and it is worth knowing about them:

1. the duration of the learning
2. learning without interruption
3. concentration
4. learning with pleasure and yearning
5. understanding what you learn
6. repetition of what you learn until you remember it for some time.

To be sure, every time a person learns, without any exception, he reaps spiritual benefits and the unification of his soul with Hashem is intensified. There is no such thing as non-productive learning. The above-mentioned points, separately and in combination, all enhance the learning and add to the extent of the spiritual gain.

4. The more you get used to learning, the more these feelings are intensified and you develop a powerful inclination to learn more and more. There may be setbacks, but the general tendency is that the desire to learn grows progressively stronger. Harav Aharon Kotler said that when a person has to close his Gemara, for instance late at night when he goes to sleep, he should not feel that he is leaving the Gemara, but that he is being torn away from it. Which means that a Jew should feel that the truth of the Torah's light and the essence of his soul are so closely intertwined that they have become a single entity.

5. In the second blessing of the evening prayers it says: **כי הם חיינו ואורך ימנו ובהם** – "for they are our life and the length of our days and we will speak about them day and night." Our Sages explain that the second half of the verse is

a natural consequence of the first; as much as a person feels that the Torah is his very life - that he lives only for Torah - to that extent will the end of the verse - ובהם נהגה - be true, and the quality of his learning will improve.

6. You should know that there is no pleasure in the world that can even compare with the wonderful happiness that a person feels when Hashem's spiritual bounty, His אור עליון, comes down to him. A human being is made up of a body and a soul, the physical and the metaphysical, and it can be taken for granted that the essence of the soul is the dominant force. Worldly pleasures and enjoyments are all physical ones; Hashem's exalted light shining on to a person's soul is, by definition, an entirely spiritual experience, and in comparison to it all physical pleasures are insignificant.

7. In Tehilim (chapter 42) David Hamelech says: כאיל תערג על אפיקי מים כן נפשי תערג ... אליך אלקים. צמאה נפשי לאלקים... "Like a deer yearns for flowing waters, so my soul yearns for You Hashem. My soul thirsts for Hashem, The Living G-d; when will I come and see Hashem's Presence?" A man's soul experiences thirst in the same way as his body does. His physical being thirsts for water, and his soul thirst to be with Hashem. If someone would offer you all the riches in the world, but make it conditional on not drinking for a month, would you not refuse? – for what is money worth if you are going to die of thirst? The thirst your soul feels for Hashem's proximity and His spiritual light is exactly the same. How can worldly enjoyments quench a spiritual thirst? The only way in which yearning for spiritually can be satisfied is by learning Torah and keeping its mitzvos.

8. However, in order to reap the full benefit of the brilliant light that comes from Torah-learning, it is important for a person to know about it and always be aware of it. Learning Torah brings a Jew's soul closer to Hashem. It is a proven fact that the more a person knows about the power Torah has to unite a his soul

with his Creator and the spiritual benefits of His exalted light, the more he stands to gain from it. Even though those forces are present whether he is aware of them or not, knowing about them has the effect of increasing their potency.

9. In his commentary on the Orach Chaim, there is a passage written by the Bach which has disturbing implications. He says that, "the reason why the Children of Israel were exiled from their land was because they studied the Torah only to gain knowledge, and they were not concerned with the spiritual bounty and the closer relationship with Hashem that learning Torah leads to. Thus there was something fundamental lacking in the way they learnt." We should learn from this how important it is not to ignore the aspect of learning Torah because it brings us closer to Hashem.

10. The above passage contains a very important message and it is the responsibility of teachers and educators to make every effort to give it over to their pupils. The students must be made aware of the concept that every moment of learning Torah consolidates a person's relationship with Hashem and makes him more worthy of receiving His spiritual bounty. If the teachers manage to ingrain it in the hearts of their students, it will act as a powerful incentive to help them relate positively to learning Torah and the quality of their learning will improve tremendously.

11. Simultaneously - at the same time as explaining how learning Torah brings one closer to Hashem - it is important to stress the significance of a close relationship with Him. One has to make every student realize how much a Jew's soul - his own soul - yearns for His exalted light and for spiritual growth.

It says in the Mesilath Yesharim (chapter 1) that whenever a person sees anything that might help him improve his relationship with Hashem, he should take advantage of it and pursue it with all his might. Conversely, from

something that might distance him from Hashem, he should flee as if he was running away from fire. The Mesilath Yesharim also mentions that a person has to know that the only good thing in the world is being close to Hashem and any other things that people might consider good are really worthless.

In the above chapter we have elaborated on the aspect of what a man gains from learning Torah. In truth, the ultimate level of perfection is to learn Torah for no other reason than to please Hashem, to give Him נחת רוח. Nevertheless learning for the reasons discussed in this chapter is a very great thing indeed. Even someone who has reached the sublime level of learning only to please Hashem should be aware of the concept of drawing closer to Hashem and His exalted light. The difference is that he will be doing it for Hashem's sake, not for his own pleasure. In fact, the above reasons for learning can themselves help one reach the lofty level of learning to please Hashem. When one feels close to Hashem and basks in His exalted light, that itself makes you want to please Hashem and give Him נחת רוח.

Chapter 3

The tremendous good that comes from learning Torah at every level and for every person, yet always commensurate with the quality of the learning and the stature of the person

1. When told about the spiritual value of learning Torah, the reaction of many students is to agree that it may well be true – "but we are on too low a spiritual level for it to apply for us, both because our learning standard is so low and because our relationship with Hashem is so poor."
2. They are sadly mistaken; they don't realize that Hashem loves every single Jew very dearly. At every moment He is waiting for you to fulfill your spiritual obligations to serve Him in whatever way you are capable of. When you do learn Torah – at your own level – then you and your Torah are beloved in Hashem's eyes to an extent that we cannot even imagine. Whether you are aware of it or not, He is pouring His spiritual bounty down on to you.
3. This is true of every sphere and every level of learning Torah, without any exceptions. In the Gemara it says that the world exists because of *הבל פיהם של רבן תינוקות של בית רבן* – the empty words that come from the mouths of children of the schoolroom, because their meaningless talk is untainted by sin. The Chafetz Chaim says that it refers to very young schoolchildren, and the level of Torah that they learn is not very high since they are too young to understand it properly. From this we can infer that learning Torah even at lower levels contains the spiritual elements of Torah-study.

4. All the same, as explained by the Derech Chaim, the superiority of Torah learnt at a loftier level can not be denied. The more you understand of what you learn, the more the Torah's truth becomes clearer and more obvious to you. You will feel the Torah's exalted light of spirituality shining through your soul with increased brilliance, and your contact with Hashem intensified.

5. Even if his behavior causes a person to fall very low spiritually, ה"ו, he can still learn Torah, and that Torah is very dear to Hashem. From some ספרים it might be understood that it is not so; - but see what is written in the קריינא דאיגרתא of the קהלות יעקב on the subject: He explains in detail why it can not be that our Sages meant that a person on a low spiritual level should not learn Torah. It would not be right to suggest that if a person is experiencing a spiritual decline, the Torah he learns is not holy and blessed. Our Sages say that when a wicked man occupies himself with Torah, the radiance within it will bring him back on to the right track. In other words they are saying that the Torah's radiance is present even in Torah learnt by sinful people.

6. The Nefesh HaChaim too, writes to the effect that if someone finds himself struggling in the murky depths of a sinful life, it is through learning Torah that he can get the spiritual strength he needs to escape from it. If he learns, Hashem will give him the spiritual strength to repent and put right the harm he has caused.

The conclusion, therefore, is that someone who ה"ו feels that he is backsliding spiritually, is even more strongly obligated to intensify his Torah studies, and devote himself to it with all his might and in every way possible.

7. It still remains true that the more righteous a person, the more his learning builds up his relationship with Hashem and brings his soul more of His exalted light. All the same, even for someone who is not so righteous, or going through a

temporary spiritual depression, learning Torah is an extremely powerful force which actively draws him closer to Hashem and His exalted light.

Chapter 4

Every single person who learns Torah is capable of great achievements even if he is not particularly gifted intellectually, or by nature not studiously inclined

1. A common trait that people have is that they are prepared to invest a great deal of time and effort in a task only if they know that they will make a success of it. Unfortunately, such an attitude is a serious drawback for someone who wants to learn Torah. There are young students who do not think they are capable of becoming great Torah scholars. Some think they are not clever enough, others admit that they do have intelligence in other fields but claim that Gemara is too difficult for them to master. Still others feel that they will not be able to sit and learn diligently for any length of time. Most likely of all to fall into the trap of despair are those who think they have neither intellectual ability nor the innate nature conducive to sitting and learning.

2. Know that this is a fallacy – for a variety of reasons. Numerous examples from personal experience have proven that this is not the case. Quite a number of famous Rabbis appeared to be limited by intellectual or behavioral handicaps in their youth. Yet they successfully overcame those limitations to become accomplished Torah scholars: Many had large followings of students and others published works of Torah which are still used today wherever people learn Torah.

3. There are several ways to explain why it is possible to learn Torah successfully in spite of natural disadvantages. The Chazon Ish (based on the writings of the Arizal) elaborates on the subject: The reason that a person does not want, or is

not able, to perform a particular element of Hashem's service often derives from the fact that the root-source of his spiritual personality identifies more directly with certain facets of Hashem's will and not with others.

Nonetheless a person is still obliged to at least make an effort to serve Hashem in those areas as well. The result of his efforts will be that Hashem will reward him by adding extra elements to his spiritual make-up; the ones which he was lacking until then. He will then discover that he does have the inclination and the abilities to perform those tasks which beforehand did not appeal to him.

4. There are other reasons too why a person can experience a radical spiritual change. It is axiomatic that Hashem can do everything; the term impossible does not exist for Him. When Hashem sees a man sincerely straining himself to do what He wants him to, He will take pity on him and give him all the tools he needs to perform His will in an exemplary manner.

5. There is another suggestion in the Gemara (טנהדרין צ"ט ע"ב) and Rashi ad loc) which helps explain the phenomenon of people who achieve far more than their apparent potential: Our Sages say that when a person exerts himself for Torah, the spiritual lights of the Torah go and beseech Hashem to help him to be successful in his learning.

6. It is known that the Chazon Ish said that every bachur who is wholly committed to Torah has the potential to become one of the Torah leaders of the generation. There are no other conditions attached to becoming great in Torah learning. The only requirement is the basic one; to be constantly busy learning Torah and striving to be a true servant of Hashem. It is a condition that every individual can aspire for. It is dependent on no-one but himself, and no-one is able to prevent him fulfilling it.

7. We have just explained that every student can be successful learning Torah and become a Torah scholar. At the same time, we do not want to detract from the merits of natural intelligence. For the truth is that someone who has been blessed with superior intelligence should know and appreciate that it is a gift from Hashem and was given to him to use in full for learning Torah.

The Chofetz Chaim wrote that people who are born with an abundance of natural intelligence can go very far indeed and reach awe-inspiring heights if they exert themselves. The converse is also true; if ה"ו they do not use their intelligence, or use it for other purposes, they will be very sorry indeed when their lives are over and they come to the next world. There they will realize the magnitude of what they could have accomplished in their lifetimes, including things which others of their generation could never have done. In the world-to-come they will understand that they were granted a very precious gift for a specific purpose, and will be filled with bitter remorse when they see the futility of the worldly vanities on which they wasted it instead. (Quoted from the Chofetz Chaim.)

8. Therefore, someone who is naturally inclined to diligent study should make use of that characteristic for learning Torah, and his accomplishments will be truly impressive - and how much more impressive will they be if he has been blessed with a quick mind as well as being studiously inclined.

Even in the later generations we know of famous Torah personalities who were not particularly gifted intellectually, nor were they all naturally studious, yet they persevered and the result was that they became very great Torah scholars.

Chapter 5

The important role of prayer in learning Torah

1. Another key to success in learning Torah is to ask Hashem for it - you can ask him that you should be able to learn, whether it is the time or the natural inclination you think you are lacking. You can also ask Him to help you understand a particular Gemara that you are trying to learn.

2. In several places in our daily prayers our Sages included prayers for learning: In the morning we sayואהערב נא... in the ברכת התורה: 'Make pleasant the words of Your Torah...', in the blessings before Shema: אהבה רבה in the morning, and אהבת עולם in the evening prayers, ואתה חונן and השיבנו in Shemone Esre. When saying these prayers a person should beg Hashem to make him want learn, to help him enjoy learning, to enable him to learn diligently, to let him understand what he learns, to make it easy for him to remember what he learns, and anything else he needs to learn Torah.

3. It is advisable to daven to Hashem at other times as well – your own personal prayers. In your own words and at any time you want, you can always ask Him to help you learn Torah and to enjoy the learning.

Another place in the mandatory daily prayers where one can ask about Torah is at the end of Shemone Esre, before the last יהי לרצון. There one may also insert personal prayers, as many and as detailed as one wishes to.

4. Know that tefilla, prayer, is a very powerful force. The Chazon Ish wrote that a person has to know that sincere prayers can change every situation in life for the better.

5. In the Gemara it says that in order to learn Torah successfully there are two essential requirements: To work hard, and to daven. To daven to Hashem for success is as necessary as it is to put effort into your studies.

6. Hashem listens to all our prayers. He hears your prayers and accepts them and gives you what you ask for. Moreover, the actual prayer itself also unites you with your Creator. Tefilla forms a link which very effectively unites your soul with Hashem, and, as we mentioned earlier, the closer a person feels to Hashem the more successful will he be when he learns Torah.

Chapter 6

To those who complain that it is difficult to understand Gemara it will be explained that the perseverance itself a very important goal since it makes your holier

1. Young people often find learning Gemara too much of a challenge because they think it is very difficult to understand.

There are two fundamental rules they ought to be aware of. Firstly, experience shows, more than any number of theoretical proofs, that as one gets used to learning Gemara, it does get progressively easier. That does not mean that there will be no more difficulties to solve or questions to answer; learning Gemara always involves effort. Nevertheless, understanding the 'pshat', the straightforward meaning of the Gemara does get easier.

2. The second point one ought to be aware of is that if it takes effort to learn and understand a Gemara, in no way does it imply that anything is wrong. On the contrary, the toil and effort is the most important part of learning Torah. The Chazon Ish wrote: "The main thing is the effort; it is precisely through the struggle to understand the holy words of the Torah that a person comes to deserve the soul-illuminating light of Hashem's Torah."

Therefore, even if a man is a genius, and understands the Gemara without exerting himself, it is still important that he should use all his powers of concentration to come to a more thorough and profound understanding of the same Gemara. Otherwise an essential element of learning Torah is still missing. The effort one has to put into learning is vital, for it contains a powerful force that effectively refines the soul of the Torah scholar.

3. The effort that goes into learning Torah purifies and refines the soul. To a young student it might sometimes seem as if he is suffering when he tries so hard and doesn't manage to understand a Gemara. He may feel disappointed when he finds that he has to study the same passage over and over again, and pore over every detail, before he begins to get the gist of what the Gemara is saying. Yet the truth is that these very factors are assets to his learning; they are what purify his soul and confer on it Divine qualities.

4. The Vilna Gaon was famous as an intellectual genius from his earliest youth. Nevertheless in the writings of his pupil, R. Chaim Volozhin (Nefesh Ha'Chaim) there are remarkable accounts which give insights into the tremendous energies the Vilna Gaon used to expend on learning Torah, and we feel that it is important to quote from what he wrote.

5. "The Vilna Gaon, our pious and holy master, was a world-renowned genius. His manner of learning Torah was to think and concentrate and strain himself to a degree that is impossible to appreciate or to describe. Because of his superior powers of concentration and most wonderful holiness, he merited to grasp the edge of understanding the Torah. It is unbelievable how that mighty giant among men exerted himself until he arrived at the absolute clarity of truth. Even though he was endowed with remarkable depth of understanding and had gained vast stores of knowledge from scholars of past generations. Nevertheless his pure heart never allowed him to take advantage of those qualities. Instead he delved into a subject until he had contemplated it from every angle and considered all the ramifications - hundreds of times. In his awesome concentration he could continue for several days and nights without eating or drinking and without sleeping, until his appearance showed that his physical being was exhausted. He quite literally gave himself up totally for the Torah. Then, when Hashem lit up his eyes with the true understanding, he underwent

an instant transformation, and his face shone with purity and happiness at the clarity of the Torah."

6. Quite obviously the Vilna Gaon's remarkable powers of concentration are not expected of everyone. However we can, and ought, to learn from his example. Everyone must strive intensely - to the limits of his own abilities - when he learns Torah, because the effort is what purifies and refines you.

Chapter 7

Parents duty to enable their children to learn and live Torah lives and the role of parents prayers in their children learning Torah successfully

1. A student's success in his Torah studies often depends to a large extent on the encouragement he gets from his parents. Therefore the attitude of parents to their sons' Torah studies is a topic that we would like to discuss here as well.
2. In every generation it was always manifestly clear that Jewish parents wanted their children to grow up to be great Torah scholars. Irrespective of whether or not the fathers themselves were able to learn Torah, their most sincere wish was that their children should be able to learn, and for that goal were prepared to make great sacrifices.
3. There are any number of well-known stories to corroborate this idea. Here is not the place for them, but anyone who knows older people who were alive a generation or two ago can ask them and they will surely verify it.
4. Unfortunately, in recent years there are houses where the priorities have changed and parents do not all understand how important it is for their children to learn Torah.
5. Know that man is only a temporary guest in this world. We all hope to live and be healthy until the ripe old age of 120, but when his time comes each one of us will find himself in the next world. Our souls will remain there for all eternity - millions and millions of years, without any end. What happens to a person - his soul - in the world-to-come depends on many things, but the two most important

ones are contained in the answers to: How did he conduct himself in this world? and what are the children and descendants he left in this world are doing here now? Every moment when they learn Torah and do what Hashem wants of them in this world, their parents enjoy the reward of the world-to-come, a kind of reward which is too indescribably sublime for us to even contemplate.

6. All parents ought to be aware of the fact that in the next world they will rejoice about whatever they did to encourage and support their children learning Torah. Similarly, if ה"ו they prevented them learning, or made it difficult in any way, there is no doubt that in the next world they will regret it very much. Just as we can not grasp the splendor of the reward in the world-to-come, so too do we have no inkling of how terrible will be the regret one feels there in the world of truth.

Know too, that the Torah does not change. It has been passed down through all the generations by word of mouth ever since Moshe Rabbeinu heard it directly from Hashem.

The traditional way in which Jewish parents conducted themselves has always been to use everything at their disposal to encourage their children to learn as much Torah as possible. If anyone has any doubts about the matter, he need only find out about his own ancestors - maybe even his own parents - and he will hear that they were, quite literally, prepared give up everything they had and live lives of poverty and deprivation, so that their children could learn Torah. We are no cleverer than those generations of the past, but unfortunately foreign influences, originating from non-Jewish sources, have found their way into our camp. They have complicated matters which to our parents and grandparents always seemed straightforward and obviously true. We could elaborate with proofs from our Sages and their holy writings, but this is not the place for it; this chapter was written only as incidental to the others.

7. Furthermore it is well-known that in the past, parents used to daven for their children (- and many do still nowadays, regrettably not all) They prayed to Hashem and begged him that their children should be worthy of learning Torah as much as possible and that they should have the pure, holy, and exalted fear of Hashem that every Jew strives for. They would pour out their hearts to Hashem every day in tearful supplication for these things.

The Chazon Ish claimed that "when a non-religious Jew does teshuva and comes back to the fold, whether he came to the truth himself or others made him aware of it, it is very often the result of the prayers of his grandparents several generations earlier who used to daven that their children and grandchildren should all learn Torah."

Harav Shach said that when someone becomes a learned Torah scholar, or one of the Torah leaders of the generation, or if he publishes seforim which become popular and are studied by many Torah scholars, it is natural for people to give the Talmid Chacham himself the credit for his accomplishments. Yet, the truth is that it may not always be so. Very often the prayers of his parents, grandparents and great-grandparents influenced his success more than anything else.

8. Know that prayer is a very powerful force indeed. We can not even imagine the impact it has on everything around us. The Medrash says that the 'gates of prayer' are never shut, and quotes a possuk in ואתחנן which says: ומי גוי גדול אשר לו אלקים קרובים אליו כה' אלקינו בכל קראנו אליו. 'Which is so great a nation that it has Hashem close to it, as Hashem our G-d is close to us whenever we call to Him?'

Chapter 8

The road to learning Torah meaningfully is much easier than people tend to think

1. Young students should never forget that the way to success in Torah is wide open to them.

The Yetzer Hora, the evil inclination, has two main strategies which it uses to dissuade youngsters from learning. Firstly, it tries to make them believe that greatness in learning Torah is dependent on complicated issues that they don't know about or won't be able to fulfill.

The Yetzer Hora's other tactic is to persuade them to think that their position as far as learning Torah is concerned is not a good one, for whatever reasons, and because they are in such a negative and unproductive state there is no way for them to deserve greatness if they learn Torah.

2. The truth is that when it comes to learning Torah the road to success is extremely straightforward. It is within the reach of every Jew; simply by making maximum use of all the tools he has been provided with for the purpose.

3. There are four separate fields on which our Rabbis tell us to concentrate:

- to try to learn as much as possible,
- to concentrate on prayer as much as possible,
- to be careful that his eyes do not see anything unsuitable,
- and to be careful about how he speaks.

Anyone who always pays attention to all these four points can be sure that he will successfully scale to lofty heights of Torah-learning and fearing Hashem.

4. Even if one does experience an occasional setback or times of weakness - and who does not? - one should never despair. As soon as possible, you should make every effort to focus your attention on those four points again: Torah, prayer, and keeping a check on your eyes and mouth. You should, of course, also do whatever you can to prevent such relapses recurring.

Chapter 9

All Klal Yisroel gain from the learning of each individual

1. Another very important thing to know is that when a Jew learns Torah he is not doing good only for himself; the whole of Klal Yisroel benefit at the same time.

The Nefesh HaChaim explains in detail why this is so: The universe has been arranged in such a way that, as well as the world we recognize, there are millions of other more exalted spiritual worlds in existence. Those spiritual realms depend on whether or not Klal Yisroel learn and keep the Torah. The more Torah there is in this world, the more firmly those spiritual worlds are substantiated.

2. The stronger the spiritual realms become, the more of Hashem's bounty is bestowed on His people. Hashem's bounty is felt in all fields, material as well as spiritual. Every hour that a Jew learns Torah brings relief for all Klal Yisroel and prevents tragedies and misfortunes befalling them.

3. For a person who lives with a sense of responsibility towards his people - who wants to do things for Klal Yisroel - it means that he should learn as much Torah as he can. If he sincerely wants to help Klal Yisroel, he should be aware that, in all matters, learning Torah is the surest way to do so.

4. It can sometimes happen that a man is in the middle of learning Torah and he is suddenly confronted by some pretext or other aimed at making him stop learning. He knows that he should overcome the inclination and continue his studies. If he is successful, then when he comes to reckon up what he gained by learning without interrupting, he should consider the benefit for all Klal Yisroel

as well as his own personal gain. In this world, we have no way of knowing what it is or how far it reaches, but we can be quite sure that the whole of Klal Yisroel will benefit considerably. It is even likely that an extra few minutes of learning can be of assistance for many Jews and prevent major calamities befalling them.

Chapter 10

Several points to add

1. A person should feel that the only thing that matters in this world is doing what Hashem wants us to do, and nothing else has any relevance whatsoever. It is the most basic truth that there is. In the first chapter of the Mesilath Yesharim it says that, 'Only cleaving to Hashem is good; anything else that people think good is really worthless and misleading vanity.'

2. Doing Hashem's will means learning Torah and doing whatever is written in it. Torah is unlike worldly occupations which are all transitory and without any substance. Torah is eternal and gives eternity to its adherents. When a man is learning Torah, its pure spiritual light is being added to his soul the whole time, and that light is eternal and lasts for ever.

His reward in the world-to-come is far beyond anything that exists in this world, and in addition to his own personal gain, at the same time the whole of Klal Yisroel reap unlimited benefits too.

3. If you contemplate these subjects, it will arouse in you an overwhelming desire to make the best use of your time and learn Torah whenever you can. You will also take into consideration that every minute you waste when you could have been learning, causes irretrievable loss for all Klal Yisroel.

4. It should be every man's sincerest ambition to spend his life learning Torah, and he should strive with all his being to fulfill that aim. If, for whatever reason, he is unable to do so himself, he should at least make every effort to encourage his children and enable them to learn Torah.

5. When you learn it is important that you strive to use all your powers of concentration whenever possible,. You should work on making yourself feel that you want to learn, and try to feel the pleasure in learning as deeply as possible. The more yearning and pleasure and excitement you put into learning, the more it comes from the innermost depths of your soul, and the more productive the resultant learning will be. Hashem's exalted light will radiate through your soul and the happiness that comes from learning Torah will be more intense, since those are the most essential features of constructive Torah-learning.

Nonetheless even at times when you find that you can not concentrate very well or feel that you don't want to learn, you should still try to learn to the best of your ability. Learning Torah at whatever level is always desirable and meaningful to Hashem.