



# Praying WITH Passion

GIVING MORE MEANING TO OUR TEFILLAH - ONE WEEK AT A TIME **ISSUE NO. 13**

Tefillah Focus Of The Week: **BIRCHAS HATORAH** *Torah: Sweet Essence Of Life*

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

employs the wording used for *birchas hanehenin* – a blessing on partaking in a pleasure: “אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו” - את תורתו את תורתו - 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

*“...Torah... is tailor-made to taste sweet to each individual who imbibes its wisdom.”*

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 (cont. P. 2)

### 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.*

### Theme:

An essential concept of the prayer

*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

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

### 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 into our physical beings as well. This can more readily come when we recognize that our Torah study is not only an obligation and requirement, but a privilege and honor as well.



### Inside This Issue: Focus on Elokai Neshama

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BIRCHAS HATORAH *Torah: The Sweet Essence Of Life*

(INSIGHT cont.)

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.

**Origin:**

The source of the prayer

The Gemara (Berachos 11b) states that Rav Yehudah in the name of Shmuel and Rav Yochanan are the sources of the text of the blessings recited before studying Torah.

**Halacha:**

If one remembered during *Pesukei D’Zimrah* that he did not recite *birchas HaTorah*, he should say them and the verses following them. If he remembered during the *birkot Kriat 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 remembered after *Ahavah Rabah/Ahavas Olam* he does not recite the blessings.

**Visualize:**

Images that bring the prayer to life

Photo archives from the Warsaw ghetto show a door of an inn that read, “Society of Wagon Drivers for

**“...Thirsting for Spiritual refreshment, and they found it...”**

*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.

**Take It With You:**

Your personal connection to the prayer

The life we live as Torah Jews has its difficulties, as does every person’s life in this world. However, the power the Torah possesses to lift us up above the fray is in direct correlation to the toil we put into it. We are commanded not only study Torah, but “*la’asok*,” to engross ourselves, in study.

You could compare the concept to the experience of marathon runner; his practice schedule seems to be a heavy demand which he must muster all his self-discipline to fulfill. Once he is out there, though, running with all his strength and skill, he enters a mind-set in which time and fatigue fall away. In contrast, were he to jog half-heartedly  
(cont. P. 3)

**Did You Know:** An insight for the week ahead.

**Tehillim Before Shacharis**

**Q** Sometimes I get up early and recite Tehillim before Shacharis. Must I recite the Birchas Hatorah before I say Tehillim?

**A** The Birchas Hatorah are required before learning Scriptures, Gemara, Mishnah, Halacha, and Mussar. Because Tehillim is considered Torah, Birchas Hatorah should be recited first. Nowadays it is customary to say Birchas Hatorah

immediately after the blessing Asher Yatzar in order not to say any Scriptural verses - even supplications - before Birchas Hatorah. Accordingly, on the days when one says Selichos, one should recite Birchas Hatorah before the selichos (Mishneh Berurah 46:27).



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BIRCHAS HATORAH Torah: The Sweet Essence Of Life

(TAKE IT WITH YOU cont.)

around the track, he would soon feel bored and tired. By fulfilling his obligation wholeheartedly, he experiences the exquisite sweetness in his exertion.

## Your Personal Tefillah Trainer:

Exercising mind, memory and imagination to carry kavannah into your davening

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."

### Try This!

To track your progress, give yourself a check for each day you have Kavannah in "V'harev Noh"

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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This issue includes Torah content and should be treated accordingly.