



Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah

Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom Part 11

11: He is obligated to divide his learning time into thirds: One third *Torah shebikhtav* (Scripture), one third *Torah sheba'al peh* (Oral tradition) and one third he should understand one thing from another, comparing and contrasting and applying one thing from another and understanding through the hermeneutical rules of exegesis until he understands the proper use of these rules and how to extrapolate the forbidden and permitted etc. from things which he learned from the tradition. This [third form of study] is called *Gemara*.

Q1: Why the obligation to divide learning time a certain way? Is this educational advice or a definition of the Mitzva?

JB (Jay Bailey): I think we're looking at an example of foreshadowing. R realized that unless you maintain a balance (=Shvil Hazahav [golden mean]), one's study of Torah risks going "off-kilter" based on personal preference. (right wing yeshivas dwell almost exclusively on Talmud over Chumash, etc.)

While Gemarah allows for the flexibility that he describes at length, it must be balanced with mandatory textual and primary commentary- based study... Sort of like driving. While theoretically, the way you drive is accelerate, steer and then stop, and this is functionally sufficient, it's in your best interest to follow advice like not braking too quickly, slowing before turning, etc. These assure that your car will last a long time and your journey will be a pleasant one. (i.e., this is not the definition of the Mitzvah, but advice on optimizing)

YE (Yitz Etshalom): In BT Kiddushin 30a, we read: "R. Safra said in the name of R. Yehoshua b. Hananya: What is the meaning of *Veshinantam levaneikha* (You shall teach them to your children)? Do not read *Veshinantam* (teach - from the word *shnayim* - two); rather read *veshilashtam* (divide them into thirds). From there, the Gemara establishes: 1/3 *Mikra* (Scripture); 1/3 *Mishna* (oral tradition) and 1/3 *Talmud*.

Where did the Rabbis get this notion? There doesn't seem to be any inherent reason for "emending" *Veshinantam*; why the statement and division?

At the end of that same page, another *drasha* (exegetical teaching) on this verse is quoted which plays upon the word *Veshinantam* from the meaning of sharpness - *Shinun* : "*Veshinantam levaneikha* - that the words of Torah should be sharp in your



mouth; that if someone asks you something, you should not hesitate and respond, rather respond directly. " Rashi comments (s.v. *Mehudadin*): "review them and research their depth, so that if someone asks you you won't need to hesitate, rather you will be able to respond immediately" - note that Rashi sets up two distinct requirements here: to review them and to research their depth. So that this drasha - much more directly related to the verse - obligates us to be sharp. This sharpness and readiness to respond with responsible and researched responses depends on two modes of learning - constant review, so that everything you may be asked is something you recently learned; and depth, so that you will be able to explain the reason for Halakhot etc. and be able to apply them to new situations. As such, R's formula is clear as day:

Part of the goal of TT (or perhaps the main goal) is to be well-versed in Torah, such that you are able to apply your own knowledge to any situation. In order to do that, you must know all of Scripture and tradition (which includes traditional commentary of Scripture AND Oral law) and you must also be versed in conceptual analysis, application, synthesis etc. The one question is, why doesn't the Gemara insist that we divide up the day into halves (which allows us to keep the "two" of *veshinantam*) and study Scripture and Oral Law/Commentary; and then, when we have sufficiently completed that, move on to Gemara? I believe that the Rabbis understood that the non-critical mode of study, typified by these two categories, if it is the only mode of learning, is not only not enough; it is harmful to the development of the Ben Torah. To view any part of Torah as "learnable" without applying our highest thinking skills is a denigration of the Torah itself. Therefore, they suggest the three-way division, so that even at the beginning of one's study, one is plumbing the depths, challenging, contrasting and comparing and the like.

R simply adds on the next natural step. Once our basic Torah knowledge is more or less complete - we know T'nakh along with the traditional explanation and Oral law - we then move to the ideal form of study. The depth and breadth of Torah which can only be appreciated when we put our best thinking into it.

By the way, R. Lichtenstein once suggested that although each of these three areas of study represents a different type of study - T'nakh is emotional ; Mishna is repetition and (nearly) rote study and Gemara is *Iyyun* - analysis; nevertheless, we should be able to apply each of these approaches to every bit of our study - to study T'nakh with intellectual vigot, to be moved and excited by Gemara and Mishna etc.

Q2: How do we distinguish between *Torah sheba'al peh* and *Gemara*?

JB: I believe they've merged. This may just be the way I grew up, but it seems that our style of Talmudic study today incorporates the primary sources and the discussion of them. Because we have myriads of authors available, and the texts (and CD-ROM!) are so easy to obtain, we can easily and quickly toss a Rishon or two into a Talmudic discussion. In R's conditions, one would obtain a tractate of Mishna or commentary, and



delve into it until finished. With so much more at hand, we no longer do that, and work instead on incorporating as many useful ideas as possible.

YE: Rabbenu Tam (Tosafot Kiddushin 30a s.v. Lo tzerikha) accepts this notion; that is how he explains our custom of studying mainly Gemara; that Gemara includes both Scripture and apodictic Mishna. Clearly, we have to find a different explanation for R, who explicitly demarcates between them. I believe that Mishna/Baraita style, which merely states the law, perhaps a dissenting opinion, is R's *Torah shbaal peh* - but Gemara is researching as to the concept behind the law, its applications and limitations etc.