



Refua and Halacha: You Can't Have One Without the Other

R' Yishmael (his) son [of R' Yochanan ben Broka] said: One who studies Torah in order to teach is given the opportunity to study and to teach; and one who studies in order to practice is given the opportunity to study and to teach, to observe and to practice. (Avos 4:5)

Why is a person who learns in order to practice also given the opportunity to teach? Additionally, why does the Mishna use the term “*given the opportunity*” rather than “*merits*”?

Perhaps *R' Yishmael* was addressing an individual who finds himself in a quandary. On the one hand, he wishes to remain in the world of full-time learning and continue toiling in Torah in great depth. On the other hand, he desires to commit himself to performing Mitzvos, especially those that require the investment of much time and effort. It seems that his desires are mutually exclusive and these competing priorities present a dilemma.

A person can choose to dedicate himself entirely to *Limud haTorah*, in order to develop deeper understanding and proficiency and to discover and formulate his own *Chidushim*. Alternatively, he could direct all of his efforts toward performing Mitzvos, such as *Chesed* with those in need. If he puts heart and soul into that, it may exhaust his energy and leave no time for *Limud haTorah*. A *Ben Torah* therefore grapples with the question, “*Must I choose between these two paths? If I put my efforts into Mitzvos, will my aspirations to grow in Torah never come to fruition?*”

Therefore, the Mishna informs us of a fundamental principle: “*One who studies in order to practice is given the opportunity to study and to teach, to observe and to practice.*”

Simply understood, the directive to “*study in order to practice*” is that a person should ensure that he derives the practical conclusions from each *Sugya* that he studies. This is vitally important, for there is no benefit to learning Torah solely for the intellectual enjoyment or even just for the sake of fulfilling the Mitzva of *Talmud Torah*. In fact, *Chaza"l* speak very harshly of a person who does so:



A person who learns [but] not in order to practice – it would have been better for him never to have been born! Said R' Yochanan, a person who learns [but] not in order to practice – it would have been better if his placenta had involuted and he had never been born! (Yerushalmi Brachos 1:2).

These strong statements are not referring to a sinner, but to one who learns Torah without the intention of fulfilling the Halachos that he studies, who undermines the spiritual foundation of our world and destroys his portion in it.

This concept is discussed in great depth by the Mirrer Mashgiach, Reb Yerucham Levovitz zt"l (*Da'as Chochma u'Musar* 3:128). He explains that the creation of the world was a matter of "*Hisgalus*" – revelation, or a translation of potential into actuality. This is the definition of "*Bri'ah*", and is something that is also within the capability of mankind who similarly translate potential into actuality when they perform Mitzvos. Without Mitzvos, the world is shrouded in darkness and devoid of any obvious Godly influence, but when Mitzvos are performed, the Will of God is expressed within it. Man's role in this world is to make it possible to reveal Hashem's Will in creation and this is why he was given the Torah which contains all of the Mitzvos:

*This is the idea of Matan Torah. Moshe brought down to the world something that had been hidden in the Heavens – nothing could be more hidden. The idea that "Moshe came and **brought it down** to earth" (Bereishis Rabah 19:13) is that of an active and obvious [revelation of a hidden entity]. This is also the idea of "And Hashem **descended** upon Har Sinai" (Shemos 19:20).*

*It follows that the connotation of Kabbalas haTorah is that of revelation. For this reason, many of the aspects of Ma'amad Har Sinai represented acts of revelation and actuality. This is the meaning behind the words, "You were **revealed** in Your cloud of glory" ... "From Heaven you made Your voice heard" etc. This is also the matter of the Shofar – a matter of actuality and not something of mere potential.*

The idea of Mitzva fulfillment is to bring something to actuality. This is why if a person learns and doesn't fulfill the Mitzvos, "it would have been better for him if his placenta and covered his mouth etc." or "it would have better for him to never have been created" for the intention of the entire creation was only to bring potential to actuality.



In other words, a person who doesn't intend to fulfill that which he learns has contradicted the entire purpose of creation. He has failed to realize that the role of a Jew is to bring the word of Hashem to every corner of the world. This is a grievous error and, in a sense, far worse than falling into sin.

At first glance, this mistaken worldview is far removed from our own. We are punctilious in our Mitzva performance and certainly have no intention of learning Torah without intention to fulfill its dictates. However, upon a little thought, we may discover that this insidious perspective may have penetrated our consciousness.

People are often tempted to try to divorce their physical and spiritual worlds from each other, to place their Mitzva performance on one side and their practical world on the other. Religious practices such as *Tefilla*, *Limud haTorah*, *Shemiras Shabbos* and the like, stand alone in their dedicated times while professional and family life are similarly compartmentalized.

But this thought stems from the misguided perspective of a person "*who learns not in order to fulfill*". As we have seen, this attitude contradicts the very purpose of *Matan Torah*, which was to bring the will of Hashem into actuality. A person must attempt to fulfill the will of Hashem and bring it to fruition in every sector and segment of his life.

This is the answer to the Jew who struggles to find balance between immersion in full-time Torah learning and energetic Mitzva performance: He should become a person "*who learns in order to perform*", dedicating himself to studying the *Sugyos* that are relevant to his occupation. This will lead to multiple benefits.

Firstly, he will learn how to conduct himself in accordance with Halacha. If he is a money manager, he will study the *Sugya* of investing in firms that desecrate Shabbos. If he is a businessman, he will learn the most pertinent Halachos of *Ribis*. If he is a *Shadchan*, he will ensure that he is familiar with the Halachos of *Lashon haRa*. In each and every field there are Halachos that are important to know to ensure that one does not accidentally stumble and violate the word of Hashem.

But this is only the most basic objective. On a deeper level, the study of the areas of the Torah that are relevant to a person's life or occupation uplifts his entire enterprise, connecting it to *Avodas Hashem*. In meticulously observing the Halachos amid a profound understanding of the subject, he fortifies all of his acts, filling them with meaning and revealing Hashem's honor to the world.



The Mishna teaches us that when a person acts in this way, “*he is given the opportunity*”. He needn’t be concerned that any of his endeavors will come at the expense of the other, on the contrary, each will contribute to and benefit the other. Combining his *Limud haTorah* with his occupation will cause both his Torah and his occupation to endure.

This is true of any occupation, but particularly with regard to the practice of medicine, as the Mitzva of *Refua* is almost unparalleled in stature. Medical practitioners have the merit of saving lives, supporting patients and their families, and performing incomparable acts of *Chesed*. They are, quite simply, occupied in Mitzvos from morning to night.

That is not all, though. If physicians and other medical professionals do not combine in-depth study of the *Sugyos* of *Refua* with their elevated profession, they are in danger of imagining that their success is due to their own proficiency and not the will of Hashem. Without sufficient grounding in the Torah of *Refua*, a physician may begin to believe that the powers of life and death are in his hands and forget that both the sickness and the cure are in the hands of Hashem and that he is but an emissary to treat the sick.

Studying the aspects of the Torah that relate to *Refua* will lead a person to attribute spiritual value to his physical endeavors which then become one long series of Mitzva performance. He will become accustomed to viewing things from a Halachic perspective, applying his knowledge to many questions that will arise, and bringing the word of Hashem into all facets of his daily routine.

The Mishna assures us that a person who conducts himself in this way will also be given the opportunity to teach others. How so? By personal example. A person who is meticulous about Halacha in all aspects of his life will stand out among his peers as a man of morals, a man who continuously and consistently recognizes the value and importance of his actions. His colleagues will, without doubt, attempt to emulate him.

This is an important lesson for Erev Shavuos. Each of us should try to bring the word of Hashem into all aspects of our lives and thus bring it to actuality and fulfill its purpose.