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Taanis Daf 21

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Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamah of

**Tzvi Gershon Ben Yoel (Harvey Felsen) o”h**

May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for his neshamah and may his soul find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

[The Gemora relates a story regarding R' Yochanan and Ilfa, two great Torah scholars.] Ilfa and R' Yochanan learned Torah in great poverty and deprivation. At a certain point, their hunger became too much for the. They therefore, decided to leave the yeshiva and engage in business. Let us fulfill the verse that says, "There shall be no poor amongst you," which instructs us not to be poor.

They left. Later, as they sat under a dilapidated wall eating, R' Yochanan overheard two angels speaking.

"Let us knock over this wall, and bury them here," said one angel to the other, "for they have abandoned their Torah study, which ensures eternal life, to pursue mundane material pursuits."

"No, leave them alone," the other angel answered. "One of them is destined for greatness, and we may not kill him."

R' Yochanan overheard this conversation. Ilfa did not.

"Did you hear anything?" R' Yochanan asked Ilfa.

"No, nothing," Ilfa answered.

"If so," R' Yochanan said to himself, "the angels must have been talking of me. Let me hurry back to the yeshiva, and fulfill there the verse, "There will not cease to be paupers amongst you."

R' Yochanan returned. Ilfa did not return. When eventually Ilfa did return, he found that R' Yochanan had been appointed Rosh Yeshiva.

"Had you remained learning here," the students told Ilfa, "you would have been appointed Rosh Yeshiva."

On hearing this, Ilfa climbed to the top of a tall ship's mast.

"If anyone here can challenge me on a teaching of R' Chiya or R' Oshiya that I cannot resolve, I will throw myself from this mast and drown."

An old man came, and cited the following braisa: If a man (in his last will and testament) declares (to the trustee of his estate), "Give a shekel weekly to my sons (for their expenses)," but actually they needed a sela, then they should be given a sela (for the father meant that they should adequately be supported), but if he declared, "Give them only a shekel," then they should be given a shekel. If, however, he declared, "If they die, others should inherit the remainder in their stead," then whether he has declared "Give (a shekel)," or "Give (only a shekel)," they are given only a shekel (for it is obvious that his intention was to limit the amount given during their lifetime, so some should remain for the third party).

He replied: This is in accordance with the view of Rabbi Meir who said: It is obligatory to carry out the will of the deceased (although an estate usually belongs to the children upon the death of their father). (21a)

Nachum Ish Gamzu was blind in both eyes, without hands or legs, and boils covered his entire body. He lay in shabby house, the legs of his bed in buckets of water that ants should not climb over him. His students wanted to move him to a better house. They came to carry him out.

"Children," he told them, "first take out all the furnishings and utensils, then take out my bed. For, as long as I am in this house, it will not collapse."

They took out the furnishings and utensils. Then, they took out Nachum Ish Gamzu in his bed. As they completed this, the house collapsed.

"Rebbe," his students asked him, "if you are such a tzaddik, why do we see you so badly off?"

"I did it to myself," he told them. "Once, I traveled to my father-in-law's house. With me, I had three donkey loads, one of food, one of drink, and one with fruits and sweets. A pauper approached me, standing on the road.

"Rebbe, feed me," he cried.

"Wait until I unload the donkey," I answered him. However, before I could remove anything from the donkey, he died. Seeing this, I fell on his face and prayed, "May my eyes that felt no compassion for your eyes, be blinded. May my hands that showed no compassion for your hands, be cut off. May my legs that had no compassion for your legs, be amputated. Still, I could not calm down until I had added, and may my whole body be covered in boils."

"Woe to us, that we see you this way," the students lamented.

"Woe, were you not to see me in such a way," Nachum Ish Gamzu responded.

Why was Nachum Ish Gamzu so called? For, about everything that happened to him, even that which was not good, he would say, "This too, *"Gam zu"*, is for the good," as we see in the next story:

The Jewish people needed to buy Caesar's goodwill by sending him a gift. "Who should go as our representative," they wondered. "Surely, no one is better suited for this mission than Nachum Ish Gamzu, for whom the heavens perform miracles." They sent him with a chest of precious gems and pearls.

On the way, he spent a night at a hotel. While he slept, the owners stole the gems from his chest, replacing them with dust. In the morning, he noticed the sand in the chest.

"This too is for the good," he said to himself, and continued on his mission.

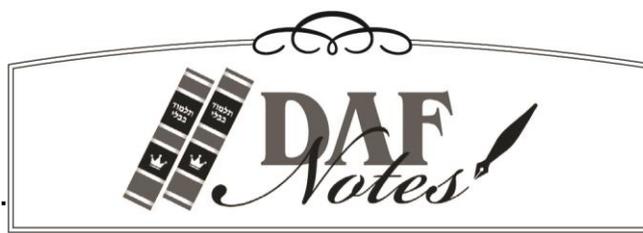
He presented the chest to Caesar who opened it. Seeing the dust, he assumed that the Jews were mocking him. He was so angry, he decided to execute the entire Jewish people.

"This too is for the good," Nachum Ish Gamzu said to himself.

At that moment, Eliyahu HaNavi miraculously appeared in the guise of an important officer.

"Maybe," he said to Caesar, "this is the sand their ancestor Avraham used to fight and conquer the kings. When he threw sand at them, they died as though slaughtered by swords. When he threw straw at them, they died as though pierced by arrows."

Caesar had a particular enemy state that had resisted all his attempts to conquer it. He therefore, took the dust and tested it in the next battle. He was victorious.



He then brought Nachum Ish Gamzu into his treasure house, filled his chest with precious gems, and sent him home in honor.

Going home, Nachum Ish Gamzu again stopped at the same hotel. Eagerly, the hotel owners asked him what important gift he had brought to the Caesar that he should return in such honor.

"What I took from here," he told them, "is what I brought to Caesar."

On hearing his story, they tore their hotel apart that they might bring all of its dust to Caesar. "We have brought you the same dust that Nachum Ish Gamzu brought you," they proudly reported. "That dust came from our hotel!"

The Romans tested the dust, but it failed to produce the same results. They then executed those hotel owners. (21a)

The Mishna had stated that a city in which there is a plague should fast and cry out. The Mishna clarified this case by stating that the city must have at least five hundred foot soldiers and three people die naturally on three consecutive days.

The Gemora cites a braisa offering the city of Kfar Akko as an example of a city that contains one thousand and five hundred foot soldiers. Nine people died on three consecutive days and it was regarded as a plague. If these nine deaths occurred on one day or in the span of four days, it would not be considered a plague. A city such as Kfar Amiko, which had three deaths on three consecutive days, it is regarded as a plague. If those deaths occurred on one day or in the span of three days, it is not considered a plague.

Derokart was a city that consisted of five hundred foot soldiers and it once happened that three people died on one day. Rav Nachman bar Rav Chisda declared a fast day different than the ruling of the braisa. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak explained that this fast must be in accordance with the view of Rabbi Meir who maintains that an ox which gored three times in one day is considered a muad and is liable to pay full damages.

The Gemora records an incident which indicates Rav Nachman bar Rav Chisda's admiration for Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak. Rav Nachman bar Rav Chisda invited Rav Nachman bar Rav Yitzchak to come live in his town amongst illustrious people. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak responded by citing a braisa which states that a person provides honor to the place in which he resides and it is not the place which deals him the honor.

The Gemora cites two Scriptural sources proving that a location does not have inherent sanctity, but rather it is due to the presence of the Shechina of the Mishkan.

Rav Nachman bar Rav Chisda said that he will go live by Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak answered him that it is better that a hundred dinar, the son of a fifty dinar (*his father was referred to as Yitzchak and not Rav Yitzchak*) should go to the hundred dinar, son of the hundred dinar (*since he was referred to as Rav Nachman bar Rav Chisda*) and not the other way around. (21a – 21b)

A plague went through the town of Sura. However, it skipped the neighborhood of Rav. People said that since Rav has many merits, he had protected them. The heavens however, showed them through a dream that this was too small matter to require any of Rav's merits. Rather, the plague stayed away in the merit of a man who lent out tools to dig graves in the local cemetery (21b)



A fire spread through the town of Derokart. However, it skipped over the neighborhood of Rav Huna. People said that since Rav Huna has many merits, he had protected them. The heavens therefore, showed them through a dream that this was too small matter to require any of Rav Huna's merits. Rather, the fire stayed away in the merit of a woman who kept her oven alight and hot, that her neighbors could use it freely. (21b)

Swarms of locusts entered the district of Rav Yehuda. People came to tell him. He decreed a fast day.

"But they're not eating any of our grain," the people protested.

"Did they bring food with them that they shouldn't touch your grain?" Rav Yehuda asked them. (21b)

They once told Rabbi Yehuda that there is a deadly plague amongst the pigs. He thereby declared a fast. The Gemora explains that the digestive system of pigs resembles those of humans and therefore the plague can affect the people as well. (21b)

They told Shmuel that in a distant place, Bei Chuzai, there was a plague. He decreed a fast day.

"Surely this place is far from us?" the people asked, "We have nothing to worry about."

"Is there a river crossing here, stopping it from coming here?" Shmuel asked them. (21b)

A plague has hit Eretz Yisrael," people told Rav Nachman [who lived in Bavel]. Rav Nachman decreed a fast day.

"If the mistress [i.e. Eretz Yisrael] has been struck, how much the more so the maidservant [Bavel] stands to suffer! Therefore, we must take precautions."

In the Gemora mentioned before, Shmuel declared a fast in one city in Bavel because of a plague in another city in Bavel even though they are both considered maidservants. The Gemora explains that this was only due to the close proximity of the two cities. (21b)

A heavenly voice would greet Abba Umana each day. "Shalom Alecha," it wished him. This was a tremendous honor. Abaye, on the other hand, only merited hearing this heavenly voice once a week on Erev Shabbos. Rava would hear this heavenly voice once a year on Yom Kippur.

Abaye felt bad that the heavens regarded him so much less than Abba Umana.

"Don't feel bad about this," the heavens told him, "your good deeds do not match his good deeds."

What would Abba Umana do? He would let blood, a common form of healing in those days, and was careful to keep his male patients separate from his female patients for reasons of modesty. Also, he had a special garment to cover his female patients. It hid their entire body except for one small hole through which he would treat them. In this way, he avoided looking at them, and indulging in improper thoughts.

Outside, in a discreet place his patients would leave money to pay for his service. Those who could afford it would pay. Those who could not afford it could leave without feeling any embarrassment. Abba Umana himself did not know who paid him and who did not. Moreover, when he saw that his patient was poor he would give him money to buy food and revive himself after the operation. If his patient was a Torah scholar, he would refuse all payment.

Abaye sent to Torah scholars to test him. He brought them into his house, gave them food and drink, and made up beds for them to rest on. He folded special woolen cloaks



under the sheets that they should sleep more comfortably. In the morning, the scholars took these cloaks with them, and set out to the market. There they met Abba Umana.

"Tell us," they said to him, "how much of these cloaks worth?" They wanted to check him if he would accuse them of being thieves, or under evaluate them that he might buy them back cheaply.

"Such and such is their worth," he told him

"Maybe they are worth more?" the scholars asked him.

"This is what I paid for them," Abba Umana told them.

"They are yours," the scholars told him, "we only took them from you to test you. Tell us what you thought of us when you realized we had taken them."

"I thought," he said, "you needed to redeem captives and for this you needed money, but you were embarrassed to ask me for the money. Therefore, you took these cloaks."

"Now, please take them back," the scholars said to him.

"I don't want to take them back," he told them, "the moment I realized you had taken them, I said they should be for charity. I will take nothing back from charity."

Rava felt bad that he received heavenly greetings only once a year, whereas Abaye received them once a week.

"Don't feel bad," the heavens told him, "be glad that your merits protect the entire city." (21b – 22a)

## INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

### DEI'AH VEDIBUR

**Acquiring `Yishuv' can only be Done through Sitting  
in [Yeshiva] Study**

**by HaRav Matisyohu Salomon**

*The reason why we study the chapter of Kinyan Torah before Shavuos*

The forty-eight ways to acquire Torah are enumerated in the sixth chapter of *Pirkei Ovos*, that is sometimes called *Kinyan Torah*. Even though several reasons are stated, it is worthwhile reviewing the thoughts of the Chossid Yaavetz as quoted in *Midrash Shmuel* as follows:

Torah can only reside in a [human] vessel which is devoid of evil traits and filled with worthwhile attributes. This is what Hashem hinted at when He said (right before *Mattan Torah*), "Prepare yourself for three days time. Do not approach a woman" (*Shemos* 19:15). The Jews were also told to launder their clothing and to purify it from the contamination and dirt which prevent a soul from ascending. All the chapters preceding this are filled with important practices which draw a person's soul closer to its Creator and rouse a person to better serve Him.

This is why it is customary to study this chapter before Shavuos, commemorating the Giving of the Torah, in order to draw Divine mercy upon those who are already worthy, as happened to our ancestors in this season. The entire chapter evokes a yearning for Torah and a love towards it. And even if the other chapters talk about this as well, this one is wholly devoted to the subject of acquiring Torah and it is a summary of all that precedes it.

To be sure, we must always strive to acquire Torah, but this particular season is more conducive to it due to the impact and inspiration which Jewish souls received at that time in history and which sparks and re-ignites our own souls at this time as well.

This chapter is called *Kinyan Torah* because it concerns those important traits which must precede our entering a covenant of Torah. They must enter a person like water so that he delve in Torah purely for its own sake, just as it is written about Rachel, the wife of R' Akiva. "She saw that he was unassuming and said [to him]: I will agree to be married to you on condition that you go study." In the end, he became the famous R' Akiva.

This chapter begins with the teaching of R' Meir, who was his disciple, and it is studied right before Shavuot, which commemorates the Giving of the Torah. R' Simcha Zissel of Kelm *zt'l* wrote a letter to his son on *erev Shavuot* (in *Ohr RaShaZ, parshas Emor*), explaining that this is why we count forty-nine days before the Giving of the Torah: they are an introduction, a preface, to the acquisition of Torah in nature, to prepare a person so that he and the Torah will be one. It is written first, "That his desire be Hashem's Torah," and afterwards, "and he shall delve in his own Torah . . ."

Upon each of the forty-eight days one should study a different 'gateway' so that on the forty-ninth, they will all be united into one single entity. By being unified, a person will find it easier to enter the inner sanctum of the secrets of Torah, which is wholly sweet and preciously desirable. There is no better preparation than this.

How fitting it is to conclude with the words of the Ohr HaChaim on *Chukas* where he writes: There is no commandment which does not incorporate esoteric secrets which were revealed to Moshe. A person should strive to acquire Torah through the forty-eight ways enumerated in *Mishnas Chassidim*, for then he becomes privy to the secrets of Torah which were revealed to Moshe at Sinai. Moshe revealed these secrets, as well as the reason and the basis for the mitzvos, to the Jews of his generation.

"And you shall heed My commandments" (*Vayikra* 26:3). On this *posuk* he comments that this can be fulfilled through acquiring the Torah in the forty-eight ways mentioned in *Pirkei Ovos (Mishnas Chassidim)*. Not everyone who desires Torah can possess it. He must do so through the 48 steps. This is what is meant by "If you walk

in My statutes." If you wish to possess Torah, you must fulfill the condition of "and you shall keep My commandments and do them." This refers to the 48 steps.

In *Emunah uBitochon (chapter 3, os 9)* by the Chazon Ish, it is written that the Torah is acquired through 48 ways, each of which is supernatural; one must leave behind habit, human nature and foibles, and strive for perfection until he reaches the stage where he is not disturbed or hindered in his devoted aspiration and powerful diligence.

### Why is Prayer Not Included in the 48 Steps?

In *maseches Niddah 70b* we find: The people of Alexandria asked R' Yehoshua ben Chananya what a person should do in order to grow wise. He said: Let him increase his Torah study and reduce the time he spends in engaging in trade.

They said: But many have tried that and not succeeded. What then?

Let them ask for mercy from the One Who possesses all the wisdom, as it is written, "For Hashem shall grant wisdom; from His mouth, knowledge and understanding" (*Mishlei* 2:6).

What does this mean? Why did he have to suggest that they increase their study time if wisdom is dependent upon Divine mercy? Because one without the other is of no avail.

In other words, since one cannot achieve or attain anything without prayer, it is clear that even Torah knowledge cannot be acquired without accompanying prayer. In fact, the lack of prayer is a very crucial reason why so many tried to increase study time but found that they did not increase their wisdom. If this is so, it seems strange that no mention was made of prayer as one of the forty-eight ways of acquiring Torah knowledge.

We also found it written in *Pirkei Ovos (1:2)* that the world stands on three things: *Torah, avodoh, gemilus chassodim*. Rabbenu Yonah explains that *avodoh* signified the sacrifices, but now that the *Beis Hamikdash* is destroyed our prayers take the place of those sacrifices. "And to

serve Him with your whole heart." How does one serve with the heart? Through prayer.

Prayer is not only a substitute or an aid; it is a goal unto itself. Anything that is lacking in the world is purposely this way in order to get us to pray to Hashem and worship Him. Prayer is a pillar unto itself, equal to Torah and *gemilus chassodim* in the upkeep of the world and the channeling of Hashem's bounty to the world, both materially and spiritually.

If we lack wisdom to fully understand Torah, we must pray to Hashem for that understanding. Indeed, Torah is not different from any of the other things that require our prayers. For prayer is not so that we fill our lack in Torah, but rather, our lack in understanding Torah *is so that we pray for wisdom!*

The pillar of prayer is certainly not a unique requirement for the acquisition of Torah but each and every step, every acquisition, requires separate additional prayer to succeed at it, for you can't have one without the other. So you see that prayer cannot be enumerated separately from the forty- eight steps for building a Torah crown, since it must accompany each one. It is a major supporting pillar for the whole world and not merely one of the ways to gain Torah.

### Acquiring `Yishuv' can only be Done through Sitting in [Yeshiva] Study

What does *beyishuv* (one of the 48 steps) mean?

Rashi says that one must literally sit, sit and learn, for the more one does that, the more knowledge one can absorb, as mentioned before, "What shall a person do in order to be wise? Let him increase his *yeshiva*."

Why, indeed, is a place of Torah study called a *yeshiva*? We find other names for this, such as *beis medrash*. But since acquiring Torah knowledge is the most difficult of all, one who doesn't have the patience, the *sitzfleish* to apply himself, to be diligent, to study without interruption, cannot achieve this *kinyan*. We shall now attempt to explain what it means "to increase one's sitting."

Studying *biyeshiva* was already practiced by our *Ovos*. We find it written in *Yoma 28b* that our ancestors were always involved in *yeshiva* and never stopped learning. "Avrohom Ovinu was old and sat in *yeshiva* . . . Yitzchok Ovinu was old and sat in *yeshiva* . . . Yaakov Ovinu was old and sat in *yeshiva* . . ."

### Studying in Yeshiva Means Being Occupied in Eternal Life and Forsaking Temporal Life

It is written in *Taanis 21a* that Ilfa and R' Yochonon were studying Torah together. Being both poverty stricken, they decided to stop learning and engage in business to keep themselves alive. After all, they argued, the Torah does state that "there shall be no pauper in your midst" (*Devorim 15:4*). And so, they left the walls of the *beis medrash*.

They were sitting eating their bread near a crumbling wall which threatened to collapse, when two [invisible] angels came and one said to the other, "Let us topple the wall onto them and kill them." Why? Because, explains the *gemora*, they were abandoning eternal life (says Rashi - - Torah) in exchange for temporal life [preparing to earn a livelihood]. The second angel replied, "But one of them is destined to become great in Torah. His time has not yet come to die."

R' Yochonon heard this but he realized that Ilfa didn't, and he concluded that it must apply to him and not to Ilfa. "I will return to the *beis medrash*," he said to himself, "and fulfill the verse, `For there shall never cease to be paupers in the midst of the land.' "

At first, R' Yochonon felt it was permissible to seek his livelihood by going out to work so as not to starve, but having heard the words of the angels, he decided to enter the other category mentioned in the Torah and live in poverty.

And so, Ilfa went forth to seek his fortune, while R' Yochonon returned to the *beis medrash* where he was shortly afterwards appointed rosh *yeshiva*. It was customary at that time for those who appointed a rosh *yeshiva* to support him in material comfort.

And they said to Ilfa, "Had you continued to stay here and study, we would have appointed you as our head, as we did to R' Yochanon." He was very perturbed at these words and went to the harbor, where he climbed up on a high ship's mast, declaring, "Whoever has a question [in Torah] to ask, can still ask me." . . . despite the fact that I am engaging in trade and not study.

Along came R' Chiya and R' Oshiya with their questions, which Ilfa was unable to answer. Thereupon, he cast himself into the water and drowned.

R' Yochanon became a famous rosh yeshiva who had many disciples in his lifetime and after his death. To this day, his lips `murmur in the grave' each time his teachings are reviewed. In contrast, Ilfa lost his Torah knowledge, even though in his prime, he had been considered very astute and brilliant. So we cannot help but see the power of yeshiva, of sitting and persevering in study.

Let us further examine the words of the angels, "They are abandoning eternal life in exchange for temporal life." A Jew must view the world, his goal in life, as Torah being "our life and the length of our days." A Jew must bear in mind that every moment which he spends in the *beis medrash* is a moment of eternity. How can he countenance the thought of leaving that, of exchanging Torah study for momentary, mundane activities of no lasting value. Above all, it is denigrating the honor of Torah!

A person may, of course, argue that setting aside eternal life to engage in mundane activities is dictated by need; he is being coerced by circumstances to do so. The answer is that perhaps this is true, but he must not rely on this argument. It does not altogether address his problem. We see that at the onset, both R' Yochanon and Ilfa felt they were forced to leave their study and decided to seek work. But they made this decision on their own, when they should have asked their masters and teachers.

This was the prosecuting argument of the angels. And this argument is still as valid today as it was with regard to R' Yochanon and Ilfa. Whoever has the opportunity to remain within the sanctuary of the *beis medrash*, to

acquire more Torah knowledge and occupy himself with eternal life, is required to do so. If at any point he feels forced to leave those walls, he must weigh this matter very carefully and consult his Torah superiors before doing so. He must realize that if he does opt to leave, he is verily abandoning eternal life in exchange for mundane life.

In *Hilchos Talmud Torah (perek 3:13)*, the Rambam states: "For it appears that he showed no deference to the words of Torah at all. So long as he is able to continue studying Torah and does not do so, or if he studied at length and then left his study in favor of worldly pursuits - - he is considered to be abusing and offending the word of Hashem."

## DAILY MASHAL

### The Difference Between a Ben Yeshiva and a Secular Student

In Letter 74 of a compilation of his responsa and correspondence, HaRav Yitzchok Hutner *zt'l* writes an essay titled, "It is good for a man to bear the yoke [of Torah] in his youth." He quotes Maran HaRav Chaim Volozhiner *ztvk'l* who insisted on changing the terminology that was prevalent in his days regarding yeshiva life. Instead of using "yeshiva student," he preferred to call his disciples *bonei yeshiva*.

Why did he feel it important to change the accepted usage? By illustration, R' Yitzchok Hutner explains the difference between a secular university student who listens to lectures from his professors and the thousandfold difference of a yeshiva student listening to a *shiur* from his rosh. He compares them to a nursing mother and a cook.

They both provide nourishment, but whereas the cook processes the material at her disposal, the nursing mother gives of herself, of her own flesh and blood. The nursing mother is feeding her infant so that he should grow and be strong; she is willing to give of her very essence for that

purpose. The cook, on the other hand, is only interested in producing a tasty meal from the ingredients at hand and nothing more; she does not give anything of her own resources or essence.

This is the difference between a university lecturer and *lehavdil* a master teaching Torah. The latter provides his students with his own lifeblood; he gives from his quintessence, his very core. The professor merely teaches the material at his disposal, without adding any element from within himself. The moment his pride is injured, his whole spirit will be shattered.

It should also be remembered that if the rov were not teaching, he would be learning Torah on his own and improving himself, raising himself to a more exalted spiritual level, in greater measure than the mere time allotted for giving the *shiur*. In this aspect, as well, the Torah teacher is sacrificing his own self for the sake of his pupil.

This, then, was the pressing reason why R' Chaim changed the terminology from "yeshiva student" to "*ben yeshiva*" or "*ben Torah*." In other words, the yeshiva hall is not a place where spiritual food is prepared, but a virtual place for soul sustenance and nourishment.

This obligates the Torah student to persevere in pure *yishuv*, sitting power. He may be considered a student even if he comes and goes, but he is only called a *ben yeshiva* if he perseveres in sitting, staying put, because the act of sitting in study application is the source of a person's vitality; it is the origin of his nurture, nourishment, and his designation as a true *ben Torah*.

This is the acquisition of *yishuv*, as Rashi notes, that he amplify and increase his *yishuv*, for yeshiva — sitting and learning — is eternal life. Chazal tell us that one must *yarbeh biyeshiva*, for whoever disconnects himself from Torah is as if he is detaching himself from life.

*Based on material from the sefer Matnas Chaim, by HaRav Matisyohu Salomon on the 48 Steps to acquire Torah.*