



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד
Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel MORDECHAI MALKA, Founder & President of Institutions "Or Hamelech"



עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Parashat Bechukotai

Setting Fixed Times for Torah Study

Our *parasha* states (26:3-5), "If you will follow in My laws [*Im bechukotai teilechu*] and guard My mitzvot and perform them; Then I will provide your rains in their proper time, and the land will give forth produce, and the tree of the field will give its fruit; And your threshing will last until the harvest, and the harvest will last until the planting, and you will eat your bread until you are satiated, and you will dwell securely in your land."

Rashi explains that the expression "*im bechukotai teilechu*, if you will follow in My statutes," does not refer to fulfilling the mitzvot; this follows shortly thereafter, when the *pasuk* states, "and guard My mitzvot." Rather, it is an exhortation to toil in Torah study.

Questions:

- 1 – Why does the Torah refer to toiling in Torah study as *bechukotai*, which stems from the word *chok*, law?
- 2 - In *Masechet Avot* (5:17) it states, "There are four different types of individuals who go [*be'holchei*] to the *beit midrash*: a) one who goes but does not perform, nevertheless gets reward for going; b) one who performs but does not go, is rewarded for performing; one who goes and performs is a pious individual; one who does not go and does not perform is a *rasha*." It must be understood: if the implication of "performing" here is to fulfill that which one learns, then how can someone earn reward for going to the *beit midrash* if he does not fulfill the mitzvot he has learned about? On the contrary, since he knows that he is obligated to fulfill the mitzvot, if he disregards them, he is punished even more than someone who does not know that he is obligated at all!
Additionally, our Sages teach us (*Shabbat* 31a) that when man passes away and stands before the Heavenly Tribunal, he will be asked if he was honest in business, **set fixed times for Torah study**, and bore children, etc. *Chassidim* relate that one of the *chassidim* of the Baal Shem Tov once travelled to a fair to earn some money by working as a guard there. When he returned home, his children asked him, "Father, what did you bring back from the fair?" When the *tzaddik* heard the question, he started to cry and said, "After returning from a fair, which lasts a few days, they already ask, 'What did you bring back from the fair? How much more so will they ask in Heaven when we return from the "fair of life," which lasts seventy, eighty, or sometimes even ninety years, 'Were you honest in business? Did you set times for Torah study? Did you have children?' What will we answer to these questions?"
- 3 – Why is the expression used by our Sages, "Did you **set times** [*kavata itim*] for Torah study?" Why do they not ask simply, "Did you study Torah?" Why is there an emphasis placed on **setting** times for Torah study?
- 4 – There is an apparent contradiction in the Gemara: In *Sanhedrin* (7a) Rav Hamnuna teaches that man is first judged over his Torah study. *Tosafot* asks that this contradicts what our Sages taught in *Masechet Shabbat* that man is first asked if he was honest in business.

The Thoughts of Someone Who Studies Torah

When someone spends his days working to earn a livelihood, he is usually happy when he finds time to go and learn Torah at the beginning or end of his day. He feels that even though he spends most of his time working, *baruch Hashem* he had the opportunity to learn Torah. All the more so, if he is a *kollel avreich*, who studies Torah all day, then he feels even better. Even though there are many times when he is unable to learn Torah, especially when he has pressing matters or needs that must be attended to – during those periods, he may not learn the entire day – nevertheless, in his heart, he tells himself that it does not really matter. Since he usually does learn or go to his *shiur*, even though many times he is unable to do so, the main thing is that he has a strong connection to Torah learning. However, the Torah and our Sages have taught us that man has still not fulfilled his obligation to study Torah by fulfilling it in such a manner. Rather, he must set fixed times that he will not miss no matter what. This is the first or second question that he will be asked in Heaven, as we will soon explain.

Even if He Must Forgo a Large Profit



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד
Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel MORDECHAI MALKA, Founder & President of Institutions "Or Hamelech"



עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Above we quoted Rashi's explanation for the expression "*im bechukotai teilechu*." It seems we can offer an additional explanation: The Torah wishes to teach us that "toiling in Torah" means setting fixed times to study Torah and not to miss those times for any reason whatsoever. Only then, can he be considered toiling in Torah. When an individual attends a *shiur* or learns Torah when it fits his schedule, his participation in the *shiur* can hardly be considered toil. The main toil is to exert effort to study Torah despite the myriad reasons that pressure him not to. This is true toil. Therefore the Torah states, "*im bechukotai teilechu*," if you approach Torah study like it is an unbreakable *chok* – like a law which cannot be changed – then it will be considered toiling in Torah, and he will see blessing and success. Now we can understand the Mishna from *Pirkei Avot* that we quoted above: when the Mishna stated that one who goes to the *beit midrash* but does not perform gets rewarded for going, it does not mean that he does not fulfill the mitzvot about which he has learned. Rather, it refers to someone who goes to the *shiur* but does not understand it or gain from it. Nevertheless, since he consistently goes to study like it is a *chok* – a law – then it is considered toil for which is rewarded, even if he did not understand it or gain from it. This is as the Gemara states in *Masechet Berachot*, that the main reward accrued for going to the *beit midrash* is in how fast he runs to get there. This is similar to what the *Tanna* taught us in *Pirkei Avot*, that whether he understands the *shiur* or not, or whether he gains additional knowledge from the *shiur* or not, he is still rewarded for going since he goes consistently.

Indeed, this is what *Tosafot* answers in their first answer: They explain that the Gemara in *Shabbat* is speaking about someone who studies Torah but did not set fix times to study – the judgment for no setting fixed times follows that of honesty in business. But in *Sanhedrin* it is speaking about someone who does not study Torah at all. Such an individual is judged for this before he is judged for anything else. Alternatively, *Tosafot* reconciles the two statements of our Sages by explaining that the Heavenly Tribunal first questions him about his business ethics, but he is **punished** first for neglecting Torah study. From the first answer of *Tosafot*, we see that there is a difference between someone who sets fixed times to study Torah and one who does not. Even if he is a *talmid chacham*, if he did not set fixed, unbreakable times for learning Torah, it will be held against him. See the *Tur* (OH"K 155:1) who rules accordingly, and adds that the set time for learning must not be broken even if he stands to earn a large profit. This ruling is also stated by the *Shulchan Aruch* (ibid.).

According to the Exertion is the Reward

We see then that setting fixed times to study Torah, even at the expense of a large profit, is not considered an act of piety that only the extremely pious are careful to adhere to. Rather, every man will be asked this question by the Heavenly Court. The explanation for the importance of setting fixed times to learn Torah is as follows: If an individual studies Torah only when it is convenient for him, while he is certainly rewarded, nevertheless, he does not receive as great a reward as someone who exhibited self-sacrifice by attending the *shiur*. To the degree that man demonstrates how he values the *shiur*, so too, is his Torah study valued in Heaven. This is as the Mishna stated in *Pirkei Avot* (5:23), "Ben Hei Hei said: According to the exertion is the reward." You may have two individuals studying Torah in the same *shiur*, but there may be a very great difference between the rewards each one receives. For one of them, it may have been very convenient to attend the *shiur*, while the other had to forgo a meeting with a friend or a party he wished to attend. Perhaps he had a business opportunity that would have earned him a hefty profit, but he nevertheless gave it up for the sake of his *shiur*. There is no doubt that the second one's reward is ten times greater than that of the first, since he exerted effort in attending the *shiur*. Therefore, man will be asked if he set fixed times to attend a *shiur*, and was unwilling to pass it up for anything in the world. Only then does his learning have true value. This is the Torah's intention when it states, "*im bechukotai teilechu*," on which our Sages expound – "You should toil in Torah." In other words, you should consistently attend the *shiur* and never miss it. Of course, sometimes the matter is beyond one's control, and for various reasons, he may end up missing the *shiur*. In that case, he is not held accountable, as the Sages teach that one is not held accountable for occurrences that were beyond his control.

Make Your Torah Study Fixed



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד
Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel MORDECHAI MALKA, Founder & President of Institutions "Or Hamelech"



עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

It is similarly stated in *Pirkei Avot* (1:15), "Shammai says: Make your Torah study fixed ..." Rashi explains Shammai's intention in two different ways: In his first explanation, Rashi writes that one should make Torah his fixed occupation the entire day. In the second, he writes that man should fix set times for Torah study. However, the *Rashbatz* in *Magen Avot* takes issue with Rashi's first interpretation. He states that the Gemara in *Masechet Berachot* teaches us that most individuals were successful by combining Torah study with working for a living. He therefore explains Shammai's intention by writing that those hours which are set aside for Torah study should be permanently fixed in one's schedule, and the other hours of his day should be allotted for work. He writes that this is what the Sages have taught, that the earlier generations made their Torah study permanently fixed in their daily schedules, while their work was performed when they had time. They were therefore successful both in Torah study and in earning a livelihood. However, the later generations did the opposite, and they were successful at neither. He then mentions our Sages statement that man is first judged on whether he set fixed times for Torah study. We therefore see that the main explanation in Rashi is the second one, as we explained above.

Story About R' Efraim Margoliot

R' Efraim Margoliot was a very wealthy man who owned a large business. However, he studied Torah regularly, and when he did, he would not divert his mind from it for any business matter. His wife was responsible for the business, and she agreed never to disturb him in middle of learning. However, one time a businessman arrived selling very expensive merchandise. He told R' Margoliot's wife that he desperately needed cash, and was willing to sell his merchandise for a tenth of the price. If R' Margoliot would resell it, he would earn a profit that would last him a few months. However, his wife knew that her husband was learning Torah and that she could not interrupt him. She therefore tried to delay the businessman until her husband would finish his learning session. However, the businessman said that he could not wait and that the matter was very pressing. If they would not buy his merchandise now, he would go on his way. Since this was a rare opportunity and could benefit them for a long time, his wife was left with no other choice. She felt that this was an exception to the rule, and therefore called her husband. R' Margoliot was frightened, since he thought that it must be a life threatening matter; otherwise, she would never have disturbed him in the middle of his Torah study. "For every rule there is an exception to the rule," she said, "and this is a very rare opportunity." He listened to what she said, and responded that he was not willing to interrupt his Torah learning for all the money in the world. If the businessman was not willing to wait, then he could go on his way. She therefore told the businessman, who grew angry and left. R' Margoliot's wife was understandably upset because of losing out on such a great opportunity for profit. After her husband concluded his learning session, he said to his wife that whatever they were meant to earn, they would earn, but he was not willing to succumb to the *yetzer hara* and cancel his learning for anything in the world. Ultimately, the businessman returned and sold him all of the merchandise. He then said to his wife, "You see? All of this was just a tactic of the *yetzer hara* to make me stop learning."

Words of Mussar

We now see how important it is for an individual to set fixed times of learning for himself and not to forgo it for anything at all. Rather, he must be consistent, and even if he usually learns the entire day, it is still important to set a fixed time which he will never miss, as is ruled in *halacha*. According to the exertion is the reward, and he will be blessed with all of the blessings of the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka