

FROM THE EDITOR

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In our world, we tend to think of education as being synonymous with job preparation. In other words, a person studies in order to pursue a career in a particular field, in order to earn a living.

After all, what's the point of studying if you can't cash in on it later, right?

We also think of education as something that one finishes after a period of time, culminating with graduation and the conferral of a degree.

Historically, among the Jewish people, however, being educated had nothing to do with the work that one did to earn a living, with the one having little, if anything, to do with the other. There were giants in Torah knowledge, including many of our Sages from the mishna and gemara, who were wood choppers (Hillel the Elder), grave diggers (Abba Shaul), cobblers (Rabbi Yochanon), blacksmiths (Rabbi Yitzchak), and on and on.¹ Yaakov Avinu, Moshe Rabbeinu, and David HaMelech were all shepherds. Rashi, our greatest teacher, was famously a wine maker; the Rambam a doctor.

But, we mustn't make the mistake of confusing what a person does with who he is or, even more importantly, with the potential that lies within him.

Everyone – wealthy or poor, healthy or infirm, etc. – has an obligation each day to learn Torah regardless of how he actually spends his time earning a living. And that obligation doesn't cease after a period of time or with the conferral of any sort of degree or title, but continues until one's dying day. A Torah education is not about syllabi, required courses, credit hours, and degrees. A person can literally spend decades learning full-time – which doesn't just mean a few hours a day like in University, but 12 or more hours every day, 6 or even 7 days a week! – be incredibly steeped in Torah knowledge, and yet lack any sort of degrees or even formal positions and titles (including Rabbi!) to point to as an acknowledgment of his accomplishments.

Simply put, a life of Torah is about striving for *gadlus* – for greatness in Torah. And, implicit in such a goal of striving for *gadlus* is the belief that each and every student has the potential to achieve such greatness.

But, is this really possible?

When we stood at Har Sinai, the Heavens opened up and we saw “*ein od milvado*” (there is nothing besides Hashem). Not only was Hashem's essence revealed, but the essence of the Jewish people as well. We didn't just get to see the greatness of our Creator, we also got to see the *nishmas yisrael* (the soul of Israel). And, just as we must recognize the greatness of Hashem, our G-d, so too we must recognize the greatness of the Jewish soul that He placed within us. It's even possible to say that, one who does not believe in the potential of the Jewish soul is almost like one who denies the existence of G-d Himself.

We need to believe in each and every person's ability to achieve enormous things. A person needs to always bear this in mind as he strives to accomplish things in his life, even though he doesn't see any possibility of ever reaching his desired goal. We must put blinders on (and perhaps also block our ears from the naysayers) and just keep moving forward. A person who thinks he can accomplish only so much and no more, who places limits on his own abilities – this is almost heresy in the reality and essence of what it means to be a Jew.

If we find in front of us a mountain that needs to be moved, and we make a calculation as to how we might uproot the entire mountain, we will quickly come to the obvious conclusion that moving a mountain is simply impossible. But, the wise person will start uprooting a bit of dirt here and there, adding shovel after shovel, grain after grain, until, suddenly, the entire mountain collapses before him.

Everything that we accomplish – in truth, we don't accomplish it through the work that we do. A person needs to put forth effort – to scratch a bit, and a bit more, and more and more – and, in the end, there comes from Heaven a tremendous assistance and magnificent greatness that the person could not even dream of and, suddenly, a person will find himself in a completely different reality.

A Jew needs to believe in this and needs to acknowledge this incredible potential that lies within.

In order to appreciate this, a person just needs to reflect upon his past a bit. Everything that we have today, we've all reached it in this very same way.

Every child must be taught to understand that the only limits before him are the ones that he creates for himself and which he chooses to believe in.

ROBERT SUSSMAN, EDITOR

Adapted in part from Tiferes Shimshon al HaTorah (Parshas Netzavim)

¹See Torah Study, Yehudah HaLevi, citing Menorath HaMaor.

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ON THE COVER:

The right classroom coupled with the right teacher have the chance to inspire a child's imagination to reach for the stars and to think that the sky's the limit when it comes to her dreams. Pictured is a young girl who dreams of rocketing into space. Bigstock.com

