

Several years ago, Reb Sender Dolgin was struggling to maintain a daily learning schedule, but was experiencing frustration with the fact that he often could not remember what he had learned the previous day. He was being moseir nefesh

(sacrificing time and dedicating effort) to learn daily – yet he felt like he was failing. He tried chavrusos, shiurim and Daf Yomi, but often did not retain what he had learned. What was he doing wrong?

He began seeking advice, and what

he discovered not only surprised him, but upset him as well. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of people walking around with the very same problem! While Reb Sender felt better that he was not alone in his difficulties, he did not have the answer.

AVROHOM JAFFE

Shas, Anyone?

A STRUCTURED PROGRAM OF REVIEW AND RETENTION

STRIVING TOWARD A GOAL

As with every successful endeavor, Torah study requires a clear goal and strategy. Like any project, the outcome is directly related to the planning that goes into it. Whether one has the entire day available for Torah study, or a limited time slot, it can work, as long as the goal matches the time available.

A common remark is, "I'm no genius. I can't set my goal at finishing *masechtos* — let alone remembering

them!" But one need not be a genius to remember one's learning. All it takes is the desire to do it and a practical method to make it happen. This led to the creation of the "*Shas Chabura*" — a comprehensive learning and *chazara* program designed to allow anyone with even average mental capacity and an ordinary memory to succeed in his learning.

THE THEORY

Science has taught us that memory is composed of short-term memory and long-term memory. Short term memory lasts for a number of days or, at most, a few weeks. Every bit of information is first "deposited" into short-term memory. It may become long-term memory, but only if the impression made on the mind is strong enough. Though there are many different ways to achieve this, one basic strategy is through continual review. The theory here is simple: review does not cause a person to remember; it just does not allow him the chance to forget.

In addition, each and every review

adds a new understanding into what was learned the previous time. What one does not understand today, he will understand tomorrow. Or next week. Or next month — or even next year. There are two reasons why the next review may bring one success: one, he is seeing the *sugya* again, and two, by the time he reviews that Gemara again, he will have seen many more *blatt* in the *masechta* — allowing him to look at this Gemara from a greater perspective.

THE FRUITS OF REGULAR REVIEW

Gedolim over the ages have extolled the virtues of *chazara*, often referring to it as the very essence of Torah learning: "*Eino domeh shoneh pirko mei'a pe'amin leshoneh mei'a ve'echad* — One cannot compare the study of a topic a hundred times to studying it one hundred and one times." With each review, one develops a more comprehensive understanding of the previously studied material (*Chagiga* 9b).

- The Gemara compares one who studies, but does not review, to one

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who sows a beautiful vineyard, but does not bother to collect its fruit (*Sanhedrin* 99a).

- *Rashi* translates the term "*talmid chacham*" as "one who familiarizes himself with his learning by reviewing it constantly" (*Berachos* 5a).

- The *Maharsha* says that forgetting one's learning is a main excuse for "*bitul*" (giving up on learning), because a person will say, "Why bother to learn if I will only forget!" (*Temura* 16b) This may be the reason why the *Mishnah* in *Avos* (3:8) says that one who forgets something from his learning is considered liable for death penalty because he did not consider Torah, which is his "life," important enough to review.

- *Chazal* also say: "If one forgets something from his learning, he transgresses as many as *three lavin* (negative commands)" (*Menachos* 99b).

Chazal, however, anticipated a common problem. The *Gemara* says: "*Migmar be'atikta kashe meichadta* – Review of old [learning] is more difficult than new [learning]" (*Yoma* 29a). *Rashi* explains this to mean that if one has learned Torah and has forsaken it, it will be harder for him to retrieve this learning than to study what he has never learned. The reason for this is that the excitement of tackling something new often motivates a person to commence studying, but reviewing what was studied yesterday just does not seem as exciting.

- If each *chazara* brings a new and deeper understanding, however, then reviewing the old *Gemara* is not old learning – it is new and exciting. *Rashi* teaches us that *chazara* is not a perfunctory activity, but "*chazor aleha u'bedok be'umkam*," review it and examine its depth, there is a new depth and appreciation with each review (*Kidushin* 30a).

THE WAY IT WORKS

Of course, one mustn't allow *chazara* to consume all of his allotted study time, and new material must be learned on a daily basis. The *Levush*

Mordechai writes in his introduction to *Seder Nezikkin* that ideally one should divide his time between learning *be'iyun* (in depth) and *bekius* – learning and *chazering* entire *masechtos* with *Gemara* and *Rashi* (and *Tsafos*, when necessary for *peshat*). By using a significant part of his time for *chazara*, one is following a system



that will place his learning within his long-term memory, without sacrificing his pursuit of *havana* (comprehension) in the least.

And so this remarkable system of

Gemara firmly in his long-term memory. Afterwards, the *Gemara* should be reviewed once a year. In summary, each *Gemara* is learned on *day 1, day 2, day 9, day 39, day 129* and then once a year on *day 365*. It may sound overwhelming at first, but a written program is created for each individual – and it becomes easy to follow after a bit of time. After all, when a *Gemara* is *chazered* six times over the course of the first year, how can one forget it?

Even young children have found this system very effective in helping them learn and remember *Mishnayos*. If an 11-year-old boy starts learning two *Mishnayos* a day utilizing this system, he will complete the entire *Sedarim* of *Nashim* and *Nezikin* four times for his Bar Mitzvah. Not only will this help his personal growth, it will provide him with a phenomenal background for his learning of those *masechtos* when he learns them in *yeshiva*.

As mentioned, many people using this program have testified that each *chazara* not only reviews, but actually deepens their original understanding of the *Gemara*, culminating in a comprehensive knowledge of the entire *masechta*. The joy and *simchas haTorah* that this brings is something

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learning evolved. Each day brings a new *amud* or *blatt* (depending upon available time), along with a regular system of *chazara*. After a *Gemara* is learned once, it should be reviewed the following day. A week later it should be reviewed for the second time. A month later, the third review should take place. Three months later, one will review it a fourth time, placing this

that cannot be described – it must be experienced.

THE RESULTS

Many have been utilizing this unique program for the last few years, with remarkable results. The originator of this program, Reb Sender Dolgin, is

IN THE VIEW OF GEDOLIM

Rabbi Yosef S. Elyashiv שליט"א:
 "For this, one doesn't need my *haskama* – it is a MUST for everyone to do it."

Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky שליט"א:
 "There is a *chiyuv* (obligation) for each and every person to learn and KNOW all of *Shas*, as it says in the *passuk* – *Vedibarta BaM. B= Bereishis* (first word in the Written Torah), *M= Mei'eimasei* (first word in the Oral Law)...."

Rabbi Aaron L. Steinman שליט"א:
 "This is a great thing; please send me the details of the program."

Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel שליט"א:
 "The *chabura* in the Mir that utilizes this method gives me much *nachas*. In the past three years, they have learned and *chazzered* over 1000 *blatt* using this system in *Seder Sheini* alone."

Gerrer Rebbe שליט"א: "In the past, learning all of *Shas* was a goal that one strived for. In our day, it has unfortunately become a *meis mitzva*

(totally neglected). *Hashem* should grant you *hatzlacha* with your program to be *mezakeh* the *rabbim*."

Toldos Aharon Rebbe שליט"א:
 "Words alone cannot express how good this is. I myself have begun using it, and I have included it in my *yeshiva's sederim*."

Novominsker Rebbe שליט"א: "All efforts should be expended to spread this method of learning to *Klal Yisroel*. If someone does not have the time to do this himself, he should act as a *Zevulun* to assist some one who does."

Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky שליט"א: "*Yasher koach* for developing this system of *chazara* – *lehagdil Torah u'lehadira* (to advance Torah study and glorify it)!"

Rabbi Yosef Zeinvert שליט"א:
 "The question that the Chofetz Chaim asked of Rabbi Meir Shapiro, I ask of you – What is your *zechus* that you were *zocheh* to create this *derech* of *harbatzas Torah*?"

preparing to make his third *siyum* on all of *Shas*. Years of diligent study, along with numerous *chazaros*, have culminated in his learning every single *blatt* in *Shas* at least five, and as many as twelve times. And, with *Hashem's* help, he hopes to complete *Shas* every year on his father's *yahrtzeit*.

A young man who had been attending a *Daf Yomi shiur* found that he was having trouble concentrating and staying focused on what was being taught.

A friend told him about this program. Though he did not have the time to learn a full *blatt* of Gemara along with *chazara* each day, he began learning an *amud* a day. After a few weeks, he commented to his friend, "You can't believe the difference this has made in my entire household. I look forward to my daily learning, my wife is very proud of me, and I've even heard my young son say 'Don't bother *Tatty* now, he has to learn.'"

Another fellow, who recently opened a new business and had to put in very long days at the office, has taught himself to budget his time to create available slots that had not existed before. For instance, instead of driving to meetings, he now utilizes public transportation to create a couple of extra hours to learn. He commented: "If I would not be using this program, I would probably have gone through the last few years without learning a word." He was once seen in the waiting room in an area hospital at two o'clock in the morning. What was he doing? Why, learning of course!

A *kollel yungerman*, after several years in *yeshiva*, felt that the time had come to move on. A friend of his told him about a *chabura* that was pursuing this learning-and-*chazara* program. After a very short time in the *chabura*, this *yungerman* has developed a new *cheishek* (enthusiasm) for learning, and has committed himself to learning at least 1,000 *blatt* before leaving *kollel*. He is now learning in the *beis midrash* day and night.

Interestingly enough, the most enthusiastic proponents of this system are the wives. Recently, a *kollel yungerman* who was in this learning-and-*chazara chabura* was offered an opportunity to join a prestigious out-of-town *kollel*. While this was an exciting offer, his new commitments would not allow him to continue with the program. As soon as his wife heard about the offer, she vetoed the idea, saying she was so happy with her "new" husband, and wanted him to continue with the program.

WHY NOT YOU?

The Gemara says that "*Hatorah krucha umunachas bekerren zavis; kol harotzeh lilmod, yavo ve'yilmod* – The Torah was put in a safe corner; anyone who wants to, may come and partake of it" (*Kidushin* 66b). Success in learning is

not reserved for the brilliant. It is available for anyone and everyone. In *Mishnas Rav Aharon* (Vol. 3, pp. 25-26,) Rabbi Aharon Kotler זצ"ל, quoting *Nefesh Hachayim*, writes that after 120 years, all Jews will be tested on all of *Shas*. Not only *talmidei chachamim* – but each and every one of us – must face this test.

• A businessman who has been learning with this system for almost five years and has already made a *siyum* on two *sedarim* of *Shas*, recently commented, "Before I started this system, I never dreamed that I could be a *Shas Yid*. Now, I don't think that I would forgive myself if I'm not!"

• At the recent gathering celebrating the *siyum* of a *masechta* by a group of *kollel yungeleit*, one of the speakers mentioned the following story: Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer said that during his days in Volozhin, there were three groups of *talmidim*. Those who spent their entire day learning *be'iyun*; those who spent the entire day learning *bekius*, quickly; and a third group who spent half of their day on *iyun* and half on *bekius*. "The *talmidei chachamim*," said Rabbi Isser Zalman, "came from the third group!"

• When Rabbi Mordechai Gifter was in high school, he covered his wall with pictures of *gedolim*. In the center of all of the pictures was an empty space with a small handwritten note that read "WHY NOT YOU!" Of course, few of us will grow to Rabbi Gifter's level, but shouldn't we strive to fulfill the potential that we have?

Even if one is *zocheh* to spend his entire day learning Torah in yeshiva, it is of utmost importance not to forget that there is a vast *Shas* that must be mastered by each and every one of us.

Now that you know that this learning and *chazara* program has been tried and tested, and you know that thousands around the globe, many with only average abilities, are walking around happy and fulfilled as they move along on their way to becoming *Shas Yidden*, there is really only one question — WHY NOT YOU? ☐

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