

Lesson 6-Why Did Chazal Integrate So Much Torah Learning Within The Tefilos

Welcome to this session of Take 5 for Tefila, a program sponsored by the Orthodox Union, as part of their Tefila Education Initiative. In this session, I will try to answer the question: Why did Chazal integrate so much לימוד תורה, the study of Torah, into תפלת שחרית? Let us begin by reviewing where לימוד תורה appears within תפלת שחרית. We begin תפלת שחרית with two sessions of learning each containing an excerpt from the Torah, the Mishna and the Gemara, one session is found in Birchos Haschachar and one is found in Korbanos. Pseukei D'zimra which begins with the Bracha of Baruch Sh'Amar and ends with the Bracha of Yishtabach consists of verses and chapters from Tanach primarily from Tehillim. Kriyas Shema which is an independent Mitzvah also represents the fulfillment of the Mitzvah of the study of Torah. The Mishna tells us that if a person is unable to recite Kriyas Shema before the deadline to do so in the morning, he should still recite Kriyas Shema because the recital of Kriyas Shema also fulfills the Mitzvah of studying Torah. We end Tefilas Shacharis with one last session of Torah learning when we recite Kedushah and translate it into Aramaic, the every day language of our forefathers. We do this in the paragraph of Oo'Va L'Tzion Go'Ail, the prayer that is known as Kedushah D'sidra, the Kedushah of Torah study.

This last session of learning was considered so important that the gemara makes the following comment about it. The gemara asks the question: why does G-d allow the world to remain standing? The gemara answers: because of Kedushah D'Sidra, this last moment of learning before we leave the synagogue and because of the Kaddish that is recited after ten men study Torah together. Rashi explains: both acts represent the same principle: that when ten men study Torah together, they combine Torah learning with Kiddush Hashem, the sanctification of G-d's name. Why is this type of learning considered the sanctification of G-d's name? The sanctification arises from the fact that the Jewish people continued to study Torah despite the destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash. That tragedy could have spelled the end of the Jewish people. Instead the Jewish people embraced Tefila and Limmud Torah to fill the void that was created by the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. When G-d saw that the Jewish people did not use the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash as an excuse to abandon their tradition and instead substituted Tefila and Limmud Torah in place of the service in the Beis Hamikdash, G-d decided that the Jewish people had given Him a reason to allow the world to remain standing.

The 20th Century witnessed another great tragedy of Jewish history, the Holocaust. The handful of survivors could have viewed the death of six million Jews as a basis to give up on G-d, a reason to abandon Jewish practice. Instead many Holocaust survivors remained Shomer Mitzvos, continued studying Torah, built Yeshivos and synagogues and gave their children a Jewish education. In doing so, they reaffirmed their belief in Jewish principles;

Take 5 for Tefila- The Tefila Education Initiative of the Orthodox Union

they accepted the Torah anew. They too performed a great Kiddush Hashem and perhaps, it was through their Kiddush Hashem that the Jewish world merited witnessing the establishment of the State of Israel. That may demonstrate the power of combining Tefila and Limmud Torah.

And there is more. In an essay attributed to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, zt"l, the Rav, the founder of my own Yeshiva, Maimonides School, in Boston, Mass. and the one who strongly endorsed the teaching of one hour of Beurei Hatefila each week to the students in grades 7 through 12 at Maimonides, the Rav linked Limmud Torah and Tefila when he defined the study of Torah as Avodah Sh'B'Leiv, the service of the heart. That same term, Avodah Sh'B'Leiv, is also the definition of Tefila, prayer. The Rav goes on to describe the study of Torah as the responsibility that each person was given in an effort to try to know G-d. And despite the fact that Man can never really get to know G-d, Man is still required to attempt to do so. By what means can we possibly try to get to know G-d? How would you try to get know a person with whom you could not physically speak? Is that not similar to writing a biography about someone with whom you cannot speak? Despite being unable to talk to their subjects, biographers are able to write biographies. They do so by studying two sources; primary and secondary. Primary sources are words that were either written by or said or attributed to the subject of the biography. Judaism provides us with such primary sources. We have the Torah Sh'BKsav, the written Torah and we have the Tanach. Those books contain words that were either said by the Ribbono Shel Olam or attributed to G-d. Are not the words of the prophets the words of G-d? Once a biographer exhausts his primary sources, he turns to secondary sources. Secondary sources are what others said or wrote about the subject of the biography. That would include other biographies. In Judaism we can turn to secondary sources as well. Torah Sh'Ba'Al peh, the Oral Law provides secondary sources. What we learn in the Mishna, the Gemara, the Midrash, in the Rishonim and in the Acharonim are all secondary sources that we can use to write our biography of G-d.

But why should we pursue knowledge of G-d? The answer may be that the better we know G-d the better we can communicate with Him. To whom do we communicate better; a close friend or an acquaintance? Who understands us better, a close friend or an acquaintance? Is Tefila not an example of communication? Do we not want to approach G-d feeling that we know G-d better today than we did yesterday or would we prefer to treat G-d as a mere acquaintance.

The best illustration I can give you for how our Tefila experience is improved by our knowledge of G-d is found in the third Bracha of Shemona Esrei, a Bracha that we recite every time we recite Shemona Esrei:

אתה קדוש, ושמוך קדוש, וקדושים בכל יום יהללוך סלה.

You are holy, Your name is holy and the ones who are Holy, namely the Jewish people, praise You each day. In that Bracha, we assert that we share a trait with G-d, Just as He is

Take 5 for Tefila- The Tefila Education Initiative of the Orthodox Union

holy, we are holy. On what basis can we make such a statement. How do we dare to compare ourselves to G-d. We can do that with conviction, only if we have made an attempt to understand what makes G-d holy. If we have not made any attempt to know G-d perhaps we should not be asserting that we share any traits with G-d.