

FROM THE EDITOR

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Just imagine...

... If achieving an 'A' on an exam wasn't simply a matter of being able to arrive at or to recall the right answer to a question?

...If, instead of being graded on our test performance, we were graded on the amount of swotting that we'd done in the days, weeks, or months leading up to the exam?

...If it wasn't the brightest student in the class who was singled out and acknowledged for his results, but, instead, the student who worked the hardest?

To put it simply, what if effort really mattered and actually counted for something?

What if it counted for everything? What would that look like?

As should come as no surprise, the Torah's value system often stands in stark contrast to the value system of the world in which we find ourselves and the area of education is certainly no exception.

Our Sages teach¹, "In accordance with the pain is the reward," meaning that in accordance with the suffering that a person endures, the struggle that he undergoes to accomplish something, for example to learn Torah or to do a mitzvah, so will a person's reward be measured.

In other words, the scale on which we are all judged and rewarded is a relative one, not an absolute one. What comes easy to one person might require genuine effort for someone else, so receiving the same reward just because the result is the same wouldn't be fair. It's like the difference between asking someone to drive you down the block versus asking him to drive you all the way across town during rush hour; you'd never expect to pay the same amount for both trips because the time, effort, and expense involved are completely different and, likewise, deserve completely different compensation. From Hashem's point of view, the harder a person works and exerts himself, the more he'll be rewarded – or, to borrow from a modern day expression and tweak it a bit: the more pain, the more gain.

But, that's not the end of the matter, not by a long shot. Just how important is really trying and putting our all into things?

Rabbi Azriel C. Goldfein, ztz"l, would teach (in the name of the Maharal) that Hashem isn't interested in answers. If Hashem wanted answers, He could have just given them to us and wouldn't have bothered commanding us to study and labour in His Torah. In fact, in terms of efficiency and accuracy, Hashem could have just given us a computer and, anytime we were faced with a question, we could have just...well, Googled the answer. Instead, Hashem chose to give us His Torah because He wants us to put effort into studying it and understanding it.

So, what about the student who does just that – who works as hard as he can, to the full extent of his potential, but, ultimately, falls short and fails the big test? Should he be left to think things like: his effort was all for naught; why did he even bother studying in the first place; or worse, terrible things about himself and his abilities?

Rabbi Goldfein explains that the Maharal gives a stunning example regarding just how important the effort we put into things is valued by Hashem.

Consider two students who are faced with the same question. The one student looked into a *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) and found the answer (comparable to a student using a study guide, like *CliffsNotes*, to help him understand the major plot points and themes in an assigned piece of literature, ie. taking the easy way out) – and it was the right answer; while the other student learned through the entire subject matter, starting from ground zero and spending however long was necessary to labour through all of the relevant texts and commentaries on the matter until he had digested the entire topic for himself and arrived at his own conclusion – but his answer was wrong. Which student does Hashem prefer? The second one - the one who got it wrong - is dearer to Hashem than the first one!

From Hashem's perspective, the valedictorian isn't the 'A' student; it's the student who gives it his all every time even if, in the end, he falls short. Just imagine what things would look like if our perspective on studying was more in line with Hashem's. Imagine how much more students would enjoy studying and how much more they'd actually do it – and keep doing it.

From everyone at *JL*, congrats to all the 2017 matrics and best wishes to all of our students in the coming year!

ROBERT SUSSMAN,
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¹Pirkei Avos 5:26



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