

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

BIRCHAS HATORAH

Torah: Sweet Essence of Life

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Blessed are You, Hashem... to engross ourselves in the words of Torah. Please, Hashem, our G-d, **sweeten the words of your Torah in our mouth** and in the mouth of our people, the family of Israel... – all of us – know Your name and study Your Torah for its own sake.

ברוך אתה ה'... לעסוק בדברי תורה. **והערב נא** ה' אלקינו את דברי תורתך בפינו ובפיות עמך בית ישראל... כלנו יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמה.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the meaning



With the words “V’harev Nah” we ask Hashem to “sweeten the words of Torah in our mouth.” As we speak words of Torah, we should feel the taste of a delicious dessert. The spiritual pleasure that we have from Torah study should permeate our physical beings as well. This can more readily occur when we recognize that our Torah study is not only an obligation and requirement, but a privilege and honor as well.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Sweetening the World

Torah study is the core mitzvah, as well as the wellspring of all goodness and sweetness in a Jew’s life in both the physical and spiritual worlds.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

A Mitzvah and a Pleasure

The first blessing on Torah study is expressed in words typical for a blessing on a mitzvah: “אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו” – Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us...” The last blessing employs the wording used for *birchas hanehenin* – a blessing on partaking in a pleasure: “אשר בחר” – Who selected us from all the nations and gave us His Torah.”

G-d’s mandate that we study Torah, thereby imbuing our lives with spirituality and knowledge of the mitzvos, is a mitzvah of which every observant Jew is aware. The blessing attached to that mitzvah is therefore understandable. What is not as clear, however, is why we recite a *birchas hanehenin*. What pleasure does the Torah give us?

From a variety of sources, we learn that Torah, like the manna given to our ancestors in the desert, is tailor-made to taste sweet to each

individual who imbibes its wisdom. One such source is a discussion in the Gemara regarding which day of the month of Sivan should be designated as the holiday of Shavuot, which marks the giving of the Torah. Not only is the exact date unclear, but so is the exact location of Mount Sinai, where this world-changing drama took place.

Rav Moshe Feinstein commented that these ambiguities illustrate that there is no set place, date or specific person upon whom Torah learning is incumbent, and therefore, there is no time, place or person to whom it is unavailable. The concept of “*Dibrah Torah k’lashon b’nei adam*” – the Torah speaks in the common language of men (Yevamos 71a) – teaches us that the Torah is written for everyone to understand on their own level. Every person has his own “portion” of Torah.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

Taking a Torah Break

Photo archives from the Warsaw ghetto show a door of an inn that read, “Society of Wagon Drivers for the Study of Talmud in Warsaw.” This referred to coachmen who seized a few moments from their work to gather in a group to “nosh”



(grab a tasty morsel of) a page of Talmud... These were not intellectuals, concerned only with the intricacies of scholastic dialectics; they were deeply religious men thirsting for spiritual

refreshment and they found it, as countless generations of Jews before them, in the study of Torah.

When the true value of Torah enters a person’s heart, it becomes not only his obligation, but his longing and his joy. It becomes an exertion that re-energizes, rather than drains, the spirit of the learner.

Try This!

Think of a moment of inspiration you have experienced in your Torah learning, whether it was in the context of beis medrash learning, listening to a lecture, reading something inspiring or hearing a meaningful d’var Torah. Reconnect to the feeling of clarity that moment brought you, and recall that feeling when you say the words “v’harev noh.”

Did You Know

► *If Birchas HaTorah Are Omitted*

If a person remembers during *Pesukei D’Zimrah* that he did not recite *birchas HaTorah*, he should say them and the verses following them. If he remembers during the *birkos Krias Shema*, he should explicitly have in mind when saying *Ahavah Rabah/Ahavas Olam* that he wishes to discharge his obligation of saying *birchas haTorah*. In addition, he must learn some Torah immediately after Shacharis. If he remembers after *Ahavah Rabah/Ahavas Olam*, he does not recite the blessings.