בס"ד

# No Student Graduation

The world views student graduation as the successful completion of a degree, course of study, or school program, or the formal event celebrating this milestone.

Yiddishkeit views student graduation as

Exactly my point. I left the space blank intentionally. Because in yiddishkeit, the concept of "student graduation" is just not a thing. Of course milestones are important. Celebrations to commemorate milestones are also important. But from the perspective of life, we are always meant to be growing and learning. We are always meant to be students; it's not something we graduate from!

One of the great mistakes in our history was the moment when we left Har Sinai. Not too long after having experienced the wondrous Torah revelation, the Jewish people left the area. Our Sages say they left "like a child running away from school." After the great spiritual experience of Matan Torah, the Jewish people perhaps thought they graduated. No more school! But guess what? This mindset was incorrect. Why? Because a Jew never leaves school. His whole life is school. He never has student graduation because to be a Jew means to be a perpetual and constant student.

In fact, the Hebrew term for a Torah scholar is תלמיד חכם (Talmid Chacham), which literally means: a student of wisdom. While the world views wisdom as knowledge, information, and power, our Torah teaches us that wisdom contains a much deeper and delicate truth. Wisdom is actually not-knowing. Like Rebbe Nachman teaches: תכלית הידיעה שלא נדע — the purpose of knowledge is to not know. A Jew lives with the humble recognition that "I am still learning."

Ben Zoma (Avos 4:1) shares a powerful five-word teaching: איזהו חכם — הלומד מכל אדם — Who is wise? He who learns from everyone." If every person is meant to be your teacher, by definition it means that you are always a student. Student graduation is just not a thing!

You might ask, "Really?! Learn from everyone?!" The answer is yes. Ben Zoma says מכל אדם, from everyone!

"But wait, what about that criminal who just robbed a bank? You're not telling me that I have what to learn from him too, are you?!"

## Even a Thief Can Be a Teacher

Again, Ben Zoma says מכל אדם, from everyone, which means that yes, even a bank robber can be our teacher.

In HaYom Yom (3 Iyar), the Lubavitcher Rebbe shares an unbelievable teaching: כל המדות, אף גם המדות הלא טובות, או גם רעות בשמן ושמותיהם, אפשר להשתמש בהם לעבודת ה' על פי התורה — All character traits, even those that are not good, or are even evil in name and description, can be used [as a lesson] in serving Hashem according to the Torah.

In this vein, the Lubavticher Rebbe then shares how the saintly Reb Zusha of Hanipoli learned seven approaches to his Divine service by pondering the work ethic of a thief: 1) a thief is modest, 2) he is prepared to endanger himself, 3) the minutest details are as important to him as greater considerations, 4) he labors with great exertion, 5) he works quickly, 6) he exhibits trust

and hope, and 7) if he fails the first time, he tries again and again.

So yes, we can literally learn from everyone. We are never meant to graduate as students. There's always more to learn and grow and apply in our service of Hashem. One of the most important words in a Jew's life is "channel." There is nothing in this world that doesn't have meaning, purpose, and Divine energy. Even a "lifeless" rock is infused with tremendous spiritual energy and vibrancy, what we call חיות, vitality!

## The G-dly Intellect in Everything

At the beginning of his magnum opus, Likutei Moharan (1), Rebbe Nachman teaches about the imperative of every Jewish person to find the G-dly intellect that exists in all matter: כי איש הישראלי צריך תמיד להסתכל בהשכל שיש בכל דבר, ולקשר עצמו אל החכמה והשכל שיש בכל דבר, כדי שיאיר לו השכל שיש בכל דבר, להתקרב להשם יתברך על ידי אותו הדבר — The Jew must always focus on the inner intelligence of every matter, and bind himself to the wisdom and inner intelligence that is to be found in each thing. As a result, the intelligence which is in each thing will enlighten him and draw him closer to Hashem through that very thing.

The world is filled with things. With stuff. The very things that so many people use to harm themselves, others, and the world, can be directed and channeled towards holiness, G-dliness, and spirituality. There is nothing on this world that is devoid of חיות אלוקית, a G-dly spirit. What we do with it and how we channel it is up to us.

## Noach: Channeling Passion, Darkness into Light

The Bas Ayin (Noach 1) explains that this was actually the chidush of Noach HaTzadik. The world was in the realm of רבה רעת האדם, completely saturated with evil. The people of the world were going bananas, and as we all know, bananas are super slippery! The world was slipping away, falling to lowly levels never seen before since Creation. The average "Joe" walking the planet prior to the Flood was emphatic and passionately in love with the physical world. Noach saw all of this. He saw people deeply connected to the transitory lures of this world.

And so, he looked around, saw what was going on, and made a simple Kal Vachomer to himself, saying: "Wow, look at all this strength, passion, and energy that these people possess. Let me take that strength, passion, and energy and apply it to Torah and Avodas Hashem."

Noach didn't look the other way. He looked right at them. Not to copy their wayward ways, chas v'shalom, but to copy their energetic passion of misplaced דביקות and channel that energy accordingly.

The Bas Ayin further reveals that the numerical value of ישראל is the same as אור חשך, because the Avodah of a Jew is to transform darkness into light. To take the darkness of this world and apply it towards a holy purpose. Even more, says the Bas Ayin, the Roshei Teivos (first letters) of נח איש צדיק תמים is also the exact same gematria as ישראל, as אור חשך.

Because this was the chidush of Noach. He didn't look away. He didn't run away from "school." He humbled himself and became a student of the situation he was in. He became a student of the terrible people around him, and he asked a very simple question: How can I apply all of this stuff and direct it to Hashem?

My friends, if there is one takeaway message from all this, I believe it's this. Abolish whatever concept you have of "student graduation" from your life's dictionary, and live by the powerful dictum of Ben Zoma: Who is wise? He who learns from everyone.

Because when we approach life in this manner, always willing to be a student of this world, then we can be the chidush that Noach was in his generation. We will be able to direct and channel everything and anything towards our life's calling and purpose, connecting to Hashem in the most meaningful way we can.

Have a heilige Shabbos!

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