



Chagigah Perek Beis is Dedicated

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Chagigah Daf 12

Interrupting Learning for Idle Talk

“Rabbi Levi said: One who interrupts learning Torah and engages in idle talk, they feed him coals of resamim wood...” (**Gemara** 12b)

Let us explore this harsh punishment. What, exactly, is the severity of this offense? And what do resamim coals indicate?

Firstly, there is a Talmudic rule that punishments must be preceded by a warning. Where is the warning for this sin? **Rabbeinu Chananel** identifies a Gemara in Yoma 19b as the source. “Rava said: One who speaks idle talk transgresses a [mitzvas] aseï, as it says, ‘You shall speak in *them* (words of Torah)’ – in them and not in idle talk. Rav Acha bar Yaakov says he transgresses a lav...” R’ Chananel explains this as interrupting learning to speak about other topics.

It seems that the issue is specifically when one is in the middle of learning. What is special about such a time?

The Mishnah in Avos (3:9) teaches a similar dictum: One who is walking along the road, engaged in learning, and stops to say, “How beautiful is this tree!...” – he is held liable for his life. On this writes

Rabbeinu Yonah that when a person studies Torah he is crowned with the crown of Hakadosh Boruch Hu. Therefore, he must maintain a state of awe and fear before Hashem when he learns. Interrupting with idle talk is like treason toward the King!

The **Maharal** learns the Mishnah as based on the earlier one which states that when one learns, the Shechinah is opposite him. It is like he is speaking to the King. If one would interrupt his conversation with a king to greet someone passing by, it surely is a great offense!

Indeed, **Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz** compares Torah to tefillah; both are mitzvos which bring us so close to Hashem that we are “standing in front of Him.” Just like halacha forbids interrupting Shemoneh Esrei to greet even a powerful ruler, so too we may not stop in the middle of learning to talk about other things (Daas Torah Shemos p. 245).

Rabbi Avrohom Padaver shlit”a discusses the awesome power of Torah learnt without breaks (ritzifus). In an oft-quoted letter, the Chazon Ish exhorts us that “the primary learning is consistent and without stopping in the middle. To learn one hour and then stop for an hour sustains oblivion, void and emptiness. It’s like planting and then flooding the ground with water to wash it away. Continuous learning is the secret to holiness... One should plan out strategies of how to acquire diligence in learning, and he should pray for it all the time.” Learning is not like other endeavors, and the effect is exponential. Certainly, if one stops in the middle to engage in idle talk, he is ruining the holiness he could have created (Ohr Hamoed, Shavuos).

What is the significance of “rosam” wood mentioned in our Gemara?

Rosam is a tree that makes coals unique for their duration of heat. The **Chofetz Chaim** (Shemiras Halashon, Chasimas Hasefer Ch.3) quotes a Gemara that they continue to smolder for *twelve months*! Thus, the connotation here is that for such a sin one is treated as a total rasha, who is punished in gehinnom for twelve full months.

Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin emphasized the graphic description of the Gemara – they *feed* him the coals – as an effect comparable to such a

terrible punishment. Having one's mouth burned by coals produces not only immediate suffering, but also inhibits eating for a long time. So too, interrupting one's learning makes it harder to learn subsequently. It weakens the spiritual sensitivities and causes long-term negative effects.

Finally, **Maharal** explains this as midda k'neged midda, measure for measure of the sin. Torah is "sweeter than honey," while idle talk is "tasteless." If one gives up Torah for that, he is punished by having to toil especially hard to achieve his sustenance. Torah study is a powerful merit to more easily make a livelihood, and if it is faulty, more exertion will be necessary. Thus, "resomim coals" are a metaphor for the extra effort one will have to make in order to live. It is as if he is eating coals (Nesiv Hatorah Ch. 15, with explanation).

Two practical applications of this Chazal are mentioned in the Poskim:

The **Shulchan Aruch** (Y.D. 246:17) rules that one may not speak in a Beis Hamedrash other than words of Torah, and even if someone sneezes, he cannot say "gezundheit." Although the Prisha suggests that in our days we could (since we do not concentrate on our studies like they did in the times of the Gemara), the Taz vociferously objects. If we would "make up our own leniencies in this area, people would permit even more things – even idle chatter." Therefore, he upholds the opinion of the Shulchan Aruch (based on Berachos 53a).

Additionally, the **Mishneh Berurah** (O.C. 285:6) states that it is very commendable, when reading the parsha shnayim mikrah v'echad Targum, to refrain from interrupting for any reason. In the Shaar Hatziyun, he adds, "This is even between parshiyos. In the middle of a topic, it is forbidden by halacha to interrupt, as Chazal say... they feed him rosam coals."