

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

# בשבת



PARSHAS  
SHOFTIM

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT  
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS  
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

## PROPHECY VS. PERSEVERANCE

**P**arshas Shoftim discusses the process of achieving clarity in Torah and *halachah*. If a person is unsure of a particular *halachah*, they should approach the local *beis din*, where the *talmidei chachamim* there can clarify the matter. If the local court cannot properly explain the *halachah*, one can travel to the *Sanhedrin* in *Yerushalayim*, where the greatest sages reside, and they will provide the explanations one seeks.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from these *pessukim* that the way to determine the meaning of a particular *passuk*, or the application of a particular *halachah*, is through the applied intelligence and knowledge of the Torah scholars.

This fundamental idea sparked the following question by the Abarbanel<sup>2</sup> (R' Yitzchok ben Yehudah Abarbanel, 1437–1508). Why doesn't the Torah learning process include *nevi'im* — prophets? Why don't we find that one should approach the local prophet, and ask them to explain the meaning of a difficult passage or idea? With their direct pipeline to Hashem, there would be no more arguments, they would tell you exactly what Hashem means, and we would now know the truth.

The Abarbanel explains that there would be a severe and terrible impact if part of the Torah learning process included asking a *navi* to explain the Torah. He points out that every Jewish person has a connection to Torah, and it is expected that with human intelligence one can arrive at understanding and truth. However, if *nevi'im* were part of the process, people might think that non-*nevi'im* are not capable of truly understanding the Torah.

The idea the Abarbanel is proposing is quite astounding! Imagine if we were able to directly query Hashem, so to speak. We would now have no doubts as to what Hashem meant, we would know the exact meaning of every *passuk*, every *halachah*, every story. But it's not worth it, because people may think that they are not capable of understanding Torah without the influence of prophecy.

The importance of the Jewish nation's relationship to Torah supersedes the ability to have direct access to the Author of the Torah. How important it must be for us to recognize this; though it will take work and effort, the Torah is ours to understand.

<sup>1</sup> Devarim 17:8

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

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### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Some may be tempted to think that only the gifted and intelligent are cut out for learning Torah. Obviously, one who can understand something with ease seems to have an advantage, but the Torah was not given only to the super-smart.

One idea is to break down a particular area into manageable parts. A person who decides that they must understand all of *hilchos lashon harah*, or the entire *Gemara* of *Eruvin* will be sorely disappointed when they don't reach that goal.

But if a person sets a smaller goal — "I want to have a clear understanding of *Tosfos's* question," or, "I want to know what to do when someone calls about a potential *shidduch*," that makes the topic at hand much more manageable.

Once a person achieves clarity in that smaller area, they can then build on that, and move on to the next area.

By accepting our limitations, and working within our abilities, we will actually end up expanding our area of knowledge.



**Just as we enthusiastically count the *sefiras ha'omer* towards receiving the Torah, we must make a regular *cheshbon hanefesh* — an accounting of our days, weeks, months and years, as an expression of enthusiasm as we pursue our goals in *Avodas Hashem*.**

- R' Tuvia Goldstein zt"l, *Sefer Emek Halachah*, vol. 1, pg. 31, footnote 22

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## TWISTS AND TURNS IN A TOPIC

Yechiel\* felt that he may have bit off more than he could chew. He kept rolling ideas around in his head, trying to work out something, *something*, but nothing came to mind.

It all started about two months ago, when he started learning a particular area in the *Gemara*. The topic interested him, and his *yeshiva* would give a monetary incentive to anyone who could produce a satisfactory way of understanding a difficult passage.

However, Yechiel found, that he simply could not do so. Try as he might, he felt himself all twisted up, every explanation demanded more answers, and every answer raised more questions. It was more than he could handle. Now he was sitting on his couch at home, staring into nothingness, thinking about the complicated *Gemara*, and wondering if he should just drop the topic.

"Yechiel!" Yechiel jumped up, startled to hear his name. He noticed his wife looking at him, with a funny expression on her face. "Are you ok? I was calling you, and you seemed to be in your own world."

"I'm fine — remember that *Gemara* I mentioned, how I was planning on saying something on it? I think I'm going to drop it, it's just too hard."

"Oh? Oh." Hindy smiled. "I feel like we've had this conversation before. Didn't you say this last time, just before you made some sort of breakthrough?"

Yechiel got a faraway look in his eyes. "Yeah... yeah, that's right! You're right, I remember that. Well, I don't know," Yechiel said with a shrug. "I guess I'll keep trying."

Two months later, Yechiel was discussing the topic with a friend who was in the Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Greenblatt's *shiur*. Yechiel had made his breakthrough, and heard that Rabbi Greenblatt was explaining the same passage to his students. "So, to explain why there is no contradiction between R' Akiva Eiger here and R' Akiva Eiger's statement in *Bava Basra*, I used this idea I found in the Pnei Yehoshua..." and Yechiel summarized his explanation to Dov. "What did Rabbi Greenblatt say?"

Dov smiled. "It sounds like you were both saying the same thing! He even used the same sources as you — how did you come up with this idea?"

Now it was Yechiel's turn to smile. "A little encouragement and a lot of work. That's all it took."

*\*Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The blessing made before learning Torah is, "to toil in Torah," not, "to understand Torah." This is because toiling itself, even without reaching understanding, is a *mitzvah*.<sup>1</sup>
- The *Gemara* states, "Praiseworthy is one who comes here with their learning in their hand."<sup>2</sup> It does not say in their head, but in their hand. This refers to what they attained through hard work and perseverance, not simply through superior intellect.<sup>3</sup>

1 *Maharal, Gevuros Hashem*, 62:11

2 *Bava Basra* 10b

3 *Michtav M'Elياهو*, Vol. III, pg. 20

[info@ohr-yisrael.com](mailto:info@ohr-yisrael.com)

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