A Deeper Dimension

A Deeper Understanding of the Parsha, of Ourselves, and of the world around us

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Parshas Yisro

The Heart of Torah

The Torah describes that when we received the Torah, we were able to see the sound. The **Kli Yakar** explains that the words of the Aseres Hadibros that left Hashem's mouth manifested themselves into physical letters. It was these very words that implanted themselves onto the Luchos. The Luchos actually contains the materialized words that left Hashem's mouth.

This in itself is an amazing insight, but **R' Dessler** says something that brings this insight so much closer to home.

Says the **Michtav MiEliyahu**, the Posuk is **Mishlei** instructs us that we should take the words of Torah and כתבם על לוח לבך, "write them on the Luach of you heart" this hints that the Luchos represent our heart.

Accordingly, the words leaving Hashem's mouth, materializing, and engraving themselves on the Luchos, represents that this same process happening when we learn. As Chazal teach us, our learning is a reenactment of the giving of the Torah. When the words of Torah leave our mouth, they similarly emanate from the mouth of Hashem as they did by Har Sinai, except, they don't engrave themselves onto the Luchos, but into our personal Luach: our heart.

When we learn properly our heart becomes like the Luchos; a receptacle to carry the words that emanate from Hashem's mouth.

How we learn

In secular wisdom, knowledge has become a cognitive pursuit. Scientific methodologies have developed to research, analyze, and quantify wisdom. The way you feel about something is irrelevant as intuition is completely discounted.

Our tradition is opposed to this idea. As mentioned above, the primary receptacle for Torah is not the mind, but the heart. We are intended to be emotionally engaged in our learning. The way what the Torah says "resonates" with us is key.

Of course, the goal is not to conform the Torah to what resonates with us. This is where we must integrate intellectual learning with the emotions. Our job is to be attuned to what settles with us and what doesn't. True *iyun* is to break down the topic nad work them through until we slowly begin to resonate with them.

As Rashi (ערובין נ"ג ע"ב) states "מדקדק בטעמו של דבר עד שנתישב בלבו", "Break down the reasoning of the topic until it settles on your heart."

What does it mean to be emotionally engaged in learning?

Many of us are highly trained in powerful intellectual methodologies of study. When we begin to learn a Gemara, our sensors are already on the lookout for where the intellectual stimulation lies. Yet, we sometimes miss the emotional attunement to the Gemara.

The language of the mind is fast and furious; the language of the heart is slow, calm, and repetitious. To tune into our emotions, we need to slow down, calm down, and pay attention to what doesn't settle with us.

Earlier this week I was in Monsey. One day I arrived to Shachris early and observed 2 people learning together. Their discussion wasn't specifically remarkable, but the words they used were. One Yungerman showed his chavrusah a section of Gemara and said, "read these lines and tell me what doesn't settle with you".

A few minutes later I heard him say, "This statement of the Gemara bothers me." Shortly before Shachris he expressed, "The only direction I would feel comfortable with this, is saying something along the lines of …"

These are expressions of emotionally engaged learning. A question is not merely *understood*, it actually *bothers* you. The focus is not on coming up with an answer, but on working it through until you can be comfortable with what the Gemara says.

The Pleasure of Torah

I have heard many serious Bnei Torah express the sentiment that "I don't enjoy learning. When the *Sugya* develops to the point of high intellectual stimulation I enjoy it immensely, but the process till I reach that point is difficult and I don't find pleasure in it. Yet we are taught that Torah is inherently enjoyable. What am I doing wrong?"

These Bnei Torah are tapping into a deep truth: intellectually engaged Torah learning is only enjoyable inasmuch as there is high intellectual stimulation. Without that it is just difficult. (Individuals who are more emotional and less intellectually dominant don't enjoy this either, and in fact have difficulty processing it.)

Emotionally engaged learning is different. When our heart is connected to what we are learning, we enjoy the process from the very beginning. An emotionally dominant individual feels no need for intellectual stimulation. (I have no source for this concept but it is based on my personal experience and on exploring this topic with many people.)

Why has the Yeshiva system become so intellectually based?

In the aftermath of the holocaust, emotions became too difficult to bear. I personally knew many survivors who told me "I left my emotions behind in Auschwitz. The only way to rebuild was to throw myself into action and ignore my emotions."

There are many exceptions, but overwhelmingly the survivors and their children were living in action and in intellect disconnected from emotions. The saying "mind over matter" dominated and was understood as "Do what you need to do, how you feel is irrelevant."

This was needed. If not for this coping skill, they would have not been able to move on, and the beautiful Torah world that we take for granted could have never developed.

When one is so disconnected from his emotions it is very difficult to engage in emotion based learning. And yet, without it Torah is not enjoyable. To give the Bachurim pleasure in learning the Yeshiva system developed a methodology of learning that is intellectually stimulating to an extreme. For several generations this *mehalech* kept the talmidim engaged, and helped to the Torah world thrive.

The scene today

Hashem has a way of helping us heal from the greatest of tragedies. It is over 80 years later and for many of us the trauma of the Holocaust, although never forgotten, has been largely relegated to history. The heart has opened up. The younger generation is living very connected to their emotions and struggle doing things that don't resonate with them.

Many of these talmidim can't connect to high emotional stimulation, and they really don't have to. They just have to learn to trust what comes to them naturally. To learn slowly with attunement to what resonates, and with a focus and breaking down the concepts until they begin to resonate. This natural methodology is enjoyable; they will process it easier, recall it better, and be more connected to the Torah.

Integration

In truth, we are not meant to choose between the intellectual and the emotional; both are needed. We are meant to integrate both. One without the other is not complete. Intellect is needed to give us direction and to ensure that we are on the path that is in line with the wording of the Gemara and the *rishonim*. But emotional engagement is key in being able to fully connect to Torah and to truly enjoy it.

There is a lot more to say on this topic. I have been researching and developing it for over a year. I am now sharing some of my gleaned insights and would appreciate thoughts and feedback as well as further discussion.