

Every Minute is Precious

Torah is the lifeblood of the Jewish People. Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, was an individual who exemplified love of Torah. He would often reminisce about others, but he was simultaneously expressing his personal feelings. He could not forget the little boy in Baranovitch, sitting on the steps of the cheder reviewing his Chumash, long after classes had ended for the day. Horav Nochum Partzowitz, zl, Rosh Yeshivah of Mir, Yerushalayim, could not wait to go to cheder in the morning, so great was his desire to learn Torah. He would go barefoot, because it took him too long to put on his shoes.

When Rav Mendel would conclude a shiur, he would ask the students, "Nu, do you hear the music of Rashi?" He once remarked, "When someone learns a lot, he develops an appetite for Torah as one does for food. When Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, would return home after spending a day fundraising for his many Torah related endeavors, he would sit down to learn like a hungry man. Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, would expend such energy toiling in Torah that he barely had any strength left for anything else. Indeed, if someone tried to discuss any topic other than Torah, his eyes would droop and he would fall asleep from exhaustion." He would often quote from his rebbe, the saintly Horav Elchonon Wasserman, zl, "Learning is very hard but, without learning, living is very hard."

He would compare Torah study to the pursuit of commerce. He once needed a part for an old fixture in his house. He went to a hardware supply store and showed the owner the part. The owner immediately climbed a ladder, removed an old, dusty box and presented the part, commenting, "You know, Rabbi, I have not been asked for this part in over thirty years!" Rav Mendel asked him how many parts he had in his warehouse. "Over thirty thousand," he replied. Upon relating the incident, Rav Mendel quipped, "Do you think that he has such a brilliant mind that allows him to remember every part that he sells? No! It is his business. If it is your business, your livelihood, you remember. You do not have to possess a brilliant mind like Rav Chaim Ozer (Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl) to know where everything is to be found in Shas. Torah just has to be your business, and you will know... Just like a businessman prays to Hashem for Divine assistance (Mevarech HaShanim), so, too, does a ben Torah pray to Hashem (Ahavah Rabbah) for assistance in Torah. He added that Hashem helps those who display a sincere desire for Torah advancement. When one learns even during times that are difficult, he receives Divine assistance. "If a person hurries back from breakfast to start learning, the angels wait at the door to bring him help from Heaven. If, however, he takes his time in returning to the bais ha'medrash, stopping along the way to shmooze, have a chat, before he begins to learn, the angels return to Heaven."

Space does not allow for the many anecdotes and lessons concerning Torah study upon which Rav Mendel would expound. There is one concerning the value of time that leaves an indelible impression. He said, "Every minute is precious. There is a building in Chicago, the Wrigley Building, which was built with the profits from selling millions of pieces of chewing gum at a penny each. From this we see that every small thing is precious." What a powerful lesson!