**Reclaiming the Lost Art of Torah Study – Introduction**

The focus of this series will be what seems to be a growing issue of lack of connection with Torah study. This can be described as disengagement, disenchantment, or even disillusionment with learning Torah. This lack of inspired connection filters down into general lack of connection to Judaism, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and the Jewish people.

This can be relevant to individuals at any level of proficiency, from beginners to advanced students.

For some it can manifest as confusion. They may feel overwhelmed and confused by the complex information being thrown at them. It may seem to the struggling student as if everyone around him has a good grasp on the intricacies of the shakla vetarya, or of Tosafos, or of the Rosh Yeshiva’s shiur.

For others it may not present as confusion. They can repeat what they learned, even be tested on it satisfactorily. But something elusive is missing in their comprehension of the subject matter. Something just doesn’t click.

For still others the comprehension and cognition may seem fully in place, but they are unstimulated and feel a sense of boredom.

Yet another group may feel intellectually stimulated, but feel a lack of emotional connection. They appreciate the intellectual depth, but don’t have a feeling of personal connection.

Some may even connect emotionally but wonder how this has spiritual meaning and connects them to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, their Neshama, or the Jewish people.

The aforementioned are often viewed as disparate issues, and worthy endeavors have been undertaken to address each of these issues separately, often with a measure of success. A number of excellent works on the art of studying Gemara have been authored for the beginner. Efforts have been made to articulate Torah study in terms and forms that make it enjoyable, or “geshmacke.” Some thinkers have invested effort in showing how all aspects of Torah study can have personal relevance. Awareness has been made of the metaphysical powers and connection accessed through limud haTorah.

The core argument of the ensuing series is that these seemingly disparate symptoms all stem from the same source and are all manifestations of the same general malaise. Namely, we seem to have lost our collective way in our approach to Limud HaTorah.

In his foundational preface to his classic work Mesilas Yesharim, R’ Moshe Chaim Luzzato famously notes the fact that it is often overlooking the simplest and most basic ideas that sabotages our attempts at avodas Hashem. Upon reflection, the same is true of Talmud Torah. By taking for granted, and thus failing to focus on, certain concepts that we may all know, we have lost our grip on the essence of Torah learning. This impels us to look for ever deeper lomdus (though surely a positive phenomenon when on target) for the sake of stimulation, or ever more rarified spiritual ideas (also, a welcome and crucial endeavor when done properly) to catalyze inspired Torah study. In truth, though, the solutions lie right under our noses.

It is the contention of this series that we have effectively jettisoned steps, tools, and facets of Torah learning that were always an integral part of Talmud Torah. Perhaps viewing these as peripheral and thus dispensable aspects, we have excised them, unwittingly robbing our learning of its vitality, direction, and meaning.

The suggested approach that will be outlined in this series, based firmly on the teachings of our greatest luminaries throughout the generations, will be the restoration of **context** to our learning. This entails empowering the student (including – or perhaps especially – ourselves) to see, connect with, and live whatever Torah concept is being studied, at whatever level is appropriate, from its earliest embodiment, in the form of the way it is presented to the Jewish people from the mouth of God, to the stage at which it is being studied presently. This includes a robust understanding of how a Torah topic is to be encountered and engaged at its source within the Written Torah, then traced through the many generations and various stages of our mesorah; as well as how to place a Torah concept within the greater tapestry of the entirety of Torah.

Applying these methodologies necessitates taking a bird’s-eyed view of the various components of Torah and their nature. Doing so, and then proceeding to learn Torah within this context, provides solid footing and comprehension and puts into place an intuitive understanding of what it is we are doing. It furnishes, on its own, the excitement and emotional connection that should stem from Torah study, and, most importantly, facilitates an experience of connecting with the Divine by engaging in Talmud Torah.

By restoring the steps we may have collectively skipped, we can, with a little effort and fairly straightforwardly, restore Torah study to its proper place as a source of ongoing engagement, excitement, commitment, spiritual empowerment, and connection to our Source.

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