



Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah

Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom Part 12

12: How so? If he was an artisan and he worked three hours a day and studied Torah for nine hours a day, for those nine, he should: read the *Torah shebikhtav* for three of them and study *Torah sheba'al peh* for three of them; and for the other three, he should meditate and cogitate to understand one thing from another. *Divrei Kabala* (Prophets and Writings) are included in *Torah shebikhtav* and their commentaries and explanations are included in *Torah sheba'al peh*. Those matters which are called *Pardes* are included in *Gemara*. When does this apply? At the beginning of his learning career. However, when he grows in wisdom and does not need to study *Torah shebikhtav* nor to be constantly involved in *Torah sheba'al peh*, he should read, at set times, the *Torah shebikhtav* and teachings of tradition so that he does not forget any one of the laws of the Torah and he should dedicate all of his time to *Gemara* alone, according to the breadth of his understanding and his intellectual maturity.

(for R's approach to *Pardes*, see Yesodei haTorah ch. 1-4, esp. the last Halakha in ch. 4 and the Kessef Mishneh there).

Q1: Once R has given us the three-way division in Halakha 11, why give an example which does the same?

JB: This took me a minute and then just hit me in the face! One might think from the first statement, that you should learn one on Sunday, the second on Monday and the third on Tuesday! R is telling us not to spend an entire day on any subject, but to always study all subjects. The question is why. The only reason I can submit is that it assures one of completing a full complement of subjects each day. If something comes up unexpectedly, you won't miss an entire day's worth of a subject. Also, his description of Gemara seems to incorporate the first 2. Hence, you can put down a Chumash and immediately ponder it. You'd do the cycle on the whole topic: text, comments, compare. There are probably a whole bunch of other scenarios that support this kind of balance.

Q2: Why does this division change once we are "grown in wisdom"? Does this mean that the ultimate level of learning is Gemara? If so, is that because it is intellectually the most engaging, or for some other reason?

JB: In a nutshell, R's "Gemara" is a lot more "wholesome" than what we study today. It was a composite of other areas of study. Today, unfortunately, there is such an emphasis on the text page, all nicely formatted with footnotes and commentary, that's it's much less



exploratory. Until one has reached a level where all the basics are out of the way, Gemara is just another subject. One who has grown in Torah learns Gemara not simply by studying a page and going to a shiur, which is NOT the ideal R describes, but by actually developing chiddushim on one's own, creating scenerios, and doing original comparisons. For most of us, (IMHO) it can only be one third of a regiment...