

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Shelach

“FROM THE FIRST OF YOUR DOUGH YOU SHALL TAKE A PORTION ...”
(BAMIDBAR 15:20)

THE RALBAG (Shelach *Toeles* 8) explains a reason for giving the separated portion of *challah*, as well as other gifts, to the *kohanim*: Hashem wanted the *kohanim* to be free from worldly concerns and obligations. This would allow them to study the Torah and to understand its secrets in order to teach the Torah and its laws to the people of Israel. By commanding the rest of the Jewish people to provide the *kohanim* with a steady and reliable source of bread and sustenance, Hashem ensured that the *kohanim* will have the independence from mundane concerns and be able to devote themselves to learning and teaching.

One phrase seems unnecessary

The basic concept is straightforward, but one phrase seems unnecessary, and yet the Ralbag includes it: “To understand its secrets.” Why does the Ralbag emphasize that the *kohanim* need to be free from material burdens so they can understand the “secrets” of the Torah in order to teach its laws? If they were preparing to teach the Jewish nation the laws of Shabbos, they would logically need to delve into the laws of Shabbos. If they were to teach the laws of shofar, they need to prepare those laws. If the ultimate goal is to be able to teach practical laws of daily conduct, why would the *kohanim* need to know the deepest secrets of the Torah and *kabbalah*?

The Torah is different than any other body of knowledge

The Torah is different than any other body of knowledge. A math teacher’s mastery or ignorance of calculus will not affect his or her ability to teach basic addition and subtraction. Whether an English teacher knows Shakespeare or not will not influence his ability to teach nouns and verbs. Torah, however, is limitless and yet interconnected at every level and element. A deeper understanding of the laws of damages in *Bava Kamma* will enhance your insight into the laws of constructing an *eruv*. Knowing the secrets of *kabbalah* can upgrade the ability of a rabbi to teach even the more ordinary aspects of *halacha*.

The Vilna Gaon explains the words of the blessing on Torah study, “And may we all know Your Name and study your Torah.” He asks, isn’t the order reversed? Shouldn’t we first study the basics of Torah and only then “know Hashem’s name” which refers to the kabbalistic, hidden secrets of Torah? The Gaon answers that because the Torah is one unit, one unified whole, we cannot understand the full depths of the revealed Torah until we have progressed to the point of having learned the mystical, concealed parts as well.

The more profound his understanding of that topic, the more effective teacher he will be

Of course, our tradition reserves the study of *kabbalah* for those who have mastered, to the extent possible, all of the Talmud and halachic works; yet there are still two very relevant applications here for every Jew: Firstly, we should never feel complacent upon achieving a solid understanding of any area of Torah. The complete picture can be enhanced when we have covered other topics as well. Secondly, even one who teaches younger or basic level students should realize that the more profound his understanding of that topic, the more effective teacher he will be, even for the simplest lessons. One who teaches elementary *chumash* should maintain his learning on the deepest levels in all areas of Torah, and his students will gain that much more from his class. May we appreciate the depth and breadth of Torah, its infiniteness and its interconnectedness, so that we inspire ourselves to constantly strive, as long as we live, towards greater mastery of Hashem’s holy Torah.