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IT'S NOT ABOUT TOCHACHAH, IT'S ABOUT AMEILUS

Parshas *Bechukosai* falls out almost every year right before Shavuos, or close to Shavuos. The subject of *Parshas Bechukosai*, as many people will tell you, is *klalos* and *brachos*, or *tochachah*. But the *emes* is that *tochachah* is only the end result. Many of us deal with symptoms but we don't think about the reason for the symptoms. You always have to search for the reason for the symptoms.

The subject of this *parshah*, actually, is one's relationship with the Torah. Relationships are part and parcel of being a human being. There is relationship between children, there is relationship between parents, there is relationship between a husband and a wife, there is a relationship between a *rebbe* and a *talmid*, a relationship between friends, a relationship between the Ribono Shel Olam and Klal Yisrael, and there is a relationship specifically with the Torah and a Jewish person.

The *passuk* in Mishlei (8:17) says: **אֲנִי אֹהֲבֵי אֱהָב** - "those who love Me, I love." What does "I love those who love me" mean? Rashi says that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is saying, "I love those who love the Torah."¹ Other *mefarshim* explain it to mean that the Torah is saying the Torah loves those who love it.² If somebody loves the Torah then the Torah loves them.³ All the *brachos* that a person can experience in his life are as a result of his relationship with the Torah. All the *klalos* that a person has, are as a result of his lack of relationship with the Torah.

In the beginning of the *parshah* (Vayikra 26:3) the Torah says, if you're going to **תִּלְכוּ** **אִם בְּחֻקֵי תִלְכוּ**, "if you're going to follow My statutes," you're going to be *zocheh* to all the *brachos*. And then it says (ibid. 26:14), "if you're not going to listen to the Torah," **וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ לִי**, then the *klalos* will come. Rashi explains, what does **וְאִם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ לִי** mean? It means, if you won't be *amal baTorah*: **לֹא תהיו עֹמְלִים בַּתּוֹרָה** - you are going to be willing to toil in Torah.

It's very interesting. All the *brachos* come as a result of *ameilus baTorah*. **תִּלְכוּ** **אִם בְּחֻקֵי תִלְכוּ** - "if you follow My statutes" and you're going to be *shomer* the *mitzvos* and do My *ratzon*, you're going to be *zocheh* to all the *brachos*.

¹ אהבי. אהביה כתיב אמר הקב"ה אני אהביה של תורה אהב וז שמעתי מרבי אהרן בשם רבי נחמן
² אני אהבי אהב. מי שכבר דבק בחכמה לאהבה אותה, תאהב החכמה גם אותו ותגלה לו סודותיה כאשר יגלה האהוב סודותיו לאהובו, ותצרוהו מכל הטא כמ"ש אהבה ותצרה, כאשר ישמור האהוב את אוהבו (מלבי"ם)
³ משא"כ אהבת התורה היא משתלמת בכ"מ ובכ"ז וכמאמר החכמה בפי שלמה ברוך"ק אני אוהבי אהב ומשחרי ימצאוני. הבשיתה שני דברים שהיא אוהבת אותו וגם נמצאת לפניו. וכדא' בסנהדרין דצ"א נפש עמל עמלה לו העמל בד"ת היא עומלת לו במק"א, היינו שמסייעת להביניהו ולהתמתק בלבו עד שנמשך אליה באהבה שלימה והיא רוחנית ועזה. נמצא דבוח"ז יקרה לפני ה' אהבת התורה מאהבת ה' באשר היא בשלימות יותר (העמק שאלה על שאילות דרב אחאי גאון, קדמת העמק, קדמת השלישי ה:ט')

AMEILUS BATORAH AND YEGIAH BATORAH

Now, a cursory reading of the first *passuk* tells us, if you do everything that you're supposed to do, you're going to be *zocheh* to *brachos*. But Rashi says that וְאַתָּה אִם בְּחַקְתִּי תִלְכוּ can't refer to *mitzvos* because it says in the second part, וְאַתָּה מִצְוֹתֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ, "and you observe my mitzvos." So *kiyum mitzvos*, fulfillment of mitzvos, is already covered. So, how do I explain, אִם בְּחַקְתִּי תִלְכוּ? It comes to teach you שְׂתִהְיֶה עֹמֵל בְּתוֹרָה, that you should be an *amal baTorah*.

Now we have to understand what exactly is unique about *ameilus baTorah*. First, you have to know that there are two things we are talking about here. There is something called *yegiah baTorah* and there is something called *ameilus baTorah* and they are two separate things. *Yegiah baTorah* means if somebody commits to learn under different challenges. For example, a guy has a headache and he goes to learn. That is *yegiah baTorah*. If a person has to travel to go learn Torah, that is called *yegiah baTorah*. But that is not called *ameilus baTorah*. *Ameilus baTorah* is when you are sitting in front of a *sefer* and you are *amal*, you are toiling to understand not the *pashut pshat*. You are toiling to understand the underlying reasons, principles and *vos shteit doh*, what is being said.

There is one person who reads, let's say, a *gemara* and has a hard time figuring out how to understand the words, where a sentence starts, where it ends, what the words mean. He takes a help *sefer* and uses that to help himself to get past that. That may be called *yegiah baTorah*, if he has to struggle. But that is not called *ameilus baTorah*. *Ameilus baTorah* begins, said the Brisker Rav, once a person knows the simple *pshat*; Rava says this, Abaya says this. That is *pashut pshat*. Now starts *ameilus*, to understand what the underlying reasons of Rava and Abaya are, what is the point of conflict, what are they arguing over. That is considered *ameilus baTorah*.

As my *rebbe* pointed out, seemingly, even after it says you should be *ameil baTorah*, the question still begs to be asked: Isn't that included in the *kiyum hamitzvos*? When it says וְאַתָּה מִצְוֹתֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ, "you should observe My mitzvos," isn't *talmud Torah* one of the 613 *mitzvos*? So just as Chazal say that *bechukoisai* can't refer to *mitzvos* because *mitzvos* are already referenced in וְאַתָּה מִצְוֹתֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ, how can *ameilus baTorah* be referenced in *bechukoisai*? This should be also included in *kiyum hamitzvos*.

Isn't that a good question? I remember when I heard it from my *rebbe*. So my *rebbe* said: *al korchach* (we must say), there are two *dinim*. There is a *mitzvah* of *limud hatorah* and certainly that is included. But then there is a *mitzvah* of *ameilus baTorah*. You can fulfill the *mitzvah* of learning Torah without *ameilus*, but there is a *maaleh* of learning Torah with *ameilus*. It's in a category all by itself and the *sechar* for that is especially great. And that is a very unique type of learning.

Now, the Chazon Ish tells us that all of the *segulos* that Chazal tell us that you merit when you learn Torah, are for *ameilus baTorah*, not for regular *limud haTorah*.

WHY RUN TO HONOR A TALMID CHACHAM?

Now, we have to understand, what is it about *ameilus* that is so special? So there was a tremendous *tzaddik* and *gaon* by the name of R' Yosef Zundel MiSalant (1786-1866). He was the *rebbe* of R' Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883). He was a giant, one of the top *talmidim* of R' Chaim Volozhiner (1749-1821). And he writes – we have very few writings from him besides for some letters – but he writes a very interesting thing. He has a question.

The *gemara* in Berachos (7b) says: גדולה שמושה של תורה יותר מלימודה, serving a *talmid chacham* who is learning Torah and teaching Torah is greater than learning Torah from him. (If you have a choice to serve R' Chaim Kanievsky or another *gadol baTorah*, or to learn Torah from them, what is better? The *gemara* says, גדולה שמושה של תורה יותר מלימודה. Now he says, *lichorah*, this is difficult to understand because the whole *kavod* of a *talmid chacham* is his Torah. Why are we *mechabed* a *talmid chacham*? Because he learns Torah. So how could it be that if you “serve” the *talmid chacham*, that is greater than the learning of the Torah itself?

So R' Yosef Zundel says, the idea is like this. Because the greatest thing that Hashem wants from us is the toil. And he explains why. *כי ע"י העמל*, if you see a person toiling in Torah, what can you tell about that Torah? If you see a person who is toiling in Torah, what does that tell you about that person? What is *nikar*, what is recognizable about that person, as opposed to a person who is not toiling in Torah? He says, it is *ניכר וגלוי*, it is *distinguishable and it is revealed*, *אהבתו ותשקתו של האדם לחכמה*, *person's love and desire for wisdom*. A person needs to have an *ahavah* for Torah to toil in Torah. He has to have an *ahavah* for *chochmah*. So when a person is *mafkir* himself to be *meshamesh* and serve his *rebbe* in order to be *mekabel* from him *chochmah* and *da'as*, he shows his *ahavah* and his *teshukah* for the *divrei Elokim chayim yisborach*. That is a person who is certainly going to be willing to toil a lot to understand the Torah. And that is the *ikar* that Hashem demands from us.

So the *ikar* idea of *ameilus and yegiah* is that it expresses a tremendous *ahavah* and a desire for Torah. That is the *nekudah*. And because of his great *ahavah*, he's willing to commit and be *meimis* himself, to give himself up, to sacrifice himself for Torah. But without *ahavah* and without *chibah*, a person does not want to exert himself.

THERE IS NO LAZINESS WHERE THERE IS LOVE

Many people are lazy. Everybody has a little bit of laziness, some people have more, some people have less. But you know what you notice? All lazy people become very great *zerizim* when they become faced with doing something they love to do. They never get tired. I never see lazy people have a difficult time playing sports because they love the sports. I never see them get tired playing with phones, or technology, and they want to know everything possible to do with that technology because they have great love for it. Similarly, if you have a love for something you'll be willing to invest in them.

A person has to know that the *mitzvah* of *ameilus baTorah* is a *mitzvah* of loving the Torah. All the *brachos* that a person gets is for loving the Torah, loving *chochmah*. A person who uses his *seichel* that is attached to his *neshamah*, and immerses that into understanding *chochmah*, that person is working on his love for Torah. You know what we see many times? A person learns something and he doesn't grasp it right away, so he tries a second time if he's a *tzaddik*. After the second time, if he doesn't get it, what does a guy do then? Let this one go. That's what he says. Why does he say that? Because he has no *ahavah* for it. He has no *ahavah* for the *chochmah*.

WHY R' MEIR SIMCHA DAVENED FOR AHAVAS HATORAH

There is a famous story with R' Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926), the Ohr Sameach. The story was sourced from the *rosh yeshivah* in Detroit, an alter Mirrer named R' Leib Bakst (1915-2003). R' Leib Bakst related a story that he had a relative who learned for a number of months, every year, *be'chavrusa* with R' Meir Simcha. One time, when they were learning, they had difficulty understanding a particular Tosafos. They were struggling with it. Now, if R' Meir Simcha was struggling with it it must have been seriously hard – he was a man who knew *kol haTorah kulah*. So he said, “Nu, what are we going to do?” They couldn't call anyone on the phone. They couldn't check it online. They didn't have an English or Yiddish translation/elucidation. So what did they do? He said, “Let's stop the learning and let us ask from the One who is in charge of this *chochmah*. We'll ask Hashem. יְתֵן הַקָּמָה מִפִּי דְעֵת וְתְבוּנָה.” So R' Meir Simcha told his *chavrusa*, we are going to *daven* now to be *zocheh*. We want to ask Hashem, not to understand the Tosafos, but we want to ask Hashem to be *zocheh* to *ahavas haTorah*. That is what we should *daven* for.” Do you hear that?

At the conclusion of their *tefilah*, they opened the *gemara* again and went back to learning and they were *zocheh* now that the windows of *chochmah* were opened up for them and the Tosafos became clear. So at the end of the learning, the *chavrusa* turned to R' Meir Simcha and he asked, “R' Meir Simcha, why did you instruct me to *daven* for *ahavas haTorah*, *davka*? Why didn't you tell me to *daven* for *havanas haTorah*, to understand the Torah?”

You know what he answered, R' Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, the heilige R' Meir Simcha? He said: “Let me give you a *mashal*. There was a mother who gave her child over to a babysitter, a neighbor, and said, ‘Watch my child for a short time until I come back.’ Meanwhile, the kid began to cry. So the neighbor checks the kid out and he doesn't understand why the baby is crying. And he doesn't know how to quiet the baby down. Until the mother comes home. The mother comes back and in one second she hears her kid crying. She walks over to the kid and understands what he wants and she calms him down. What is the *pshat*? The mother has *ruach hakodesh*? How does the mother know what was bothering her child?”

He said, “Because if a person gets a wound in his hand or a wound in his foot, does only his hand bother him, or does only his foot bother him, or does his whole body bother him? All the *eivarim*, limbs in a person bother him. Do you know why? Because they are all one. They are all attached to each other. A mother loves a child so much, that she is like one *guf*, one entity with her child. So when the child is in pain, the mother understands exactly what the pain is.”

R’ Meir Simcha explained further: “I said we should *daven* for *ahavas haTorah* because *havas haTorah*, understanding Hashem’s Torah depends on the degree of your love for Torah. Somebody who loves the Torah is attached to the Torah, and becomes one with the Torah, like it says **ישראל ואורייתא חד הוא**, Klal Yisrael and the Torah are one, so *mimeilah* the person understands the Torah also, just like the mother understands the child. Therefore, I said that we should *daven* to be *zocheh* to *ahavas haTorah* because if we’ll have *ahavas haTorah*, we’ll be *zocheh* to understand the Torah itself.” There is no greater *brachah*, there is no greater *nachas ruach* that a person could give Hashem than loving the Torah!

WOMEN CAN ALSO HAVE *AMEILUS BATORAH*

And that’s why I’ll tell you an amazing thing. Many people think that it’s only for men. It’s not true. Women also have this great opportunity. The *gemara* (Berachos 17a) says, “How is a woman *zocheh* to Torah?”⁴ She doesn’t learn Tosafos. You know what it says? She serves the people who learn the Torah. She serves her husband, she serves her children. If a mother loved the Torah, when she sent her kids off to *yeshivah* in the morning, she would be full of excitement because her child is going to learn Torah, she would wish him to be *zocheh* to *ahavas haTorah*. She would transmit her love for the Torah to her child. But many women think, “This is not my field.” They have no love for the Torah. And if their husband would come home one minute after they decide they have to go sleep, they would not be happy. I have spoken to many *yungerleit*. I said, “When you come home, do you spend a few minutes with your wife?” They answer, “Are you kidding? My wife needs her beauty sleep. By 9:30, she’s out.”

The *gemara* says that in order for a lady to be *zocheh* to Torah, she has to demonstrate her *ahavas haTorah*. It is interesting. The *gemara* says that they wait for their husbands to come home. Very interesting. So when the husband comes home, he doesn’t feel like he was out bowling with his friends and his wife is not a bowler so she went to sleep and he went to bowl. You have to demonstrate the connection. Have you ever read about these *gedolei olam*? Have you read stories about R’ Elyashiv’s *rebbetzin*? R’ Elyashiv used to get up at 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning. His *rebbetzin* always woke up with him regardless of when she went to sleep. And what did she do? She prepared a coffee for him. Do you think R’ Elyashiv couldn’t prepare himself a coffee? He could learn the whole Shas, whole Shulchan Aruch, *kol haTorah kulah*. You think he couldn’t make himself a coffee?

⁴ אמר ליה רב לרבי חיאי: נשים במאי זכיין? באקרוי בנייהו לבי כנישתא, ובאתגויי גברייהו בי רבנו, ונטרין לגברייהו עד דאתו מבי רבנו (רש"י: לבי כנישתא – תינוקות של בית רבן היו רגילים להיות למדים לפני רבן בבית הכנסת; בי רבנו – בית המדרש ששם שונים משנה וגמרא; ונטרין לגברייהו – ממתנות לבעליהן ונותנות להם רשות ללכת וללמוד תורה בעיר אחרת)

I can picture most wives telling their husbands, “You know, if my sleep gets disturbed in the middle of the night, I’m finished for the night. My whole night is gone and my whole beauty sleep is shot and now my whole day is shot and then my whole week is shot. You want me to be a good wife? I can’t do that.” So what do they say to their husbands? You want to get up and learn? That’s fine. Just make sure you don’t make noise and you make your own coffee. When they come to the next world, they are going to say, “I let my husband learn at 2 o’clock in the morning. Do I get any *sechar* for that?” No. Because where was your *ahavas haTorah* demonstrated?

Hashem is going to say to you, “I didn’t demand of you to wake up. Why didn’t you want to get up to give your husband his needs?” What did R’ Elyashiv’s *rebbetzin* do after she gave him what he needed? She went back to sleep. If a mother wakes up for a baby in the middle of the night, what does she do? She goes back to sleep. If a person loves something, a person is willing and feels an honor and a *kavod* to be *meshamesh* them. There are many mothers, with all their rules of sleep, still, when their baby wakes up at night, they don’t let the baby cry. They want to wake up and be there for their baby because they feel, it’s like one *guf*, one *zach*. Nu, when it is one *zach*, you can’t ignore it. Half of me is crying, I can’t sleep.

A person has to know, this is a new insight into what it means to toil in Torah. Everybody has to love the Torah. And if you want *brachos*, you have to demonstrate your love for Torah. Men have to demonstrate it. Women have to demonstrate it. And that’s what it says over here in the *passuk*, אָנִי אֶהְבֵּי אֶהָב. Hashem says, “I love those who love my Torah.” Now, loving Torah, is loving Hashem. Appreciating Torah, is appreciating Hashem. No question about it. But it’s not going to come without development. You have to develop a love for Torah.

PARENTS TRANSMIT TO THEIR KIDS WHAT THEY LOVE

Let’s say a mother has a love of cauliflower. She tries her hardest to transmit that love of cauliflower to her children, so they should know how healthy it is, how wonderful it is, how good it is and how tasty it is. When a mother has a love for bangs, so they give their kid their first *chalachah* and they want to keep the bangs all the way down to the eyes, they want to show, “Oh, he looks so cute, so cute.” And the kid thinks, “So my mother loves this.” This is what the mother loves. So he always wants to keep his bangs. And what does it help him? He gets ‘banged,’ that’s all. *Gornisht*.

Parents transmit to their kids their love. And a father has to come home from learning and he has to feel that love for Torah and show the love.

THE SWEETEST DANCE FROM LEARNING THE RASHBA

I remember hearing from my wife something that *mamash* moved me to no end. My *shver*, *rosh yeshivah*, *hagaon hatzaddik*, R’ Refael Baruch Sorotzkin (1917-1979) was very *leibedig* in his learning, and from time to time he would come home after a second *seder* and he would take his *rebbetzin*,

Rochel, the daughter of the Telzer Rav (R' Avraham Yitzhak Bloch, 1891-1941), and he would say to her, "Come Rochel, let's dance." Let's dance. Why? "I had such *hana'a* (pleasure) from the Rashba today, I want to share it with you." The kids couldn't join in. The kids had to watch. He used to take her on a little waltz, "*Ah mir tantzen oif de simchah fon de Rashba - we are dancing from the simchah that comes from learning the Rashba.*" After I heard that, every time I think about that, it gives me goosebumps – the hairs rise in the nape of my neck. You know what amazing *chinuch* that is when a child sees that? "What are you *tantzing* about?" "Oh, it's our anniversary, oh I'm loved, I'm cared for." *Shtuyot!* That's nonsense. But *waltzing* over a Rashba, a *simchah* in Tosafos, because we understood a *pshat* in a Tosafos today?! You know what that is? That is unbelievable!

I know there are many people who dance with their wives. You know when? When they get a new car. Or the husband tells his wife, "I'm taking you on a vacation, honey. We're going on a vacation." "Wow! Are we going to a hotel for Pesach?! Oh boy!!" Let's do a jig over there, you understand? That's what turns them on. But to dance over Tosafos? To come home after learning a *shverer gemara*, and say "I got the *pshat*. I toiled on it." That only comes from *ahavah*.

IF YOU LOVE THE TORAH, THE TORAH WILL LOVE YOU

A person has to know, you must develop a relationship of *ahavah* with the Torah. And if you love the Torah, the Torah will love you. That is what is unique. The Torah is called a *Toras Chaim*, a Torah that is living, so it really means, the Torah will love you. And if the Torah loves you, you are going to be in great shape!

And your kids will love to learn. How many parents sit and wonder, "Why does my kid hate to learn? How come my kid can't stand learning Torah?" Is it because of how much you showed him you loved Torah. Did you show him your love for Torah or did you show him you love health food or how much you love seven-layer cake from a special bakery? What love did you impart to your child? And if you impart your love for the Torah to your child, your child is going to want to love to learn Torah. But if your child saw when the mother got her smartphone she was so tickled pink, she was so excited about it. She looked in the *chumash* and said, "What does a king have to do? A king has to carry his Torah wherever he goes. Ah, if that is how a king has to love Torah, that is how I'm going to love my smartphone." And then she has to figure out how she will carry her smartphone because she only has two hands, she doesn't have three hands. They don't make these holsters for women, they make holsters for men for the phone. You don't see women wearing belts around their waist holding their phone, so they carry their phone. *Talmudo beyadoi*, you see. They are always carrying it in their hands. They walk around the house taking care of the kids, they keep the phone near them and there's a little ping. Ping. Poo! Everybody runs over to the thing. *Mir loifen* (we are running), *mamash* running to the thing. That's *ahavah*. *Nebach*. But that's sick, let me tell you!

And your kid sees that. So then your kid says, “You want me to run to learn? Ma, I learn from you, hee hee. The only thing that tickles me is technology. Technology really moves me, just like that moves you. I saw you spent days figuring out how to work your phone.” She spent nights. It was real “*ameilus*.” What you love is what you toil in, and what you don’t love, you don’t toil in.

It’s Erev Shavuot now, Rabbosai. The Torah tells us all the *brachos* are from the Torah. If you love the Torah, the *brachos* will come to you. If you don’t love the Torah you’re jeopardizing all the *brachos* that Hashem wants to bring to us.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The main subject of *parshas Bechukosai* is our relationship with the Torah. All the brochos in our *sedrah* come our way only when we toil in Torah, not simply learn it. This applies equally to men and women, based on our own unique roles and responsibilities. The famous dictum of Mishley, אֲנִי אֶהְבֶּה אֶתְּוֹרָה, “If you love Torah, then Hashem or the Torah/*chochmah* will love you in return,” has to be understood in the context of what R’ Yosef Zundel of Salant famously said, that the strong desire and love for *chochmah* is the main prerequisite for toiling in Torah. This is why a *shimush* of *talmid chacham* is greater than learning from him, since the desire to serve him demonstrates a person’s thirst for drawing from and connecting to the *talmid chacham’s* wisdom, and ultimately to that of *Divrei Elokim Chayim*. This passionate drive to *chochmah* is the *ikar* of what Hashem wants from us regarding our relationship to Torah. And while we may not yet be on the level of spontaneously breaking into a joyous dance upon getting clarity in our learning - like R’ Refoel Boruch Sorotzkin did, or davening for *ahavas haTorah* (vs. its understanding) - like R’ Meir Simcha of Dvinsk did, we can still appreciate how important it is to strive for *chochmah*. And if we ponder and internalize these lessons and stories deeply enough, we ourselves can begin to ask and plead for *chochmah*, so that when Hashem hears our sincere tefillos, He will testify regarding us, אֲנִי אֶהְבֶּה אֶתְּוֹרָה. And in that *zechus*, the upcoming Yom Tov of Shavuos will be truly transformational for us, our spouses, our children and all those around us.

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