

Should we be happy we received the torah

Shiur Overview

Argument Flow Summary: Should We Be Happy That We Received the Torah?

1. The Central Question

The core question of the class, occasioned by **Shavuot (Zman Matan Torateinu): Should we actually be happy that we received the Torah?**

Two framings:

- **"Frum" framing:** *Why* should we be happy? (presupposes we should be)

- **"Non-frum" framing:** *Whether* we should be happy at all

2. Observation: People Don't Actually Seem Happy

People act invested in the Torah and go through the motions of celebration, but **don't genuinely appear happy** about having received it. The Torah seems more like a source of problems than a source of solutions — something one must fulfill (*mekayem*), but that doesn't produce joy.

Side Digression: Shavuot Domestic Humor

The real happiness of Shavuot for some is that spouses get to sleep all day while the other watches the kids, and in Eretz Yisrael the holiday is over quickly. This underscores that the joy isn't really *about* the Torah.

3. The Midrash of the Nations — Turned Inward

The well-known midrash: God offered the Torah to all the nations, each of whom found a "deal-breaker" commandment (e.g., "Lo Tirtzach" — do not murder). But could *you* think of a deal-breaker? There's a big list.

The only reason the Jews accepted was the formula **"Na'aseh v'Nishma"** (we will do and then we will hear) — they committed *before* knowing the details. Had they known the full contents, they might have refused too.

Reb Zushe of Anipoli reportedly said that if the Jews had been told about the prohibition of *lashon hara* (evil speech), they never would have accepted the Torah.

Side Digression: White-Collar Crimes Joke

The "blue-collar" prohibition (murder) is easy to nominally accept — "only do it when nobody sees" — but the subtler, everyday prohibitions are the real obstacles.

4. A Student's Proposed Answer: The Torah as Structure/Mold

A student offers an answer (the **"internet shittah"**): Without the Torah, a person is like the unfiltered internet — available for everything, shaped by nothing. The Torah **hones and molds** a person into something specific, giving life form and direction. Without it, you're a "blob" — theoretically able to be anything, therefore actually nothing.

Analogy: It's like a curriculum that makes you a computer scientist vs. drifting aimlessly between the couch, the beach, and the guitar.

5. Critique of This Answer

The argument has merit **as a case for having *some* structure**, but is **not a good argument for *this specific* structure (the Torah):**

- Any system of discipline or direction could serve the "anti-blob" function.

- The argument doesn't address whether **specific elements** of the Torah are actually good or beneficial.

- One can still raise criticisms of particular commandments or norms — e.g., restrictions on intermarriage, tribal identity, the drive to be "the best" — which may have **caused more problems than they solved.**

6. Provisional, Honest Position: No Answer Yet

There is no answer to the question yet. Going further:

- **There are parts of the Torah (broadly construed, including the entire mesorah and minhagim) that are genuinely bad for us** — not merely unhelpful, but actively harmful.

- The comparative question ("Would a *different* Torah be better?") is acknowledged but set aside as not the right question.

- The right question is whether **everything** within this broad tradition is helpful — and the answer is clearly **no**: some parts are "the opposite of helpful."

7. A Concrete Example: The Problem of Chosenness (*Atah Bechartanu*)

A **universal problem embedded in Torah itself:** the doctrine of Jewish chosenness (*Atah Bechartanu*). It may be true, but it leads to bad character traits (*middos*), specifically **excessive pride (*ga'avah*)**. Some pride is necessary (a *middah beinonis* — a moderate measure), but overdone pride in being Jewish is harmful and produces terrible results.

This is **not an easily separable element** — it is integral to *Yiddishkeit*, making it very hard to simply refine away. Most people either struggle with it or, worse, embrace the bad trait because they feel the Torah gives them license for it.

Sub-point: Practical Consequences of This Pride

Half the problems Jews have with other nations stem from Jewish bad *middos* — not just from external anti-Semitism. A *rebbe* once said anti-Semitism is half the Gentiles' fault and half the Jews' fault. This implicates the Torah itself.

8. Disposing of the "Easy" Version of the Question

A naive fantasy: without Torah, one would be "free" to do whatever one wants. This is **trivially answerable:**

- **You don't know what you want** — desire is not a reliable guide.

- **Doing whatever you want is effectively doing nothing** — it's not actually freedom.

This is the **"easy mode"** version of the question — really just asking "should human beings have a culture/laws?" — to which the answer is obviously yes. The **hard version** must be tackled: Should *this specific person* (in Lakewood, in 2025)

be happy with *this specific Torah*, including all its books and content?

9. Splitting the Question into Two Distinct Questions

Question A: Is the *Ideal* of Torah Good? (The "Banner" Question)

This is the question most people *think* they're asking: Is the Torah — capital 'The', capital 'T', the holy Torah given at Sinai — good?

- The answer is obviously supposed to be yes.
- We're "not even allowed" to ask it.
- **This is the less relevant question.**

The typical defensive move: separating the ideal from its practitioners. Examples:

- "Love Judaism, not the Jews"
- "I don't have a problem with Christ, only his fan club"
- "99% of the apples give a bad name to the other 1%"

This is the **Karaite-style defense**: the *book* is holy; it's only the commentaries/practitioners that are bad.

Two Problems with This Defense

1. **Empirical problem**: Maybe the Torah/religion *did* make people that way — you can't simply separate the text from its effects.

2. **The bigger problem — the "Banner" is irrelevant: No one should care about defending the abstract ideal/headline called "Torah" or "Judaism."** Defending the banner is:

- Not useful to anyone's actual life
- A matter of *kavod* (honor) at best
- Only relevant to people having fights on YouTube
- Not *emunah* (faith) in any meaningful sense — *emunah* is not about being a "fan" of a banner and protecting it from criticism

Illustrative Analogy: Islam

Whether the Quran is a good or bad book is irrelevant. What matters is that certain people want to kill you. Whether their behavior derives from the book or not is **tactically irrelevant** — proving the book bad doesn't change the practical situation. Similarly, if someone proves the book is really good and was just "corrupted," that information is **useless** — it changes nothing about lived reality.

Side Digression: Bracketing Theodicy

A student raises whether this argument is really about whether God is good. Theodicy is explicitly **bracketed** — this discussion is not about defending God's goodness. The impulse to defend the Torah's ideal comes from a prior commitment (God gave it, God must be good), but the goal is to move past that framing.

10. Dismissing the God Question as Irrelevant

Even granting that God gave the Torah, this doesn't answer the question.

Against the "God gave a good Torah, people ruined it" defense:

- If God is omniscient, He should have known how the Torah would be interpreted and practiced. A God who gives a Torah

that only produces bad outcomes is not a God worth defending (*Rachmana litzlan*).

Even if God is rendered "blameless" by this defense: **what - זאל ער לעכטן אין גן עדן — וואס איז דאס פאר מיר?** *?does that do for me God being blameless in paradise is irrelevant to the — (*"practical question of whether the Torah is good *for us

11. The Core Question Precisely Defined

Both sides of the debate constantly shift the question.

The question that matters: Is *this* Torah — the one that actually exists among the actual people who follow it, teach it, and live by it — good? Should I be happy with it?

The question that does NOT matter:

- Is the *idea* of the God who gave the Torah a good idea?
- Is the Torah a good *book* in the abstract?
- Was God's plan good?

These are "nice questions" but they are **not the question**, and people keep performing a "sleight of hand" (like media training: "answer the question you wanted to be asked, not the one you were asked").

Side Digression: Analogy to Christianity and the Crusades

Nobody really cares whether Christianity *as a doctrine* caused the Crusades. People judge the Crusaders by their actions. The abstract causal question is only interesting for political reasons, not for ethical evaluation.

12. The Pragmatic/Consequentialist Principle

Key claim: If a Torah is abstractly "good" but all its followers are bad → you should be a *kofe* (heretic) regarding that Torah and disregard all the apologetic defenses.

Conversely: If a Torah is abstractly "bad" but somehow causes all its followers to be good → there is at least a serious *tsad* (argument) that you should join that group, because **it works**.

Hypothetical illustration: Imagine a text originally about murder and rape, but the commentators and oral tradition transformed it into a system of charity and goodness. You should join that group — who cares what the *peshuto shel mikra* (plain meaning) originally was?

The decisive criterion is practical outcome, not textual or theological purity.

13. Torah Is Not a Book — It Is a Living Practice

Strong claim: The word "Torah" does not mean a book. Anyone who says Torah is a book is an *apikores* (heretic).

Talmudic proof (Masechet Kiddushin): Yannai HaMelech made the mistake of saying the Torah is a book — anyone can read it, so the sages are dispensable. The Gemara says *nizreka bo minus* (heresy was cast into him).

Reason: Torah she-bikhtav (Written Torah) without Torah she-be'al peh (Oral Torah) doesn't work. The Torah exists **in the people** who practice and transmit it, not on the page. Defending the *book* while the *people* fail is meaningless: "If not for the people that are good, I have nothing to do with the book."

14. Addressing the Counter-Argument: "Follow the Book, Not the People"

A student proposes: Even if the current practitioners are flawed, can't one follow the *book itself* (or the best historical interpreter, e.g., the Rambam) directly?

Response — this is Karaism reinvented: Bypassing the living tradition to follow only the text is structurally identical to Karaism.

Practical objections:

- It's very hard to be a student of a dead person (e.g., the Rambam). Possible in limited ways, but severely constrained.
- You'd be creating a *new* (or revived old) Judaism, not participating in the actual existing one.
- **This still doesn't answer the original question:** "Should I be happy with the Torah" means the Torah *as I was taught it*, not one I could hypothetically reconstruct from a good old book.

Side Point: The Torah Is Not the Only Good Book

Even according to the Rambam, the Torah is not the only good book in the world. There are perhaps five (or up to ~20) world-historically significant books with millions of followers, and they are all likely roughly comparable in quality ("erech as good as the Torah in the same way"). This is stated as a conjecture, not from deep knowledge of all traditions.

15. The Circularity Problem — What Is "Good"?

A **massive unresolved problem:** throughout this discussion, there has been a pretense that we know what "good" means and can evaluate whether the Torah (or any system) is good.

If you define "good" as whatever the Torah says, you are trapped in a circle: you can only be happy with the Torah because the Torah commands happiness, which is purely circular (*deha da bekatigatah de-katigatah*).

People in religious literature (e.g., *Likutey Shivos*) repeat such circular arguments without recognizing them as circular. There is no way out of this circularity yet, but the question must be asked from **outside** the system to be meaningful.

16. It Is Uncontroversial That There Are Bad Versions of Torah

It is **traditionally accepted** — not controversial at all — that there are bad ways to learn and practice the Torah. Sources:

- The Gemara: *"lo zakha, na'aseis lo sam hamaves"* (if one is unworthy, Torah becomes a potion of death)
- *"Yishtu talmidim u'mayim ra'im"* (students drink bad waters)
- *"Motzi'im divrei Torah l'minus"* (deriving heresy from Torah)
- Chazal's view that **Christianity is essentially a bad version/interpretation of the Torah** — not something external, but something that emerged from Torah "in the wrong way"

All opinions agree that it is theoretically possible for people to claim commitment to Torah while being horribly bad people, people whom even the Torah itself would condemn — yet who genuinely "came from" the Torah.

17. The Case of the Person Who Leaves a Corrupt Torah Community

Thought experiment: Someone grows up in a corrupt Torah community (e.g., was molested by a teacher). This person, through sincere moral reasoning — like a "pure version of Avraham Avinu" — concludes that what he experienced is wrong and leaves to become a non-Jew (*goy*).

The common religious response: "Your bad teacher doesn't represent the whole Torah; don't throw out the baby with the bathwater; you're foolish for leaving Judaism because of one bad leader."

This argument is absolutely wrong. Reasoning:

- There is **no Torah that exists apart from the Torah as it is actually taught and lived** by real people in real communities.
- The Midrash (connected to Purim) and a piyyut for Shavuot: the Torah said to God, *"Im ein Yisrael, ein Torah"* — if there is no Israel, there is no Torah. Torah "in Heaven" with no one practicing it is useless.
- Therefore, **if the only version of Torah someone encountered is a bad one, that person is correct to leave it.** He is not making a mistake. You might offer him a better version, but you cannot call him stupid.

18. The Converse Case: The "Orthoprax" Person Who Stays

The **reverse is equally true:** Someone who says "I don't know if the Torah's stories are historically true, but the way of life I was taught seems good — my father was a good person, my teachers were good people — so I want to continue living this way and raise my children in it" — **this person has made the correct and wise choice.**

- Whether *Maamad Har Sinai* literally happened is irrelevant to this person's justified decision.
- If the tradition is based on such stories, fine — he can affirm them too. But the foundation of his commitment is that **the people who transmitted it were genuinely good.**
- This is wisdom: doing the correct actions for the correct reasons.

19. Central Thesis: Goodness of the People Is What Matters, Not the Banner

Being good people is what actually matters. People constantly try to escape this by saying "I believe in the Torah, I have the right *emunot* (beliefs)" — but this is useless.

- If you are a bad person, **your children should become non-Jews,** and the "banner" of Torah commitment does not save you.
- Many people rely on having correct beliefs as a substitute for being good, and **their children do in fact leave Judaism** (*taka become goyim*).

20. What "Saved" Yiddishkeit — The Baal Shem Tov Debate

Side Digression: A Debate Observed

Did the Baal Shem Tov save Judaism, or did Torah "protect itself"?

The entire framing is "**la-la-land**" — people debating which **theory** (rationalist vs. mystical) saved the Torah are missing the point entirely.

What actually keeps the Torah alive is people being genuinely good through it. The Chassidic mythology that "before the Baal Shem Tov, Yiddishkeit was declining" simply means: the Baal Shem Tov was a **sincere person** who tried to become good using the Torah, whereas the establishment rabbis before him had become somewhat corrupt — using Torah for self-serving purposes rather than genuine moral improvement. If that's the case, people **should** leave such a corrupt version.

21. The Empirical Claim: Sincerity Predicts Continuity

An observable claim:

- **Where Torah teachers are sincere** — even if stupid or wrong — and genuinely trying to become better people through Torah, **their children remain Jewish.**

- **Where teachers are obviously insincere**, relying on the excuse that having correct beliefs (**emunos**) is sufficient, **their children leave Judaism.**

A nuance: sometimes you need a good **theory** (like Chassidus) so that people **can** believe in the Torah and use it to become good — if without such a framework they'd think the Torah is bad, they can't use it for moral growth. **But the theories are instrumental; what makes people good is their sincerity, not the theories themselves.**

Side Digression: Reference to Izhbitz

A listener raises a connection to the thought of Izhbitz (the Mei HaShiloach) — something like "he became a goy but kept Yiddishkeit." This is acknowledged but declined for elaboration, as it would lead to complications.

22. Acknowledging the Dangerous Implication

The argument so far creates a problem: by its own logic, it might be telling people from bad backgrounds to **leave Judaism** (**become goyim**), which is **rachmana litzlan** (God forbid). This tension is acknowledged directly.

23. Transition: Promising an Answer Through the Concept of Virtue

There is a **shtickel** (partial) answer — one considered genuinely useful — to both the main question (why be happy about receiving the Torah / what makes Torah good) and the dangerous implication. The answer requires an extended introduction (**hakdamah**) through the concept of **virtue** (**middot**), which will lead to the **siyum** (conclusion) of the broader argument.

The Nature of Virtue (**Middot**)

24. The Problem of Translating "Virtue"

- **Greek origin:** The Greek word **arete** means something like "excellence."

- **Latin:** "Virtue" is just a Latin translation of that Greek term.

- **Hebrew — **Middot Tovot**:** This is the traditional Jewish translation, but it is **inadequate as a definition.**

- **Middah** literally means "measure."

- The term likely derives from the **Rambam's (Maimonides') adoption of Aristotle's doctrine** of virtue as the mean between extremes — the correct "measure."

- But calling it a "good measure" (**middah tovah**) doesn't tell you **of what** or **to what end.**

Side Digression: Etymology of **Middot Tovot**

The Rambam used **middah** in **Peirush HaMishnah**; **Chazal** (the Sages) already used the word **middah** in a broad sense of "measure" (e.g., **Arba Middot B'Talmidim**, **Middah Tovah Merubah**). These usages are close to what the Greeks called virtues — measures of ways of acting — but the terminology still doesn't **explain the nature** of virtue.

25. Core Thesis: Character Virtue = A Trained "Like"

Character virtues are likes and dislikes — specifically, the love or liking of a **specific activity** (not a specific object). **Intellectual virtues** (e.g., knowing **how** to learn) are different from character virtues (e.g., **liking** to learn).

Illustration: The Litvish Yeshivah System

A **yeshivah** doesn't primarily teach you **to learn** (intellectual skill); it teaches you **to love learning** (character virtue). A "successful product" of a Litvish yeshivah loves to learn **regardless of other factors** — even religious observance.

Chassidish stories mock people who learn Torah while smoking on Shabbos, but this actually **proves the yeshivah succeeded:** it produced the **like** of learning, which is independent of **mitzvah observance**.

Side Digression: Chassidim vs. Litvaks

Chassidim do the same thing — they teach you to love singing **Menuchah V'Simchah**, davening with feeling, etc. The **real debate** between the two camps is **which virtues are more important** — not who has more **yiras shamayim**. This debate cannot be resolved by pointing to people who lack religious commitment; it can only be resolved by asking: **Is this kind of person a better person?** This is a serious question left unanswered here — only the **framework** is being provided.

26. The Fundamental Error: Confusing Virtue with Belief or with Sensory Pleasure

A **false dichotomy** that people commonly fall into:

The Two Wrong Options:

1. **"I believe in it"** — the intellectual/dogmatic level (e.g., "Torah learning is an ideal"). Many people hold this belief but don't actually love learning. These are people for whom **chinuch** (education) **failed.**

2. **"I just **stam** (merely) like it"** — reducing the like to a brute sensory preference, as if liking Torah is the same as liking orange juice.

The Correct Third Option: A ****New Kind of Like****

Virtue-training creates a **genuinely new capacity for liking** that didn't exist before. It is **not reducible** to:

- Pre-existing sensory pleasures (food, attention, comfort)

- Instrumental motivations (*kavod*, money, *nachas*)

- A mere belief or ideology

You are **born** with certain basic likes (food, pleasure, attention). Through *chinuch*, you acquire **new likes** — e.g., the love of Torah learning.

27. *Mitokh Shelo Lishma Ba Lishma* — The Mechanism of Acquiring New Likes

A developmental account:

1. **Beginning stage (*shelo lishma*)**: The activity of learning is initially connected to **external rewards** — candy, cheesecake on Shavuos night, *kavod*, parental *nachas*.

2. **Transition**: Because the external reward is only **artificially connected** to learning (it doesn't naturally follow from it), the learner eventually encounters **the internal goals of the activity itself** — e.g., understanding the *sugya* well.

3. **Mature stage (*lishma*)**: The person likes learning **for its own inherent good**, not for the external reward.

- This aligns with the ***Nefesh HaChaim*'s understanding of *lishma***: you like the thing itself.

- This is contrasted with a more "Chassidish" *pshat* of *lishma* which is characterized as more theoretical/abstract.

Key point: The Natural Trajectory

Staying focused on the candy while learning is **possible but unnatural** — it requires deliberate effort to *not* care about the *sugya*. The **natural** situation for anyone who genuinely likes learning is that they have come to appreciate **the good inherent in the activity itself**.

28. Rejecting the "Feeling" or "Sensory Taste" of Torah

A student raises the idea that perhaps there is a "taste" of Torah analogous to the taste of orange juice — some built-in sensory experience.

This is **firmly rejected**:

- There is **no sensory pleasure** in learning Torah. None.

- The orange juice analogy illustrates the **built-in, pre-existing** type of like — and that type simply **does not exist** for Torah.

- Any apparent "sensory" connection to Torah (cheesecake on Shavuos, *kavod*, etc.) is **artificial and external** — that's precisely the *shelo lishma* stage, not the real thing.

- The real like of Torah is a **new capacity** — not a sensory feeling but an appreciation of the activity's own internal goals.

The Categorical Difference Between Sensory and Non-Sensory Pleasure

29. The "Feeling" of Learning Is Not Sensory

The feeling or pleasure associated with learning is **not a sensory feeling**. When someone says "learning feels good," they are using the word "feel" in an **analogous sense**, not a literal sensory one. Understanding a *pshat* does not feel like sweetness on the tongue or any nerve-based sensory pleasure. There may be neurons firing, but these are **different neurons, different nerves** — they cannot be reduced to "I feel good" in the sensory sense. The "feeling good" of learning

is a **categorically different kind of feeling good** than that of drinking something sweet or getting drunk.

30. Critique of the Degel Machaneh Efraim and the Chassidic Confusion

A historical confusion: the **Degel Machaneh Efraim** (a Chassidic text) began discussing the "pleasure of learning," and this generated widespread confusion. The root cause: the Degel Machaneh Efraim, like most modern thinkers, **lacks the intermediate category** between sensory pleasure and the highest spiritual ideals. This intermediate category was well-known in the Aristotelian tradition but was forgotten once universities (and consequently the Jewish intellectual world) stopped reading Aristotle.

The resulting error has two steps:

- **Step 1**: People collapse all forms of liking into sensory pleasure (which is obviously wrong but widely assumed).

- **Step 2**: Since religious people still sense there must be something higher, but have no intermediate category, they **leap to the highest possible ideal** — *lishmah*, *dveikus*, God-connection — as the only alternative to base pleasure.

What is being discussed is **much simpler** than divine connection. The pleasure of learning is its own kind of thing — not sensory, and not necessarily the ultimate spiritual good either.

31. Is the Pleasure of Learning Separable from Learning Itself?

The liking involved in learning **cannot be separated from the learning** in the way that liking ice cream can be separated from the act of eating ice cream. The whole essence (*mehus*) of becoming a learner is that a new kind of liking has been **installed in you**. The liking is **part of the learning itself**.

The Degel Machaneh Efraim gets this particular point right: the liking is intrinsic to learning. Someone who merely fulfills the commandment of Torah study (*mekayem mitzvas talmud Torah*) without liking it is a *tzaddik* (righteous person) but **not a learner** (*lomed*). The yeshiva's educational mission has failed if it produces someone who studies without liking it. If the education succeeds, the student likes learning — and this liking is constitutive of being a learner.

Side Note: Bracketing the Normative Question

The question of whether this pleasure is *good enough* or whether it constitutes *lishmah* is explicitly **bracketed**. The Chassidim would say it's not sufficient — and that's not being argued with. The only point is that **when the Chassidim criticize** this pleasure by reducing it to sensory pleasure, **that criticism is wrong**. It can be criticized on other grounds, but not by collapsing it into base pleasure.

Side Digression: Student Challenges About Different Kinds of Liking Within Learning

A student raises a distinction between (a) the *cheshek* (desire/urge) to go learn (e.g., at 2 AM), and (b) the *geshmak* (delight) experienced while actually learning a Tosafos. This distinction is dismissed as **not relevant** (*lo ligabei inyan*) to the current purpose. Since the goal is only to define what a virtue is, all these sub-varieties fall into the same category. They would be interesting distinctions if discussing the virtue of learning in detail, but not now.

Side Digression: The Pizza Analogy and Its Rejection

A student proposes: "Since I once ate pizza, now I like pizza-eating" — suggesting that liking learning might work the same way as acquired taste for food. This analogy is **firmly rejected**. The two kinds of liking are being connected too closely. Examples must be kept **clearly distinct** to avoid confusion: eating and physical pleasures are one kind of liking; *kavod* (honor), *gaiva* (pride), and *ka'as* (anger) are another kind entirely.

32. Key Distinction: Sensory Pleasure vs. Social/Constructed Liking

A crucial distinction:

- **Sensory pleasures** (food, drink): natural, bodily, don't require teaching to enjoy.
- **Social/constructed likings** (kavod, gaiva): culturally taught, exist in the **relationship between people**, not located in the body in the same way. You have to be **taught** to like honor. It's a cultural institution. (A critical theory person would say it doesn't really exist.)

Torah learning belongs to the **second category** — it is the kind of thing that *kavod* is, not the kind of thing that food is. You need *chinuch* (education/training) to come to like it. It exists in a different "part of the soul."

Addressing the Objection: "But Food Tastes Also Require Training"

A student asks: if food taste also requires *chinuch* (acquired tastes), wouldn't it be the same? **No**. The teaching/training distinction was offered as **one difference** (*chiluk*), not as the defining or sole difference. Even if food preferences were entirely learned, the two kinds of liking would **still be categorically different**. They are felt differently, located differently in experience, and exist in different domains.

Addressing Another Objection: "One Is an Activity, One Is Liking an Item"

A student suggests the real difference is that one involves liking an **activity** and the other liking a **thing/item**. This is **emphatically rejected**: "Absolutely not! This is just a nice fantasy that people like to tell themselves." **Introspection** reveals these are totally different kinds of things.

33. Concluding Critique: The Flattening of "Liking" Into One Undifferentiated Category

A widespread conceptual error: people have invented a single, undifferentiated category called **"liking things"** and then treat all instances as equivalent — "You like soda, I like pizza, I like Torah." This is true only in the **broadest, most vacuous sense** of the word "like." It's analogous to saying "this is a table and that is a star — both are things." Technically true, but it obliterates all meaningful distinctions.

34. Extended Defense of the Categorical Difference

This is not a value judgment (not saying one should "care" more about one kind of pleasure). It is a purely descriptive, ontological claim: **sensory pleasure and the pleasure of learning Torah (or intellectual engagement) are fundamentally different kinds of things**, not merely different degrees or flavors of the same thing.

This is **the most basic fact** in the discussion — so basic that if someone doesn't see it, something has gone wrong in their philosophical foundations.

The Yellow-Marker/Blue-Marker Analogy

Two markers are obviously different; the question "why are they different?" is almost absurd — one is yellow, one is blue. Similarly, sensory pleasure and intellectual pleasure are self-evidently different.

Burden of Proof

The burden falls on whoever claims these pleasures are the same. The **default, commonsense position** is that they are different. Claiming sameness requires positive proof; claiming difference does not.

Accusation of Equivocation

The resistance comes from the fact that English uses the same word ("like," "enjoy," "pleasure") for both experiences. Using the same word does not make the referents identical. This is **equivocation** — a verbal trick, not a philosophical insight.

Side Digression: The Chair Analogy

A reductio: "My chair likes to be on the floor — it never jumps up." We use the word "likes" there too, but obviously the chair's "liking" is not the same as a human liking pizza. The shared word masks a total difference in kind.

The Five Senses as a Genuine Category

A sense is something that gives information about the outside world **in a way analogous to touch** — physical contact or interaction (light waves hitting the cornea, sound waves hitting the ear, etc.). Within the senses, different pleasures (taste vs. touch vs. hearing) are indeed different from each other, but they share a **family resemblance** — they are all sensory, all involve physical stimulation of a receptor.

Intellectual pleasure does not fit this category. "Which sense enjoys learning?" No one can answer, because it is not a sensory experience in the relevant way. "I don't know what it is, but I know I like it" — the liking is real but not being able to identify a sense organ is precisely the point — it is a **different kind of thing**.

Side Digression: Hearing a Joke vs. Hearing a Sound

The **physical pleasure of a pleasant sound** (what babies respond to) = genuine sensory pleasure of hearing. **Appreciating music** or **getting a joke** = not sensory pleasure; it is cultural, social, learned. Different cultures find different jokes funny. This is analogous to intellectual pleasure, not to sensory pleasure.

Side Digression: Alcohol/Drinking

Liking to drink alcohol (where the taste is unpleasant) is a good example of a non-sensory pleasure masquerading under the same word — the enjoyment of getting drunk is not a taste-pleasure.

The "Plenjoyment" Thought Experiment

To break the spell of the shared word: call sensory pleasure "enjoyment" and non-sensory pleasure **"plenjoyment."** Once you use different words, the objection evaporates — no one would confuse the two. The entire confusion is **purely linguistic**.

Further Illustrations

- **Marriage vs. sex:** The enjoyment of being married is not the same thing as the enjoyment of having sex. Both are called "pleasure," but the word means **literally something different** in each case.

Is that: (די קינדער): נחת פון די קינדער; Yiddish) **Nachas from children** - the same as enjoying sex? Obviously not. Some Chassidic texts

make such a *drash* (homiletical connection), but this is nonsense at the literal level. Perhaps both are "selfish" — but .that is a shared property, not an identity

- **Floor and ceiling analogy:** They share some features (both are flat surfaces in a room), but they are plainly two different things.

Diagnosis of the Confusion

The students' resistance stems from **philosophical brainwashing** — centuries of philosophers (and certain yeshiva traditions, e.g., "a Kotzker chassid") who collapsed all pleasures into one category. This is a deeply entrenched but **false assumption** absorbed uncritically.

35. Key Implication: Non-Sensory Pleasures Must Be Taught

Having established the categorical difference:

- **Sensory pleasures are natural** — they do not need to be taught. Humans (and babies) respond to them automatically.

- **Non-sensory pleasures (intellectual, spiritual, relational) must be trained/taught.** They are not instinctive.

This insight is attributed to **Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon) and Plato** — the convergence point of the Jewish and Greek philosophical traditions.

Synthesis: Training, Culture, and the Answer to the Question

36. The Necessity of Training for Non-Sensory Likes

Sensory pleasures (e.g., food) are natural and need not be taught, but higher-order likes — including the love of Torah and learning — **must be trained into a person.** This is attributed to both Shlomo HaMelech (Mishlei) and Plato. Without training, a person will simply never come to like these things. There is no shortcut.

37. The Insufficiency of Argument Alone (and the Sufficiency of Training Alone)

Two complementary points:

- **Even a perfect rational argument for why Torah is good would not make someone *like* it.** They might agree intellectually, but liking is a different category from assent.

- **Conversely, training can make someone like Torah even without providing the argument.** The yeshiva system is cited as evidence: yeshivot typically do not explain *why* Torah is good but rather tell students to believe it — and yet they succeed in making students like learning.

Side Digression: Yeshiva Training Overshoots Its Intended Target

An interesting phenomenon: yeshiva training often produces a love of *learning in general*, not merely obedience to the rosh yeshiva. Students trained in yeshiva come to enjoy learning things the yeshiva itself would not approve of. This demonstrates that what is acquired is a *general disposition* (love of learning), not loyalty to a specific authority. This is compared to the concept of **lo lishmah** — an imperfect entry point that leads to something genuine.

38. Culture *Is* Training (Chinuch = Tarbut = Culture)

Every culture that has ever existed trains its members to like certain things and dislike others. This is literally what the word "culture" means. The Hebrew word **tarbut** (culture) is etymologically connected to chinuch (education/raising). The Gemara's phrase **"kasheh tarbut ra'ah betokh beito shel adam"** is cited — tarbut means the raising/formation of a person, not in the animal sense, but in the distinctly human sense of cultivating *middot* (character traits/dispositions).

Side Clarification: Middot and Virtues

Middot (virtues/character dispositions) are exactly what culture produces. The word "virtue" technically just means "a good one" (a good de'ah/disposition), so a de'ah can exist without being a middah tovah. Culture shapes de'ot; whether they are good is a separate evaluative question.

39. Childhood Training Determines the Trajectory of Life

Both Mishlei and Plato/Aristotle teach the "scary conclusion" that **what you are trained to do as a child will remain with you for life.** The verse **"Chanokh la-na'ar al pi darko, gam ki yazkin lo yasur mimenah"** (Proverbs 22:6): train a youth in his way, and even in old age he will not depart from it.

Examples:

- Chassidishe schools teach respect for Rebbes → graduates always respect Rebbes (possibly a different Rebbe, but the *middah* of emunat chachamim persists).

- Litvishe schools teach critical thinking → graduates retain that critical disposition.

Side Digression: Can Someone Fully Switch?

Very few people entirely switch; most people *refine* rather than replace. Full replacement is neither realistic nor necessary. The goal is refinement, not wholesale transformation.

40. What It Actually Means to Be Happy About Receiving the Torah

"Being happy to have received the Torah" means being happy with the virtues/dispositions that your culture (Yiddishkeit) trained into you — things you were made to like that you would never have liked without that training.

This is the **only coherent kavanah** one can have when saying **"asher bachar banu mikol ha-amim v'natan lanu et Torato."** It cannot mean happiness about a book or a set of propositions; it must mean happiness about the formation of character.

Side Digression: The Misframed Question

A common deflection: people reframe the question "Are you happy with the Torah you received?" into the hypothetical "Would I have become religious if I'd been born in Honolulu?" This is **not the question being asked.** The question concerns your *actual* formation, not a counterfactual one. People persistently make this substitution.

41. The Framework for Teshuvah and Refinement

Since the question is about your *actual* training:

- **To the extent your trained virtues are good → you should be happy.**

- **To the extent they are not good → you should do teshuvah.**

The Gemara *"noach lo l'adam shelo nivra mishennivra, v'achshav shenivra, y'fashpeish b'ma'asav"* is cited: now that you exist, examine your deeds.

The Method of Refinement

The practical work of philosophy/teshuvah/growing up:

1. **Identify what you were trained to like** (virtues you would never have acquired without your culture).
2. **Distinguish the good from the bad** within those trained dispositions.
3. **Make the good interpretations govern the bad ones**, rather than vice versa.

This connects to the doctrine of the mean (Middas HaMitzvot / Aristotelian mean): **there is no entirely bad trait; every disposition has a "too much," a "too little," and a proper measure.** The question is always *when, where, how, and how much.*

42. Concrete Example: The Lakewood Virtue

A detailed example to illustrate the refinement process:

The trained disposition from Lakewood culture: "We are the best, we know the truth, and we don't care what anyone else thinks."

This is a **genuine virtue** — a way of being, a disposition that was cultivated.

- **Good interpretation (virtue of courage/integrity):** Having a backbone, a sense of self, not being a *chanaf* (sycophant/people-pleaser who does whatever others want). A person needs some inner conviction and independence.

- **Bad interpretation (vice of egoism):** Not caring about other people at all, dismissing everyone outside your group.

The "bad talmid of Lakewood" gets the vice of egoism. The "good talmid" gets the virtue of integrity/courage. **The raw material is the same trained disposition; the difference is which interpretation governs.**

There is uncertainty about the precise name for this virtue — "courage" may not be exactly right since it traditionally involves facing danger — and **integrity** is tentatively settled on as a working term, while noting the concept needs further refinement.

43. The Role of Practical Wisdom (Phronesis) in Applying Virtue

Key principle: There is no way to apply any virtue correctly without using *seichel* (practical wisdom / **phronesis**). The virtue of integrity/backbone must be applied **in the right cases, in the right way, and in the right amount** — calibrated to the situation.

- **Negative example:** Applying it in excess makes one a *gas ruach* (an arrogant/inflated person) — which is how "some other people" misapply it.

- **Positive outcome:** Applying it correctly is what it means to become a *mensch* (a morally mature person) as an adult.

44. The Precondition for Receiving Torah

Central claim: Only once a person has developed this properly calibrated virtue of integrity — becoming a *mensch* — do they have the **right** to receive the Torah. **Without this prior moral development, receiving Torah "only made you worse"** — Torah without the foundation of good character is counterproductive and even harmful.

45. The Unanswered Question

A student raises (or re-raises) the question: **Does it still have to be *this* Torah specifically?** (i.e., could the principle work with a different moral/legal system?)

This question is explicitly **declined**. Students are told to think about it themselves. Only a cryptic remark is offered: "Didn't have to be nothing" — suggesting perhaps that *something* was necessary, but leaving the specific identity of that "something" deliberately open.

The lecture concludes on this deliberately unresolved note, leaving the question as an exercise for further reflection.

Full Transcript

Should We Be Happy We Received the Torah? A Critical Examination of Simchat Torah and Religious Obligation

Chapter 1: The Central Question – Genuine Joy or Religious Performance?

Framing the Problem in Two Languages

Instructor: We can say that I have a question, or I often want to answer, but mainly a question, and my question is if we should be happy that we got the Torah, which means, or another question, the way to say it in the frum [religious/observant] language would be why we should be happy. But in the non-frum language, it's the same thing as if we should be happy.

Because we have this Yom Tov [holiday] called Zman Matan Torateinu [the time of the giving of our Torah – referring to Shavuot]. And supposedly the Olam [world/community] was happy because they received the Torah.

Now I'm not so sure. Let's be real. What's this pretending? Right? This is their pretense. Okay, I'm going to ask you about the Torah. I don't know if it would make a whole Yom Tov.

The Reality Check: Torah as Source of Problems

But now I'm the killer, I'm going to be the nominator is the master, be real. So I'm best made, I'm not doing them, I want, I want, I want, I want Sarah, see if she's been out to my house.

You don't have to drug the kids anymore. And I heard you're strong, by the way. Yom Tov is over, bro. Right after Shachar [morning prayers], it's over. Whatever, okay.

It's a good question, no?

Student: Yeah, yeah, okay.

Instructor: Serious question. We're adults. We're allowed to ask normal questions. Chvay tzemes medrash'tum [we need to be honest], and if not, follow the pretendant. But that's why we come here.

It seems to me that Torah is a source of problems, not a source of solutions. Right? How do we make chayim [life]? Okay, it's a problem. We have to make chayim. Then you're not happy.

Chapter 2: The Midrash of Refusal – Turned Inward

The Deal-Breaker Exercise

Instructor: I once had a sif and shviz [Shavuot night learning session] by night in my house. I told everyone that everyone knows the story that the all the going [nations] and everyone said there's one thing that's a deal breaker, right? Can't have that.

So I said, imagine if they come to you, could you think of one thing that you would say no because of it? I got a big list. Then we'll be fine, okay. We said otherwise we wouldn't have gotten it either, right? That's the trick.

Real talk, real talk. They said, I didn't want to hear. I heard, I heard once that if they would have told them we would have never gotten the title.

Student: White collar crimes too?

Instructor: Yeah, only do it when nobody sees. Okay.

The Seriousness of the Question

So this is a serious question. I think it's a serious question. Must come to a serious question. I told this question to my daughter. She said, so everyone thinks that's already an answer. Maybe there's no answer. You don't understand, you don't understand, you don't understand.

Chapter 3: First Proposed Answer – The Torah as Mold and Structure

The Student's Interpretation

Student: Explain. If you would just allow yourself just to be like, just always able to do everything, right? Like the internet, which is just you're available for everything and anything at any time and nothing to mold you to a specific thing, right? That's not a life.

So the Torah is like this thing that hones you in.

Instructor: So you're saying that, Berksham [with God's name], there's a thing. A thing.

In other words, you're interpreting my question as the question which most people think like the guy in the what's-his-name's book said without a God everything was permitted and you're coming to say that seems like most Eden [people] when I tell them this question they're interpreting what right what's the other side like what would have happened if it would not be a Torah and the answer that most frum people think it would be is that everything would be permitted or something like we would be able to do what I could give you the exact language we would be able to do whatever we wanted.

Student: Yeah, right, yeah, yeah, we'd be wild, right?

Instructor: That's the outcome of being able to do whatever you want, don't have to be down.

Student: No, it's telling somebody, meaning somebody who has the terror [Torah], ask him right what what would you do it would be wild you know what I'm saying.

Instructor: Yeah, yeah, that's what they were saying, right? Right? Not thinking of an alternative to that.

Clarifying the Blob Metaphor

I asked a very broad question, so you give a certain interpretation of the question, which is probably what most

people, at least in some way, think. And then you give an answer to that interpretation.

I don't mean because everything would be mutter [permitted]. It's not really what I'm saying. I think it's just a toilet. You'd be free to do whatever you want.

Student: No, it's a way of, no, it's the mold of this chayim [life], meaning you're just a blob, right? And in order to make you, let's say, into a table or into a something, right? And not just to be anything.

Instructor: But this blob is a name for free will, right? For being able to do whatever you want. That's what we mean when we say that, right? That'd be nothing or what some people think is everything, right? It's like being able to choose whatever I wanted to want, whatever I wanted to do whatever I want. That's basically what it is, or you have a different shot of what it is.

Student: That's what I thought it was also.

The Computer Science Analogy

Instructor: But that's only if you interpret that the Torah is very restrictive, right? I don't know if it needs to make your life restrictive. I don't know if it needs to be restrictive. It's just telling you what the good way is to be.

Anyway, it's not all of them, it's one of them, right? Or at least, not infinitely all of them. Maybe it's a lot of them, but not all of them.

Student: I mean, let's just say the old said, there's no lobbying, let's say, yeah, just do this and this and this and this. Let's say the goal is to be a computer scientist, right? So I'm telling you to do this and this and this and this and this, and then you become a computer scientist, okay? So now you mold it into a computer scientist, right? That's a good thing. In other words, that's the goal, right?

Versus not having anything, and then you just, one day you're on the couch, the next day you're on the beach, the next day you're playing guitar, right? Just nothing ever because you're able to be everything, so it's different than nothing. That's all I'm trying to say.

Chapter 4: Critique of the Structure Argument

The Limitation of the "Any Structure" Defense

Instructor: But it doesn't have to be Zotoid [this Torah] for that reason. Very good. So that would be a good argument for something, a something. It's not a very good argument for this specific something, not an argument.

I can still say, it becomes harder to say a little bit, but I can still say something like, I could still have certain criticisms of specific things, like say, I don't actually have an answer for this question, but I could say something like:

Did we need this thing about being the best, about having this advice, about not marrying wherever you want, only people from a specific, how do you call it, tribe? Maybe that's just the cause of most of our problems. Maybe we should tell ourselves to blame for that. But anyways.

Student: Yeah, like...

Instructor: In other words, all the particular things. Or maybe even, maybe even if someone says, well, you need certain particular things, we might not be happy with specific things. Maybe there are some things that are bad.

The Instructor's Honest Position

Maybe there are some parts of, I mean maybe there's some parts of the Toyota [Torah] that cause us problems and are the source of issues. We should be sad about them at least. We should look for solutions. Are you so happy about it?

By the way, I'm, I don't know, I don't have an answer this question. I think that there are parts in the Toyota [Torah] that are bad for us, as far as I can tell, and to say that it would have been better to have a different one, that was a comparative question, like is there a different one that's better, you have to weigh all the options, but at least in the, and that's not, I don't think that's really the question we should ask.

The question we should ask is it true that everything, the Toyota [Torah], and the Toyota [Torah] means something very broad here, right, the whole Masada [tradition] and everything, right, and maybe it's only if you include all of that, there are definitely some parts of it that are not helpful, that are even the opposite of helpful.

The Request for Examples

Student: Like?

Instructor: Like? Everyone should think of their example. You want me to tell you my problems?

Student: No, tell me a problem that is like a universal problem.

Instructor: There's no universal problem.

Chapter 5: The Problem of Defending the Torah's Ideal: Why We Should Ask Better Questions

A Concrete Example – The Problem of Chosenness and Pride

I mean, universal problems, yeah, like, for example, with something that I think is a problem, is this thing with being so special. I think that *Atah Bechartanu* [the liturgical phrase "You have chosen us," expressing Jewish chosenness] is a big problem. I'm not saying it's not true, but I said that it's a big problem that leads to some very bad *middos* [character traits], which are not helpful.

But *ga'avah* [pride, arrogance] is not a good *middah* [character trait], and *ga'avah* about being with *Yiddish* [being Jewish] doesn't make it better. At least not when it's overdone. Maybe we have a *shalef middercham tsui* [unclear Yiddish phrase, possibly "a measure of moderation"], maybe there's a *middah beinonis* [moderate measure] of *ga'avah*. Okay, some pride is important. I think it's true. I don't think a person could live without some pride, including pride in his people or so on.

But I think that too much of it is definitely horrible and leads to very bad results. And therefore, and since this is something very integral to *Yiddishkeit* [Judaism], it's very hard to imagine *Yiddishkeit* without it. It's not like something that you could easily—you could try, many people have tried to refine it and explain it better, but it's at least a challenge for almost everyone, for everyone basically, besides for people to just embrace it like we should take any bad *middah* if it's in the Torah, if we could have an excuse for the Torah for it. But that's something that's a problem and it actually causes us many problems.

The Practical Consequences: Anti-Semitism and Jewish Responsibility

Like half of the problems we have with other nations is just because of our bad *middos*, and we have to be real, right?

The anti-Semitism—half of it, half of anti-Semitism is the *goy's* [non-Jew's] fault, but the other half is *Yidden's* [Jews'] fault.

I don't know why am I saying this, cut it out of the video. Okay, then we get—I'm not—I don't want—okay, I'm gonna soon, in a minute we're gonna talk about this. It's like the Torah, that's what I said when I say the word Torah, to show that God is not great because all the things, whatever, right now.

Now, and I think, very good, very good, I'm talking about this.

Student: No, I don't think it's not at all. I actually think that that argument is the correct argument, and we should take it seriously.

Instructor: Why? I'll tell you why. Because—

Student: I don't know that argument, so...

Instructor: Okay, I know what he means. Now, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. This is not *mareh mekomos* [source references], right? This *shiur* [class/lesson] is not about *mareh mekomos*. We don't have to know anything. No prerequisites. Only what I'm discussing.

Why am I—I should stop saying this *shiur*. It's causing me issues. No, let's say it's very clear and correctly.

Chapter 6: Refining the Core Question: Should We Be Happy We Have the Torah?

Well, we started with a question. Question is, should we be happy that we have the Torah? Or why are we happy? More of a way of asking the same question.

Now, we have to refine the question a little bit. We discussed, because it's very general, it doesn't—most of what we can do really is to refine questions randomly.

Disposing of the "Easy Mode" Version: The Freedom Fantasy

One way of talking, what Ari talked about was, does this mean like—like, this funny imagination that most *frum* [religiously observant] people have, and maybe most people have in general in regards to their little, whatever culture they have, is like, without this, I would have been more free. I would have been able to do whatever I wanted.

And the answer to that, I think, is relatively trivial:

First: You wouldn't be able to do whatever you wanted because you don't know what you want. That goes back to a different *shiur* where what you want is not a good source for anything, I think.

And secondly: It's not good to do whatever you want. It's another word for doing nothing.

Okay, now those are very good points, very good. So we don't—not really talking about them. But I'd said it's that's—that's easy mode, right? Because instead of asking a specific question, which was the question we started with, which is why we people in Lakewood in YouTube 2025 should be happy, or should we be happy with having received *Torah*, you're asking a general question: should human beings have a culture? Should we have laws? Of course the answer is yes.

So we have tradition, that's a more complicated question, we can get to that. But really the heart—which is not a question to say easy questions, right? We should ask the hard questions, which is: should it be happy that he has this *Torah*, which includes all of these books?

Right, now we have to refine that question a little more. And this also, I think it's also a key for a solution. It's not only making the problem, but I think it's important.

Chapter 7: Splitting the Question: The Ideal vs. The Reality

Then we can split this question also into a bunch of questions. In other words, we can split at least to the two questions.

Question A: Is the Ideal of Torah Good? (The "Banner" Question)

One is like the question that most people think that they're asked when they ask this question and they get defensive about it. I also am getting defensive about it, right? Which is—being defensive is depending on which context. But the question is like there's this ideal ideology belief, something like that, which we like believe in the Torah—like you say "the Torah" with the capital T-H-E and capital T—and it's questions on it like: are you happy with it? Is it good? Almost the same question.

And of course the answer has to be that it's good. We're not even allowed to ask that question, or at least we don't allow ourselves to ask that question. And I also think it's a less relevant question.

The Typical Defensive Move: Separating Ideal from Practice

And then we could say like this: let's say if that would be the question, then we could have this question, this difference between—how does it go?—love Judaism and not the Jews, or like the Christians say, love Christ and not the Christians, or like that. Let's say, I don't have a problem with Christ, only with his fan club, right? That would be like an answer, right? That's a good answer for people that think that the primary question is to defend some ideal of the Torah—capital T-H-E and—or the whatever thing he believes in.

And since there's some people that, you know, like 99% of the apples give a bad name to the other 1%, so he's worried about the bad name of this headline thing, so he's going to justify it, he's going to make apologies for it, he's going to say, oh, you know some *Yid* [Jew] that's bad, yeah, but that's not *Yiddishkeit*, God made him bad, the *Yiddishkeit* was trying to make him good, it's he's bad, he's a bad *Yid*, right? Same joke, right?

Critique of the Defensive Move

Now what's the problem with this argument? Is that a true Scotsman argument? Sort of. What's the problem with this argument? What's the problem that I have with this argument? Or if some people—

Student: How do we know it didn't make you that way?

Instructor: Okay, no problem. Maybe it did. And of course, there's ways in which it did. But I have a bigger problem with this argument, which is that **I don't care about this headline.**

I am not here—I don't think anyone should care. When I say I don't care, I think you should not care. You should not care about the banner that says "Judaism." All the banners, that just should be good. Who cares what's happening from there? What are we going to gain out of having that banner be right?

Okay, there's like a *emunah* [faith]—people think that *emunah* means to be a big fan of that banner and to make sure that it doesn't get sullied by any arguments or anything. But I don't see how that's useful to anyone. It's a question of

kavod [honor]. I don't know what it's a question of. It doesn't seem to be useful.

That's not a question you should be asking. You should never be asking if this headline thing called *Yiddishkeit* or Torah or whatever it is that you're defending is good or bad. Why would anyone—to whose life is this question relevant? Only to people who are having fights on YouTube. But other than that, *lema'an ha'kavana* [for what purpose/to what end].

Student: Can I just say one thing? I know you're not saying these words, but are you also saying that *lema'an zeh* [for this purpose], in the time was the *Rishonim* [early medieval rabbinic authorities], all these bad things in this *lema'an* wouldn't come out. Is that what you're saying?

Instructor: No, what I'm saying is, even imagine you could have—if you would convince me, okay, that all the bad—now maybe there's a *mitzvah* [commandment] to convince yourself of that, but it's not the question that I care about.

The Karaite-Style Defense and Why It's Irrelevant

You convince me that all the bad things that you find in—let's say someone would be like a Karaite-style argument, right? So there's a bunch of bad things that we assume are bad—again, we can discuss if they're bad or not, but we're just assuming—there's a bunch of bad things in religion so-and-so, in state so-and-so, and group so-and-so. And now I have a problem: this is a bad group because they're full of bad things.

So someone comes and says, look, I have *hasbara* [explanation] for you. This group, they're not really about what they're doing. They're really about this book that they claim to believe in, which nobody really opens or cares what it says. Nobody in that group cares. But suddenly we care. And that book is really very high. It just happens to be there's a lot of *mefarshim* [commentators] on that book that are bad. But you should really hold of this book because it's only the commentaries that are bad, but the book itself is good and says only good things.

And I'm going to answer this guy: why in the world should I care about what these people claim to be about? I don't care about what they claim to be about. I care what they were actually about. Now this is a bad group of people.

Illustrative Analogy: Islam and the Irrelevance of Textual Defense

People seem to keep on getting confused, right? Is Islam a problem? I don't care if the Quran is a good book or a bad book. I've read it and it's not—I've read it and it's not the point. But I don't care. That's not the discussion. They seem to want to kill me, so I'm not a fan of them. That's all.

Whether it's from this book or that book, maybe it's a tactical thing. Could we convince them that the book is wrong? It makes no difference to my life. And people get stuck with this because if we could prove that their book is bad, that helps me somehow. But if someone says, you know, someone comes and says, you know that really the book was great, just someone else corrupted it—okay, and now what? What should I do with this information? There's nothing I can't do anything with it.

Chapter 8: Distinguishing from Theodicy

Okay, but it's always a question of what the argument originally was. If the argument is God's not good—so wait, first we're talking—I'm not talking about God being good. This is not a *shiur* in theodicy. Same thing. I don't think that when—very good.

So if you're interested in defending some God or something like that, because we already believe that God gave it and He must be good—

Should I Be Happy With the Torah? The Question of Practical vs. Abstract Evaluation

Chapter 9: Defining the Real Question – Torah as Living Practice, Not Abstract Text

The Constant Misdirection: What Question Are We Actually Asking?

Instructor: I think that people, I think that people right away tend to shift the conversation to the wrong question. The question that we want to know when we ask these questions is: is this good?

When I ask you the question "should I be happy?" I'm going to tell you what I meant with the question. I think that people get very easily confused—both sides of the discussion get very easily confused with the question. When I come and I say, should we be happy that we got the Torah? Right? I mean literally that. I mean this Yitzchak [Isaac] and this Torah. The one that actually exists amongst the actual people who are following it or teaching it and so on.

I don't mean a different question, which is a very nice question. Like, I'm with you. It's a good question. Is the idea of the God that gave the Torah and had this plan, was it a good plan? Is he a good God? Is the Torah a good book? Those are nice questions, but they're not the questions that I asked. I don't think I meant to ask them.

We shift. That's why we keep on noticing this—people always shift questions that you ask as if you meant something else. And if you actually remain very mystic and you say, "well that's hard to think what you really wanted to know," you'll notice that you never wanted to know that question.

The Christianity and Crusades Analogy

Instructor: Same thing like I said, it's easier to think about—nobody cared if Christianity is the cause of the Crusades or not. If these **chevra** [group/people] with the Crusades, we don't like them. **Chevra** that do other things, we do like them. So now is there a question of why is this abstract question so interesting? It's not so interesting. It's of course interesting also for political reasons, but the question that I'm asking is not that question.

The Pragmatic Criterion: Does It Work?

Instructor: And I think that if there would be such a Torah which is in itself somehow we could know that it's very good, that all these apologetics are true, this ideal is great, but all the people that follow it are somehow bad—I say that you should be a **kofer** [heretic] in that Torah and you should disregard all the **teritzim** [apologetic answers] because it's not relevant.

And vice versa, I think that if there's a Torah that's bad theoretically but somehow causes all the people to be good—now of course this is complicated because how do you know what's good and bad, okay, but imagine that this would be possible—I think you should, there's at least a very serious thought that you should become part of that group because it seems to be doing good for them.

Who cares if they're—imagine there would be like a text that everyone agrees that originally it was just about murder and rape, and somehow the **meforshim** [commentators] came

and said, "no, it's about being a good guy and giving **tzedakah** [charity]." So we should become part of that group. Who cares what really the **tzedakah** was? That's only if—

Student: **Lamei said** [unclear phrase], if it works.

Instructor: Yeah, yeah, yeah, if it works. Because that's the much more interesting question. When I ask about the Torah, I don't ask about some—it's not a science question, right? It's a question about ethics. It's a question about the good. Torah is a system of how to live. It's not a system of telling us a story that happened, whether the actual story of **Maamad Sinai** [the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai] or some truths about God. Those are totally separate questions. We're asking about certain ways of living. If these are a good way of living, then that's all.

Torah Exists in People, Not in Books

Instructor: I wish that in the **piyut** [liturgical poem], it says in the—it says in the **piyut**, I make things very simple. If it's intertwined, then you should achieve it until it becomes simple. Very simple. Not **pashut** [simple/simplistic].

I don't believe in the Torah as an abstract thing. I think the question that's interesting is the one of the actual one which exists between—in the people, not in the book.

Student: I don't understand something. Why can't you say abstractly whatever, really the **meforshim** [commentators], the Torah is like a disaster, mentally corrupted. So explain what type of God is that God that didn't know—

Instructor: What do you mean, what type of God is the God that gives you to screw everything up?

Student: By the way, yeah, useless.

Instructor: What, useless?

Student: Yeah, you're just used to the—

Instructor: No, I'm asking you, is that the question? Is that your question, that you shouldn't have—

Student: No, no, no, that was just a throwaway argument. Delete that from the record.

The Distraction of Abstract Theological Questions

Instructor: That was not the interesting thing. Is that I don't think that this question is a distraction. You're confusing me like many people are good at debates. They're big Christians, but they do sleight of hand. They instead of answering your question, they make you think that you answer a different question and they have a good answer on that question and they answer it. Like media training, right? Answer the question you wanted to be asked, not the one you asked.

I think that when I ask the question, "should I be happy with the Torah," which is sort of the same question, "should I follow it," right? If it's good, I'm happy with it, I'll follow it, right? If it's not good, I won't follow it. The question I want to know—

Student: No, no, no, no. Okay, okay, wait, wait, wait. I'm not following the people.

Instructor: No, okay, okay, okay. I don't believe in the concept of a Torah existing without the people.

Student: No, no, no, it does not. No, it does not.

Instructor: It does not. It does not. Okay, I'll subscribe by the next year. Hello, you're pushing away the thing. 99% of people made mistakes. Fine, listen to me, listen to me, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. You're jumping around, you're jumping around, you're jumping around.

I say that it's distraction. People distract by saying, "okay, but the book is so good." I have news for you: if none of the people that are good, then I have nothing to do with the book. I don't care about the book. That's what I say. The question that I actually want to know—okay, now if you want to tell me that you have a secret way—

Student: No, but listen, listen to what I must—listen, all the people are—

The Talmudic Proof: Torah Is Not a Book

Instructor: Because the word *Torah* doesn't mean a book. If anyone told you it as a book, they're an *apikores* [heretic]. Curse them. That in the *Gemara* [Talmud], if someone just thought as a book, *nizreka bo minus* [heresy was cast into him]. The *Torah* is not a book. The *Torah* is people that do it.

I make it for you *tishkach Torah* [you will forget the Torah]. *Nishmad* [it will be destroyed]. *Yannai HaMelech* [King Yannai] never made a mistake. Is that there is a book? Anyone that wants to read it should read it. I'm a bad guy, but who cares? I killed all the *chachamim* [sages], but there's still the book. That's a *gemul* [consequence]. But why? Because this Torah doesn't work. The Torah is not a book.

And maybe there's a book called the Torah, and maybe God gave that book, and maybe you could defend it as a very nice book, but no, there's no such a thing. That's not what we mean to say when we say Torah, or when we ask, "we should be happy with the Torah." We don't mean, is that a good book?

The "Follow the Book, Not the People" Counter-Argument

Instructor: Now, you came up with a nice idea, which is okay, *maskil* [enlightened person], but maybe I could be the first one to follow that book which is a good book according to the apologetics which switched the question, and I'll be a good person by following the book. Okay, that's what you're saying. Then why did God give such a—wait, wait, forget about the questions on God. We're not worrying about God. He's worrying about him.

But then it's such a confusion. That's a *kasha al Hashem* [question on God], that's a *kasha* on God. But we're not interested in justifying God. We're interested in finding a good way to live.

So you're asking that even though all the people, or assuming that the people that are actually teaching this book—right, you have to remember, but when I say people following it, maybe people teaching it, right? People teaching the book don't understand it. Mr. Ari got on the edge to his society. And since those people themselves are more that the book is better than them, right? Obviously that's what everyone that believes in the Torah will say, that the book is better than them in some sense. I'm going to be following the book and not them, right? Be a *talmid* [student] of the Torah and not of the *lomdei Torah* [students of Torah].

So that's another version of *Karaism*, right? You noticed, right? You just reinvented *Karaism*, right? And so that's not an argument. That's just me making fun of you.

The Practical Limitations of Following a Book Without Living Teachers

Instructor: But the problem with this is that I don't actually believe that this works. I mean, it might work in a very limited way. But even though there was a sense that it works, it only works in the sense that you do find one person who thinks he's

a good person. If you say, like you say, the Rambam [Maimonides] said that 99% of people don't understand, so you're at the coast of the Rambam. So the Rambam is there. It's a kind of problem.

Student: I didn't say you have to have a live person.

Instructor: So you're not part of the *Yiddishkeit* [Judaism] of the lake. When you're part of a new *Yiddishkeit*, or an old one called Rambam, or any one, whatever it is, your old book they decided is good, and you're trying to be a student of this person, it's quite hard to be a student of that person. It's possible somewhat, in limited ways it's possible. You might be able to do that.

But just to go back to the question, that's not the question that I asked, right? That's again not going to satisfy me, because when I say, "should I be happy with the Torah," I mean the one I was taught, right? I don't mean one that I could invent, because I found a good book that seems to be a good book, and there's no people that actually follow it, or maybe very few. But I'm interested in that book.

The Torah Is Not the Only Good Book

Instructor: I have tons of good books for you. *Veyafeh* [and it's good] to get the books. It's so easy to write a good book. It's not that much easy—I'm exaggerating—but there's five good books, not only one. We have to be real. The Torah, even according to the *Rambam*, is not the only good book. Someone tells you it's the only good book, maybe they just didn't read any other good books, which is—I'm not saying there's not many other good books. Maybe there's five. I think it's very hard to write a world historical good book. It's not simple.

In reality, how many books are there that have a million people following them? Maybe five, right? Okay, twelve if you count. A number less than twenty, I think. Okay, but I'm pretty sure all of them are as good as the Torah in the same way. Not that I know. I'm making this argument not out of knowledge. I'm just—but the most important thing is—okay, I didn't say.

The Fundamental Problem: What Is "Good"?

Instructor: I pretend in this whole discussion that we know what is good and we can decide if the good book is good. Of course. Otherwise, nothing works, right? If we can't decide what is good, then we don't have anywhere to start with anyways. Of course we have to do that. But that's the important question. Of course that's a big question. No, I didn't solve that at all.

If you just define good as whatever that book says, then again we're stuck in a loop that doesn't help us. We can't be happy with it either. We can only be happy because it says you should be happy, so you should be happy with it. But that's just circular. That's just the Rebbe who said you should believe that the Torah is good.

Chapter 10: The Circularity Problem and the Criterion of Good People: What Actually Keeps Torah Alive

The Fundamental Circularity in Justifying Torah's Goodness

Instructor: Someone that grew up in that group. Everyone should imagine whichever group he's thinking of. And then he started asking the right questions. Of course, it's a fantasy. It doesn't really work like this, but let's say really got molested by a teacher over there, but let's say you could be like this pure

version of Avram Avinu [Abraham our Father, the first patriarch].

By the way, that's bad. That's a reason I don't know what I'm saying, right? That's correct. That's the real.

Anyway, let's say he figures out that this is wrong, right? Because it's not good to molest people. So, he becomes a goy [non-Jew], right?

And us, we come and tell him, what do you mean? That you're a rebbe [rabbi/teacher], the shayigetza [derogatory term for non-Jew], he doesn't represent the whole Torah. He had a wrong shita [approach/interpretation] in the Torah. Therefore, come to us, or you're stupid for becoming a goy because you realize that the square rebbe is not such a tzaddik [righteous person].

Because the rebbe himself doesn't pretend to be Moshe Rabbeinu [Moses our Teacher] — he is also modeh [admits] that the Torah is above him. Does not actually modeh by the way, but we pretend that he is. And not only he is right, but and therefore you are very dumb if you make that conclusion, right? That is what we like to say.

Rejecting the Standard Argument: There Is No Torah Apart from What Gets Taught

I think that that argument is absolutely wrong because there is no Torah besides for the one that actually gets taught in Talmud Torah [Torah study/school]. And it says in the Midrash [rabbinic commentary], right? Everyone knows the Midrash of Purim [the festival commemorating the story of Esther]. The Torah came to the Ribbono Shel Olam [Master of the Universe, i.e., God]. It says in the piyyut [liturgical poem] of Torah — Gedosh [holy] — that someone printed it into a machzor [holiday prayer book] for Shavuot [the festival celebrating the giving of the Torah]. So I sang it yesterday, that the Torah said that the Bnei Yisrael [Children of Israel] learn in one Yisroel [Israel] one Torah.

What do you mean one Torah? It's in the Himmel [Heaven] no use, right? The Torah only exists to the extent that people read it and do it, okay?

And therefore if there's a version of Torah which is bad, then whoever converts out of it is right and there isn't any argument against it. He's not making a mistake.

It could be that you could propose to him now that you got out of that, no problem, because the guy's lost, so you're helping him. I'm not saying you shouldn't help him in that way. But I'm just saying that the argument that says that he's stupid is wrong. He's right.

The Reverse Case: The "Orthoprax" Person Who Stays Is Also Right

And I said I think it's right versus true. If someone comes to me — and I know people that come and say this — I don't know that it is true. It seems to me that whatever I was taught is good. It's a good way to live. And people think that this is cynical. They call it orthoprax or something like that.

Turns out that this is the truth, right? And that's not really what the people say, but if they would say something like this, I think that they mean to say that someone would come and say: I have no idea if all these stories are real, but I'm happy. My father seemed to be a good guy. My teacher seemed to be good people. I don't know if there's other ways to be a good person, but this is a good way of being a good person. I'm happy with it. I want my children to be good people in the

same way. Therefore I want to accept this version of way of life.

I think that that person made the correct choice and the justified choice, right? The wise choice. Wisdom in the sense of doing the correct actions based on the correct reasons, for the correct reasons.

He has no idea if Maamad Har Sinai [the revelation at Mount Sinai] happened, so what? That was never the question. His father's thing is based on that. Okay. So we'll say the same story also. No problem. If it's based on that, we'll believe in it also. But they had to be good people.

The Central Thesis: Being Good People Is What Actually Matters

This is the argument that I make based on my question, right? I didn't answer the question. I just assumed that that's just because of me saying that that's the correct question. Thanks, Mr. Maskim [one who agrees].

Turns out that it's very important to be good people. People keep on jumping out of this and saying, I don't have to be a good person because I believe right in the Torah. I have this banner behind me, it was good. Useless.

If you're a bad guy, your children should become goyim. Even if you have this banner. It doesn't save you. I think how many people sort of rely on that and their children taka [actually/indeed] become goyim.

Digression: What Really Saved Yiddishkeit — Theories or Good People?

And like I have that — I saw this discussion I was thinking about this. People who are having this machloikes [dispute]: what kept Yiddishkeit [Judaism/Jewish way of life]? This guy says it's the Baal Shem Tov [founder of Chassidic movement, lit. "Master of the Good Name"] that's why it is a good. After the nation was out though and this is a base. So the Torah protects itself, protects itself by — well if you care but I care about people.

And everyone was saying something else like the questions about which theory saved the Torah: is it the rationalist theory or the mystical theory? And I'm looking at these people — you people are living in la-la-land. You think that everything is about theories that you can defend and debate. It's nonsense.

What really keeps the Torah is people being good people by it. And I think when people say before the Baal Shem Tov Yiddishkeit was going down and the Baal Shem Tov saved it, all that means is the Baal Shem Tov was a sincere person who tried to be good using the Torah. And according to the mythology, they didn't like to tell themselves that the rabbonim [rabbis] before that were somewhat corrupt. Which just means they used the Torah for themselves instead of trying to become good people and teach their children. Of course you should become a goy, if that's the case.

The Empirical Observation: Sincerity Predicts Continuity

I actually think this is true. Any area where you see where the teachers of the Torah are sincere — they might definitely be stupid. They could be wrong. That's not the point. If they're sincere, they're trying to become better people using the Torah. Their children stay Yiddish [Jewish].

People who are very obviously not sincere, there, and sometimes not even having a problem because they think that the excuse of having the correct emunos [beliefs] saves them, their children become goyim. Look around.

It could be that you need a good theory for that. Like, if people can't believe in the Torah without Chassidus [Chassidic philosophy/movement], then you need Chassidus in order to be able to be a good person using the Torah. Because otherwise you think the Torah is not that bad. So you can't become a good person using it. But the thing that makes people good is only the good people, not the theories.

Brief Reference to Izhbitz

That's the whole idea of Izhbitz [referring to the Izhbitzer Rebbe/Mei HaShiloach] the whole time, right? That's what you're saying?

Instructor: I don't know, what is that, yeah?

Student: Yiddish lach kezach la-Torah [Yiddish phrase], right? That like you're scared that someone's gonna maybe become like bad from it. He somehow like makes it not as good.

Instructor: Does it really mean this? Maybe, I don't know. Basically, goy avda goy, Yid bled goysha [mixed Yiddish phrase]. Like he kept Yiddishkeit.

I'm not sure what you mean, but I feel like it's gonna get me into a whole complication if I start talking about it.

Acknowledging the Dangerous Implication

So I didn't answer my question, I just said what the question is. Do you understand?

Student: No.

Instructor: I don't understand.

Student: I don't understand.

Instructor: I don't understand. What are you doing?

Student: Yeah, because like the generations before they kept the Torah, right?

Instructor: Right.

Student: And they said, this is the Torah. The Torah says to do all these like, like, you know, that's a smith's thing or whatever, right? And they blame, they haven't taught it to back them, right? So the ma'aseh [deed/action] made a bad society, yeah?

Instructor: Now, the question is, I'm not saying that any of these solutions are the correct solutions or anything. I'm just saying what kind of thing it is, what kind of question the question is. Now given that this is the correct question, we should think of what the answer is.

Student: Huh?

Instructor: Wouldn't that be complicated?

Student: So what do I think? What do you think?

Instructor: Turns out I made my job very hard now because something — all the people listen to my classes, not all of them have the same background as me, and some of them maybe have a bad background, and I'm telling them to become goyim, and so on. Rachmana litzlan [God forbid], right?

Student: Yeah, hello.

Transition: Promising an Answer

Instructor: Okay, so I have a shtickel [small piece/partial] answer, and actually I also think that this answer is used. I also have an answer to that question, but we have to say what I think the answer is.

Student: You missed the whole part.

Instructor: I missed everything?

Student: All right, I wanted to come in.

Instructor: Now we're going to say the peshat [straightforward interpretation/textual reading]. All right. It's hard to start with the peshat. It's always hard. It's good for a challenge. All right. So.

The Nature of Virtue: Trained Likes and the Acquisition of New Capacities

Chapter 11: Returning to the Framework of Virtue (*Middot*)

Instructor: Shach HaMaas is this sheen, right? Yeah, hello. Okay, so I have a stickle answer. I actually also think that this answer is used... I also have an answer to that question, but we have to say what I think the answer is.

Student: You missed the whole part.

Instructor: I missed everything? Ah, right, I wanted to come in... Now we're gonna say the *teretz* [resolution/answer].

Student: *Teretz*.

Instructor: It's hard to start with the *teretz*. It's always hard, but it's good for a challenge, right?

So the *teretz* says—what's the *teretz*? In Rosh Hashanah I can't get into the actual *teretz* maybe, but I can say what kind of *teretz* there could be, right? What kind of *teretz* there could be goes back to what we discussed about virtue, right?

Student: This was a long time.

Instructor: I had to get back to our thing.

Student: Yeah, of course we're not getting about anything else, right?

The Problem of Translating "Virtue"

Instructor: We learned that there's something called virtues—virtues—and it's very hard to find a good translation for it, even in English. Virtue is just a Latin word that translates a Greek word which means *arete* [ἀρετή: excellence], which means something like excellence. And in Judaism people call it but it's [good character traits: מידות טובות] **middot tovot apparently a bad translation, although it has something going for it—it's traditional—but it's not actually good for defining .what it is

just means a measure, and the reason [מידה] *Because *middah we call it *middah* was just based, I think, on the Rambam's [Maimonides'] theory of *middah*, Aristotle's theory of virtues: [מידה טובה] *being measures in between. And *middah tovah just means the correct measure, but it doesn't [good measure think of what—like nothing what the point of that is. The term ?*middah tovah* came from the Greek word

Student: Yeah, I think so.

Instructor: Not from the Greek word. It came from the translators, like from the Rambam. The Rambam already used the word *middah*, although he called the book *Hilchot because it's the [Laws of Character Traits: הלכות דעות] *De'ot [opinions/character traits: דעות] **middah* of the *de'ot

Student: It's not—but he used the term *middah* in *Peirush [Commentary on the Mishnah: פירושי המשנה] *HaMishnah

Chazal** [the Sages: הזו"ל] **Instructor:** It's from *Chazal used the word *middah*, and possibly for the same—for the kind of thing that the Greeks call virtues. Now, I can't deny that interpretation. *Chazal* used the word *middah* in the sense of measure, but in the broad sense of measure—like in

this broad sense of measuring anything. Like things like that, they literally mean measure, but it means like the measure of a certain way of acting, I think. So something very close to what .we call virtues

And it was used by Rambam and tennis translators for virtues more generally. But it doesn't help us to explain what it is.

Chapter 12: Virtue as a Trained "Like" of Activity

The Core Definition: Character Virtue as Liking

Instructor: The important thing to understand, or the thing that we're struggling to understand right now—there's something about it that we could say, right? Something about it that we could say, and this is connected to what I'm saying. Something about it that we could say, which has to do with the right? ,[character traits :מידות] *question of how to get *middot
?How to get virtues, right

Now, we said that virtue is liking. A virtue is a like, okay? A character virtue, at least. There are other virtues, intellectual virtues, which are not like that exactly. But character virtues are likes and dislikes, which is a way of saying the love or the liking of a specific activity, right? Not of a specific thing, but of a specific activity.

Illustration: The Yeshiva System and the Love of Learning

Like, for example, if you go to yeshiva and they teach you to learn, what they teach you is not to learn—they teach you to like learning.

Student: Older yeshiva, I'm asking with this.

Instructor: They teach you to know how to learn—that's intellectual virtue. But I'm talking about the character virtue. It's the *middah* of liking to learn. And interestingly, anyone that went through a yeshiva system, a literature system that was successful at him—nowadays not all of them are successful, or maybe never they were all successful—but for the most part, like a successful product of a yeshiva system—we're a bad word—a successful product of a yeshiva loves to *if he's a *yid ,[non-Jew :גוי] *learn, no matter if he's a *goy .or not [the Sabbath :שבת] if he keeps Shabbos ,[Jew :ידי]

There's all these silly stories that are supposed to make fun of this, saying, "Oh, there's a guy that used to learn with a cigarette on Shabbos." But that just shows that they were successful, right? That was their goal—to make you like learning—and they were successful at it. Because liking means :מצוה] that you like it. It doesn't mean that you do a mitzvah .[commandment

for the sake of :לשם מצוה] *Like we discussed, *lishem mitzvah .is that particular of liking [the commandment

The Chassidic-Litvish Debate: Which Virtues Matter Most?

by the way, have the same ,[Hasidic Jews :חסידים] *Chassidim* thing. They just teach you to like singing *menuchah and there's people that ,[rest and joy :מנוחה ושמחה] *v'simchah unclear :הושע גראן שבת] *did that with *Hosea Gran Shabbat .[reference, possibly a specific Chassidic practice

is very [dispute :מחלוקת] *But it's actually the whole *machloket dumb, because this *machloket* all gets conducted as if the main thing is some kind of Kabbalah soil, right? And then everyone is arguing if you have the correct one. But the reality is that it doesn't work with [education :חינוך] *of *chinuch Kabbalah soil. The reality of *chinuch* for which is that that .teaches you to love certain things

Now the *machloket* is really which—of which is more important—of singing *menuchah v'simchah* or like him to learn. That's a fair discussion. It doesn't get resolved by referring to how many people are like, don't have *eretz [ארץ שמים :יראת *shemaim and do it, right? It gets resolved by: is [fear of Heaven :שמים] this kind of person a better person or not? That's a serious question. I don't have the answers there right now. I'm just ?trying to give the framework of what the question is, right

Chinuch as Training in New Likes

So that's called training. That's called *chinuch*. That's called virtues.

Now, what am I getting at here? That this becomes something a little hard to define or a little hard for us. We are very used—since like we discussed a minute ago—we are very used to jumping to the like intellectual level or the like dogmatic level of things. Like, should you learn Torah? Then we pretend that *yeshivas teach you that you should—that there's a big *inyan that's ideal to learn Torah. But that's not [matter/concept :ענין] —that's not what they teach you. That everyone believes supposedly—that's not the point, or you do or you don't. .Maybe they don't even believe it

What they actually teach you is the activity—not the activity, but the like of the activity, the habit, right? It's called the habit, the hobby, the love of this, being this kind of person, alright?

Chapter 13: The False Dichotomy—Belief vs. Mere Preference

Virtue Is Neither Belief Nor Sensory Pleasure

Instructor: Now that is not the same as the banner—what we call like the belief. Like because, like I said, there's many *people that are like—all the people that write in the *Ated people that—[unclear reference, possibly a publication :עתה] :שטארק] *unclear, possibly *shtark :אסכתם] *don't learn *asachas but they very much believe in the ideal of learning, [intensely right? Those are people for who the *chinuch* didn't work, right? The people that did work are the people that like to .learn

But it's also not—it's very important to notice, right? We discussed this in the last class. It's also not the kind of like as liking orange juice, right? It's like the taste of orange juice.

Student: Yeah, right. You said this last one tonight.

Instructor: Okay, let's assume that we—there is liking learning, and then there is actually when you learn that it happens.

Student: I'm not masking.

Instructor: When I said the taste of oranges, I just meant the thing that is built into you. The thing that is just sensitive pleasure. There is no sensitive pleasure in learning. There just isn't.

Student: Say that you like the activity of drinking oranges. That would be different than the sensory pleasure of drinking oranges.

Instructor: What do you like about oranges?

Student: People have likes like that. I just said the word oranges.

Instructor: No, no. People that enjoy popcorning.

Student: Yes, yes, yes.

Instructor: No problem. But this does not exist at all for Torah, just to be clear. It does not exist.

Student: The only way—

Instructor: No, it doesn't. No, no, it doesn't. It doesn't. The only way it can exist is in the way of—which is as in you should come to—because they give out cheesecake, which is like an artificial connection between the activity of learning and that. And you could do the learning not for itself, but for the or for money or for the [honor: כבוד] *purpose of *kavod .that you give [snack: נאש] **nash

***Mitokh Shelo Lishma Ba Lishma*—From External to Internal Motivation**

But that's—let me finish my sentence—but that's the idea of from: מותר שלא לשמה בא לשמה: *mitokh shelo lishma ba lishma*] doing something not for its own sake, one comes to do it for its which is saying that because it's not actually ,[own sake because of that, the activity of learning doesn't very well connect to this knowledge that you get. It would connect well, then you would be stuck. But it doesn't actually connect because it's a separate activity, which means it has its own .goals

And then, once you get into it, you notice those goals. This is an important point that we're going to get to. You notice those goals. You notice that learning has its own goal.

?[unclear: חבש] **Student:** What is it, *chvesh

Talmudic [סוגיא: *Instructor: To understand the *sugya well, let's say. That's a goal that's entirely [topic/passage .separate from getting the candy

Now you could—you could work hard and you could like try to keep on remembering, "I don't really care about learning this. Well, I only care about getting the candy in the end." That's called the structural learning. That's not actually the natural situation. That's always—that's like where people begin. But it's not the natural situation of anyone that likes to learn.

Anyone that likes to learn is because they like the good which is part of—which is inherent to learning itself.

Rejecting the "Feeling" Model

Student: Can you say that they like the feeling of learning?

Instructor: No, because feeling is another thing that you pretend—

[End of chunk]

The Nature of Pleasure in Torah Learning: Sensory vs. Intellectual Liking

Chapter 14: The Fundamental Distinction: Learning Is Not a Sensory Pleasure

Instructor: I don't know what the feeling of learning is. The feeling of learning was less *hadesh* [new/novel] when you were taught to learn. When you say the feeling, you're pretending that... I don't know what feelings are. I know what sensory feelings are, okay? Sensory feelings, as in... There's no sensory feeling in that. No. Absolutely not. No. It doesn't feel like anything. It feels like... I mean, it feels... It's an analogous use of the term feel. It feels like understanding a *pshat* [interpretation/explanation]. It doesn't feel like sweetness in your tongue or like whatever sensory pleasure in your nerves you have from other sensory pleasure. Just not.

People like to pretend that it is but it's not. I'm not denying that it doesn't have some neurons firing in your brain or

whatever that is, but that's still separate than what we call sensual pleasures. It's other neurons, let's say. It's also neurons, I'm not getting into materialism, but it's other neurons, other nerves. And those nerves do not act—they're not the same ones. You can't reduce it to "I feel good." What does feeling good even mean? The feeling good of learning is a different kind of feeling good than the feeling good from drinking something sweet or getting drunk or whatever it is. And that is the feeling good that belongs to learning.

The Historical Confusion: The Degel Machaneh Efraim and the Loss of Aristotelian Categories

This is what confused so many people when they started getting into pleasure of learning, all these things. They're all just confusions for not understanding this. Yes, absolutely. Just confused. Entirely confused. Because the *Degel* [Degel Machaneh Efraim, a Chassidic text] thinks that *lishmah* [for its own sake] means something a third thing, which is closer... No, no. The *Degel* thinks... Again, the *Degel* doesn't have this middle category like most modern people, because they forgot it, because they stopped reading Aristotle.

And since the university started reading Descartes, the *yidn* [Jews] also stopped. And therefore, they forgot about the reality that the normal way of talking about these things is not to pretend that everything you like is just a kind of sensory pleasure, which is obviously not. So, of course, everyone knows that. So we pretend that these psychological pleasures are somehow the same thing as sensory pleasures, right?

And then, since everyone still—everyone, at least everyone religious or everyone part of Judaism—still thinks that there's something higher than that, but you don't know of anything intermediate, so you jump to something very high. So the Chassidim jump to this idea of *lishmah*, of *dveikus* [cleaving/attachment to God], of meaning God or something like that.

Now, meaning God is a very nice ideal, but that's not all we're talking about over here. We're talking about something much simpler than that. And the kind of pleasure that you have from learning is not sensory. Why would you even think that? It's a thing itself.

Now, is that good? By the way, I didn't say that it's good to pursue for itself. I don't know if it's a good... The Tal's question is a different question. Or the question of, is it good, is it really the thing you should pursue? But I don't actually think... I'll say something later.

The Inseparability of Liking from Learning Itself

Student: No, to answer your question—it does not... It can't be distinct. The pleasure... The kind of pleasure... If we call this pleasure... If we call this liking... The liking of the learning is not separate from the learning in the same way that the liking of... Like the first division that we made, like the liking of ice cream and the liking of eating ice cream. It's not... It doesn't separate in that way.

Instructor: Because the whole... The whole of this thing is that now you have—I installed you a new liking thing. That's all it means. Of course there's an activity of learning. Maybe not always you like it. Maybe the like comes in the beginning. That's already how it works. But the liking is the same thing.

That the *Degel Tal* [Degel Machaneh Efraim] does get this right. The liking is part of the learning. It's not possible for someone to be a *loymid* [learner]. The *middah* [character

trait/quality] is a *loymid limit*. You could be a... Then you're not a *loymid*. Then the yeshiva's education failed on you. You're a *tzaddik* [righteous person]. You're not a *loymid*. You're a *choviv tzadikim* [one who fulfills commandments]. You never like learning. But if they succeed, then you like it. And this liking is not the same kind of pleasure.

Well, if it's *lishmah*... If God cares about it, that's a separate question. We have to ask that question. The Chassidim will definitely say that it's not enough. I'm not arguing with that. I'm just saying that it's not the same. When they criticize the Chassidim, they sometimes reduce it to the lower kind of pleasure, which it isn't. It can be criticized, but not in that way, right?

Addressing Objections: Why Learning Is Not Like Sensory Pleasure

Student: You're saying that if it would have been such a type of sensory pleasure, then no one would have to teach you this type of liking. Then all Torah that isn't that...

Instructor: Again, I don't know if it wouldn't be a have to teach, but that's just not what it is. I don't know why anyone would think it's a sensory pleasure. It just isn't. Which sense is it?

Who cares what it's called—sensory this, sensory that? I just know for myself, right? There's two different likings. There's one, like, before you get up, like, get a *cheshek* [desire/urge] to go over, yeah? If I was about to advise, that's a *geshmak* [delight/pleasure]. But if you like the activity of learning, in other words, right? Like 2 o'clock in the morning, get this *cheshek* to learn, let's say, or 2 o'clock in the afternoon, whatever, right? Just go, right?

One second, and then what do you do? Besides, these are details within the thing. I don't see that. It's not like he's liking the activity of learning for the learning itself. Some people like this, but no, I don't think it's... I don't think it's... It doesn't matter to me. It doesn't matter to me. These are interesting discussions to have if we're talking about actually the virtue of learning. We'll get into all the different parts of it. But since I'm just trying to find what a virtue is... And all of those are in the same category to me.

Psychological pleasure—I don't know what that means. It's just a word that seems to make people think they know something.

The Pizza Analogy and Its Rejection

Student: I want to say something very, very simple, because I want to understand this. Since I one time ate pizza, now I like pizza. In other words, forget about the taste of pizza. At this point I already like pizza eating, right?

Instructor: I don't know. But we're not talking... Again, we're not talking... We can't... No. Again, I'm not... How do you understand that? I like pizza. What does that even mean?

Student: Yeah, I think that it's... I actually think that you're wrong because you're jumping within that. You're connecting them too much, right? You'll remember. You'll remember.

Instructor: Don't... Let's do... Let's keep things simple. Listen, listen. That's not it. Wait, so let's keep things very simple and never talk about the same thing which has both, because that's just confusing, okay? We're going to use examples where it's clearly distinct, okay?

Eating and other physical pleasures are one kind of like, and *kavod* [honor] and *gaiva* [pride] and *ka'as* [anger] are

another kind of like, okay? As simple as that. *Kavod* doesn't mean I get a tingle in my spine or something. It just means I like that, okay? It's a social thing. It exists somewhere. I'm not getting into the materialism thing question. Just a different kind of thing, okay?

Student: Is *ka'as* a different kind of thing?

Instructor: There you go. That's all. Now Torah is the kind of... Learning is the kind of thing that *kavod* is, not the kind of thing that food is. That's all. There's a third thing? Not a third. Same. There isn't a third thing. It's a better one, but it's the same kind of thing. There's a third thing which is intellectual. We're not talking about that. We're talking about the virtue of learning.

The Key Distinction: Natural vs. Socially Constructed Liking

Student: Can you give two regular examples, let's say, of like *gaiva* and let's say, I don't know, the food thing, whatever, the pleasure thing?

Instructor: Yeah, what do you mean? Once I feel *kavod*... Why is it so difficult? The generally big difference is that one is social—in other words, it's taught—and the other one is more natural. Isn't... We, again, to use a simplified example, sensory... You don't have to be taught to like food, but you do have to be taught to like *kavod*.

Student: Everyone is taught that because it has to do with the sensory pleasure?

Instructor: Yes, whereas *gaiva* has nothing to do with the sensory pleasure. Exactly. It's something you're taught. Maybe you're taught... You have a natural disposition to it because you have a natural disposition to everything, but you're taught in the sense of it's a social... They're cultural. *Kavod* is a cultural institution, right?

If you're a critical theory person, you say it doesn't really exist. Only literal pleasures might exist. Even that's culturally construed because they get into that level of that. But we're trying to make it simple. But it's a... How do they call it? How do they call it? A paradox? Not a paradox. A constructive thing, right? Something that doesn't live in your body in the same way that food-loving, eating, lives in your body. As simple as that. It lives in the relationship between me and you.

Does that have some representation in my body, in my brain? Not my question. But it doesn't live in my body in the same way. Yes. You have to be taught. And liking it is not a reduction of one to the other. It's not that now I just like it in the same way I like food. I like it in a different way.

Now, you could say that all of these kinds of likes are still selfish and bad. I'm not getting into that question. That's the Chassidish criticism, the Platonic criticism. Plato already had that criticism. But that's not my point. It's still more that it's a different kind of thing, and people seem to be missing this because it just... In other words, if there's no value... Like, I don't know, value... It's not different. It's not different at all. Like some people like pizza and some people like Torah. That doesn't really follow. It's true, but it's a different kind of thing.

Responding to Further Objections

Student: To be able to like pizza is a simple thing. To be able to like Torah you need training, you need *chinuch* [education/training]. This is important. It's socially constructed, okay. And if taste needs *chinuch* also, then it wouldn't be the same.

Instructor: It doesn't. There's other differences. It's a different thing. I just told you one difference between them. It's a different thing. Even for... There wouldn't be... There's still a different thing. We're just trying to define why it's a different thing.

Student: No, I said one, because I didn't say this is what made the difference. Obviously a different thing. It's just I don't think I need to explain why it's a different thing.

Instructor: It's a kind of... What do you mean? It's a different thing. It's like a sense. Feeling is a kind of thing. Do you understand what that means? A pleasure of the sense is a kind of thing. Do you understand what that means? And sense of... of liking to it. It's a different kind of thing. You don't feel it in the same place. I just want to say that. It doesn't exist in the same part of the soul. Absolutely. It's not the same.

Student: One is an activity and one is liking the actual item. But if you come out with examples where it's not an activity, correct?

Instructor: No, absolutely not. This is just a nice fantasy that people like to tell themselves. I don't know why people got this. You literally don't feel the same. I don't know why. Look in your experience, okay? You could look and do introspection for this. This is totally not the same thing, okay?

Conclusion: The Flattening of "Liking" Into One Undifferentiated Category

Very nice. No, *hamevul* [confused/mixed up]. So it's not the same like, the same thing. Why do people go around that? These people have just invented this category called liking things, and then like, you like soda, I like pizza. That's true in a very broad sense if you like to use the word "like" in an undefined way. But it's like saying this is the table and that's... and that's a star. Both are things. Very nice. But there's a table, that's a star.

Chapter 15: The Nature of Pleasure: Sensory vs. Intellectual Enjoyment

The Fundamental Distinction Between Types of Pleasure

Instructor: I don't know why. Look in your experience, okay? You could look and do introspection for this. This is totally not the same thing, okay?

Student: Yeah, it doesn't hit my taste buds. It's in some other sense.

Instructor: Very nice! It's in some other sense. So it's not the same thing. Why do people go around... People have just invented this category called liking things. And then like, you like Toyota, I like pizza. That's true in a very broad sense if you like to use the word "like" in an undifferentiated way. But it's like saying, this is a table and that's a star. Both are things. Very nice. But this is a table, that's a star. So, two different things.

So, why should I care about this? There's nothing to do.

Student: I didn't say that you should care. I just said first that it's a different thing.

Instructor: Fine.

Student: I didn't say anything about caring. I'm just trying to tell you the most basic fact that it's different. And for some reason, I don't know why. I do know why. Because it's basic. If it's something else, it's basically you're messed up. No, I mean this for real.

Student: I'm actually thinking the way you usually teach the thing. But I don't see why the taste bud, because it's a tongue and a piece of something hits it.

Instructor: I don't understand what you're saying. We know what that is and we know what this is. They're not the same thing. If that's why—it's like yellow marker different than the blue marker. I don't know. It's one is yellow, one is blue. What is the question? Those are different, right?

Student: Of course those are different.

Instructor: Very nice. But they're the same—

Student: Okay, no no no, they're the same kind of thing, right? We have this—

Instructor: Okay, did you—okay did you—did you ever figure out this category called senses? Do you know what a sense is?

Student: Oh, so you decided there's five senses?

Instructor: I decided? Yes.

Student: And that's it? It can be another—

Instructor: Again, again, again, we have to be—we have to be very—no, there's not one in five. But we have to be real in this sense. In this sense, maybe in a different sense, and we have to be real, right? It's not a *chochma* [wisdom/cleverness] to just go and take words—this is sophistry, right? Let's take words and pretend we can make them all sound the same. They're not the same. There's no real—like it's the opposite. If someone wants to claim they're the same, they have to prove it. The normal way of thinking is that they're not the same. It's not the same kind of thing.

The Burden of Proof and the Problem of Equivocation

Instructor: I don't know why. Like tell me why. Even me, when you say the same kind of thing, I have no clue what you're saying. No, it's not. It's absolutely not. It's not the same as what? It's not the same as feeling something in my mind, as feeling something in my tongue. What are you telling me?

Student: Oh, so once again, so the other sense called hearing is also not the same as saying—

Instructor: Again, when you say music, just to be clear, no, because you made me complicated examples. I'll tell you why. Because we can't—people always like escaping complicated examples. Because music is not a pleasure for the ear. If you say something very simple, like the kind of music that babies like, then yes. But if you talk about appreciating music, that's something—

Student: No, I'm not appreciating. I'm talking about what babies like.

Instructor: Then of course it's just a pleasurable sound. It's not simple that there's such a thing, but I'm assuming that there's such a thing. Yeah, of course. Very loud sounds hurts you and a nice pleasant sound likes you. That's the same exact kind of thing, of course. It's a kind of—I could even give you some definition for what a sense means, but why would I have to go there? Like I feel like it's something we all know.

And I think that the other thing—I'm telling you this, I'm making this argument, okay? I think that the other thing, this assumption that it's the same kind of thing, like a *stickl* [piece of] Tosfos [medieval Talmudic commentary], is something that nobody knows. It's a *stickl* philosophy that makes no sense that you were told by someone and you decide

that it's basic, and it's nonsense. Just think of it for one second and you see that it's nonsense.

Student: I'm trying to figure out when you say—I'll tell you this. I understand so much when I sleep and when I go home it's over.

Instructor: No, you don't know that. You actually don't know that. No, no, it's not a *metzius* [reality/fact]. That's what I'm telling you. It's brainwashing by a *kat* [sect/group] that told you this.

Student: I know you're not—you have to come to me whenever I say something that's not a *metzius*, I know it, okay?

Instructor: No no no, I'm doing a shortcut because I don't have a good—I'm doing a shortcut because I don't have—I don't have to name a *chalik* [difference]. You're the one that's connecting two things just to have the same word. It makes totally no sense. And for some reason you're pretending that it's me that has to prove you that it's different. It's so funny. It's no *shaych* [connection/relevance]. It's these two things.

And I'm not even getting—actually your other question was a better question. What is the *shaych* between enjoying a touch and enjoying a taste? That's a good question. It's actually a pretty easy way of answering it, why they're similar. But what you're saying is something totally different.

The "Plenjoyment" Thought Experiment

Instructor: Word—like for both, or enjoy for both, which is very not accurate because it's not the same kind of enjoyment. It's the same kind just in the sense that, you know, like in the same but similar—like I sometimes make these funny things like my chair likes to be on the floor, both likes and never jumps up by itself, so I must like it. And that's the same kind of thing as me liking pizza. It's just a word that we use the same, but it's just sophistry. There's nothing—there's nothing—this, the same word refers to in your experience or in your in anything that you're making them pretend to be the same thing. I have no idea why anyone would say this.

Student: I use the *mashal* [parable/example] of hearing for a very simple reason, okay? Because you said that hearing is one of the five senses and that has type of enjoyment, right? So then you said, no, I'm using a complicated *mashal*. I wasn't using a complicated *mashal*. I'm trying to tell you a *mashal* that hearing has pleasure from, right? There you go. So that you understand that hearing's pleasure and touch pleasure is different, even though they're from the five senses. I just, did I—so, dude, the brain—

Instructor: Tzadik [righteous one/my friend], did you answer? Did you answer? Did you listen to what I said or you just were thinking of what you're going to answer? Because I just repeated this question that you said to you.

Student: No, you said about the difference in touch and taste. And I specifically said hearing.

Instructor: No, because I think I specifically gave you the—do you understand why we came up with this concept of the five senses? What do we mean when we say senses?

Student: I have an example of not the five senses. What about hearing a joke? Now, I'm not talking about the physical feeling of laughing after you hear the joke.

Instructor: That's like appreciating music.

Student: Yeah, it's like music, but the music is one of the five senses. And that's like understanding touch.

Instructor: Yeah, yeah, that's not hearing. It's not a pleasure of the ear. Of course not. Of course not. It's a social thing. I don't know what—yeah, of course. It's a social thing. Of course, of course. That's not social—by social I don't mean that no one's around. I mean it's something you're taught. It's a cultural thing. Of course. Different cultures like different jokes. Okay, that's not entirely a proof, but in some sense, yeah, of course. Yeah, of course. Yeah, of course. It's not the same kind of thing as liking, as the pleasure of senses. Of course not.

Defining What Makes Something a "Sense"

Instructor: I didn't convince you that anything better or anything. I'm just telling you it's different. We just use this word "feel good" for everything. We just use this word "feel good" for everything, as if we know what that is. But we don't know what that is. We know what feeling good means in a sensory sense. We also know what it means in a different sense. But it's not the same thing. It doesn't—I have no idea why you keep on pretending it's the same thing. It's just the same word. It's not even—you should use a different word and you'll see that it's not the same thing.

I could call it differently. Let's call—let's decide to call it differently and then I'll be right, right? I can't just come—what's the difference? *Deh sabah khalif, deh sabah khalif, deh sabah khalif* [this is different, this is different, this is different - Yiddish/Aramaic]. Again, again, I'm not hooked—I'm hooked on you being so brainwashed and you're repeating words to me that mean nothing.

Let's make a new language. We're not allowed to call these things enjoyment. We have to call one enjoyment and one "plenjoyment," okay? Now you understand that's two different things, right? This I enjoy and this I "plenj oy." Finish. Did I solve your problem? Now give me something besides for the words to tell me why I said something wrong.

Student: Let's say liking to drink, talking about alcohol—alcohol, liking to get drunk, right? It's a perfect example for you. You can't—you have to make a distinction between, of, of, of why—not why you like to drink, but meaning you can't bring taste into the matter, right? Because it's disgusting, right?

Instructor: No, no, sensory-wise, right? Like it's nothing to do with the good taste, right? It's the social aspect of it, right? So I'd like—I'd like to drink. I'd like to—

Student: I don't think Ada disagrees that it's different. He disagrees that therefore we should say that it's different.

Instructor: I don't know why. It's the opposite. If you want to connect things, you have to connect them.

Student: Within learning you're saying you have sensory. I don't think you have both things. I don't know which sense enjoys learning.

Instructor: I don't know which sense enjoys learning. If you want to tell me which one it is, or in which sense it's a sense—so why would you even call it a sense?

Student: I don't know where it is, but I know for sure that I like it.

Instructor: Very cute. If I'm asking that you like it, but you're just—no, because senses have a meaning. It's not just a word that we made up. A sense has a meaning. Tzadik, when we call

it senses, it's not because we randomly decided to call these things senses.

Student: No, but if you say there's five senses, then you're taking away from other things that have the same feeling you could call senses, but they're not senses because they're not—

Instructor: Okay, a sense is something that gives me information about the outside world in a way of touch, or in a kind of way—now just a touch, yes. With sight is touch.

Student: Yeah, kind of touch, everyone—

Instructor: Of course. The ancient theories were sure like that, but nowadays it's also like that. Just a light wave is hitting your cornea or whatever. Yeah, of course. That's what a sense is. There might actually be more than these five, but it's hard to find them. Like there's many more. And this is not touching your brain or touching your whatever—not in, not in the same way. Like again, in analogous way, yeah, we have these analogies, like—but not in—it's just an analogy. It's the same word for a different thing.

The Categorical Difference: Marriage, Nachas, and Other Examples

Instructor: I don't see why I have to explain to you that it's different, because it's obviously different. It's you that has to explain to you why it's similar. I can explain to you why it's analogous, but I don't know why you would assume that it's the same thing.

And just to be clear, I'm not saying—I didn't make any moral claims here. I didn't say that it's a better kind of pleasure. I just said it's a different kind of thing that happens. They get called feeling good in the same way, but it's a totally different thing. It's the same thing, okay? Let me tell you clearly. People seem to be very confused about this. I don't know why. I know why—because I'm brainwashed by a bunch of hundreds of years of philosophers that try to pretend that this is the basic facts, but it's not.

The enjoyment of being married is not the same thing as the enjoyment of having sex. And some people think that it is, but it's not. It's that both enjoyable, both are pleasurable, but the word pleasure literally means something else in both cases, okay? *Nachas* [satisfaction/joy, especially from children], in Yiddish it's called *nachas*. *Nachas*—what's *nachas*? Basically the same thing as enjoying some sex? No, it's not *nachas*. There's some Yiddish that make that argument, but it's nonsense. Maybe they're both selfish. I didn't say that one is better than the other or any of that. All I said is that it's a qualitatively different thing.

It's like saying you're telling me the floor and the ceiling are both the same. Yeah, they have some similarity, but they're two different things. Like why would you even connect them?

The Key Implication: Non-Sensory Pleasures Must Be Taught

Instructor: Okay, let's get back to this thing. I'm going to finish my *shiur* [lesson/class]. So now, the important thing about this kind of thing is that you have to be taught, okay? You have to be taught. It's not natural. There's actually very few things that are really natural, or at least whatever—this distinction is more complicated. But at least in some simplification level: sensory pleasures don't have to be taught to humans. But other pleasures, or other likes—we shouldn't use the word pleasure because it confuses us, but of course it is pleasurable—have to be trained, okay?

And that's what Shlomo Hamelech [King Solomon] said and Plato said.

The Nature of Cultural Training and the Meaning of Receiving the Torah

Chapter 16: The Insufficiency of Rational Argument Alone

Instructor: There is no way to make you like [Torah] without training. We did this right last week. I don't know. I did it in my Yiddish. You have to be trained. And this also means that both—even if I could give you an argument for why it's good, which would be a different discussion, it wouldn't be enough. Because you still won't like it.

If I give you an argument for why it's good, you're going to agree that it's good, but you're not going to like it in the same way which you like food, for the different way that we're talking about here, right?

And vice versa, if I don't give you the argument why Torah is good, I can still make you like it. Maybe slightly less successfully, but I can still do it. You know how I know that it can be done? Because many people have been doing it all the time.

The Yeshiva System as Evidence

And like with yeshiva, they don't really explain to you why Torah is good. They just tell you you should believe it, but they do make you like it, at least in some cases. And it even works very well. They even make you like it in the ways that they would not agree with, right? Because people that went to the yeshiva like also learning other things that the yeshiva doesn't approve of, which just shows you that this is like a kind of thing that you could—you could be trained into liking learning, and it doesn't translate into liking following what the yeshiva says. It's not the same thing. That's how you get into it, maybe, but that's not what you get. Just like it's a kind of way of getting you into it.

Student: Make sense.

Instructor: Make sense?

Chapter 17: Culture as Universal Training

Now, just to be very clear, every single culture that ever existed [חינוך] does this, besides for a few that pretend that chinuch is not necessary, but they also do it. They [education/training] just don't talk about it, right? Belonging to a culture literally .means this. That's what it means. That's what culture means

[culture: תרבות] This word "culture," which, by the way, tarbut [our Sages, of blessed memory: חז"ל] is literally what Chazal called culture, and tarbut means chinuch. Kasheh tarbis ra'ah difficult [קשה תרביס רעה בתוך ביתו של אדם: betokh beito shel adam Tarbis means being .[is bad training within a person's house raised—the raising of people, not the raising of people the way of raising animals, the way of raising people, which means teaching them some more human rights. Obviously animals don't literally have, at least not to the extent that we do. And .this is something that at least tarbis defines as human

as Cultural Products [Character Traits: מידות] Middot

And when you grow up, you are taught to like certain things and dislike certain things that is not very much connected with the beliefs of this society. The word "virtue" is weird, but the kind of thing that a virtue is—virtue just means the good ones. without being [disposition/opinion: דעה] That's why it's a de'ah .This is what culture does .[character trait: מידה] a middah

Chapter 18: The Lasting Impact of Childhood Training

And this is why culture—and even to some extent this leads to some scary conclusions for us, which were said already, drawn and by Plato and [Book of Proverbs :משלי] by the Mishlei Aristotle—that the kind of things that you start doing when you're a child, there are going to determine your whole life, basically. Whatever you are trained into doing as a child in a .childish way, you will remain with you for the rest of your life

Examples of Persistent Training

Which is why if you go to a Christian school, if they teach you [רבני] to respect the Rabbis, you can always respect Rebbe It might be a different Rebbe, but that's a [Rabbi/teacher middah. Or if you've got a literature school which teaches you to be critical in some sense, you're going to remain with this .middah, and so on

Student: Wait, wait. We're going to figure out how to switch.

Instructor: I don't think people entirely switch. People refine. Very few people entirely switch, actually. Maybe none, or maybe very few. But very few people entirely switch, and I don't think that's what we need to be doing. Well—but let's get to that in a second.

Chapter 19: What It Means to Be Happy About Receiving the Torah

But this, I said before my question of what's okay. Now, when someone says I'm happy to be—if I am happy to have received the Torah, and like we gave in the first half hour of the shiur that we don't mean the Torah that's in the [שיעור: lesson] banner [the physical book]. So the only thing it could mean is that I am happy with certain virtues that I was made to have. .Certain things that I was made to like

It's not that I choose to like, right? This is even something that's weird to talk about choice. The choice is—it's a choice, but in a much broader sense than what we think about choices, like I choose to this action or that action. You can't literally sit down and choose to like learning. You could choose to get into a path that will cause you to that. You could choose to train your children to do that. It's a much broader thing than individual particular action choice.

[Intention :כוונה] The Only Coherent Kavanah

But if you were received a training, you received a kind of that made you like certain things and dislike certain things, and those things are good—now we'll have to have some way of evaluating whether they're good—but if you realize them to be good, then you should be happy with receiving the Torah.

If anyone says, you should tell me, because this seems to be the only kavanah that's possible to have: that your culture that you were brought up in, if that was the culture you were brought up in, has given you certain likes that you would not have had otherwise. It's not possible to get them otherwise. There is nobody that gets them without being trained in them, without being cultured and educated into them.

Chapter 20: Addressing the Misframed Question

And we have to talk about what do you do when you're stuck, but we're talking about when we talk about being happy with the Torah, we're not—this is, by the way, very clear, right? We're not talking about the last time, right? Again, people like to go to the extreme cases for some reason, right?

When I ask you a question, are you happy with—hello? When I ask you the question, are you happy with having received the

Torah, I don't mean hello. I don't mean the question of would you have been—would you have taken the Torah if you would have been born in Honolulu or something, you've been born differently, which many people think that that's the question. I don't know why that would be the question. That's nice for some reason.

Why People Switch the Question

This is another one of the ways in which people switch the question to a different one, which is either harder or easier to talk about, right? If I—before I asked this question of—I said that we should ask, we should all think of if we're happy to have received the Torah, and for some reason people think that this question translates to a different question, which is if would—[God forbid :הליילה] I would have been born in—halilah have been this guy. It's entirely besides—besides for that not being a realistic question, it's also not the question that I asked .you

When I asked you if you're happy, I mean the one that you have, actually. Not a different one that you would have theoretically had. Why do people keep on changing it to that one? I don't know. I actually know what you should think about.

Chapter 21: The Framework for Refinement and [Repentance/Return :תשובה] Teshuvah

And since the question is on this actual one that you were given—and "given" doesn't mean there's a book that you believe in; "given" means you were trained in, that's what chinech means—therefore, the question is: if the virtues—not the values—if the virtues that you were trained in are good, now to the extent that they're good, they should be happy. To the extent that they're not good, they should do something very simple.

The Process of Refinement

And what does refining them mean? That it's probably very hard to think of a society that has zero virtues, or that has no virtues at all, because that would be an impossibility. And since everyone has some virtues, then the job of growing up, or doing teshuvah, which is what we do when we're more than fifteen and so on and we can't relive our childhood—is childhood, not only childhood, right? Youth.

Then the answer is you need to know what those virtues are, and you need to know what the good parts of them are—what the good things that you were taught to like that you would never have liked otherwise—and then you find out what the bad things are, what are the bad things that you were taught to like and you would never have liked otherwise.

And what you would have to do is like the work of philosophy, or the work of teshuvah, like the work of growing up: it's to make the good ones interpret the bad ones instead of vice versa.

Chapter 22: A Concrete Example: The Lakewood Virtue

Student: What does that mean?

Instructor: Ah, now I have to—I'll tell you the answer also. The answer—yeah, I could tell you one example, but I have to finish. The answer would be something like—like, I was brought up to—let's do something like this, right? This is really are about, the [character traits :מידות] what all the middas the mean/measure of [מידות המצוות] Middas HaMitzvot And the Middas HaMitzvot shows you that [character traits there isn't, like, really such a thing as a totally bad thing. It's

only a question of when and where and how and how much, right?

The Raw Disposition

So, for example, if someone was brought up in some kind of society which taught him, like, to not care about what anyone else says, right? Okay, this is a virtue that you get from—I'm going to tell you about it. Okay? We are the best. We talked about this. We are the ones that know the truth, and everyone .[understand/get lost—Yiddish :פֿאַרשטיין] else can farshtayn .Yeah, one of the basic virtues

Just very clear, again, we escape to the truth of it when we talk about it, but this is a virtue. This is a kind of way of being. We like it. We like to be the ones that know what they have to do, nothing— [גאָרנישט:] and we absolutely don't give a gornisht what anyone else thinks, right? That's a virtue. It's an [Yiddish ?excellence. It's a thing that you get. Okay, what

Student: But it's good or bad?

Instructor: It's a virtue.

Student: Okay.

Instructor: Yeah, I don't have a different word. It's a way of thinking.

Good and Bad Interpretations

Now, this has a too much, which is bad, and a too little, which is bad also. And which virtue is this? This is something like the virtue of courage. I'm giving you an interpretation of this. This is what I mean.

Now there's a bad interpretation of it, which is called the vice of egoism. Okay? Which is not caring about other people. of [student :הלמידי] That's how you become a bad talmid Lakewood. But the way to become a good talmid is to interpret it as the virtue of courage, which is the idea that you as a human being need to have some sense of what he is doing and not be the opposite of that, which would be the vice of being a someone that just does what ,[sycophant/flatterer :חנף] chanef everyone else wants him to do, which is not good—not for .himself and not for anyone else

You need to have that kind of—I'm calling it courage. Maybe there's a different word for it. I'm not sure if it's exactly courage. It's courage—it has more to do with facing danger and

stuff. But self—some kind of virtue of having a backbone. Okay?

Student: Integrity.

Instructor: Integrity. Integrity, you could call this. We'll figure out. You understand more? That's what I mean. And some kind of integrity—

Integrity, Practical Wisdom, and the Preconditions for Receiving Torah

Chapter 23: The Virtue of Having a Backbone

Instructor: The opposite of that would be someone that just does what everyone else wants them to do, which is not good—not for himself and not for anyone else. You need to have that kind of... I'm going to get courage. Maybe there's a different word for it. I'm not sure if it's exactly courage—it's hard to have more to do with facing danger and stuff. But some kind of virtue of having a backbone.

Okay, integrity. Integrity, you could call this. I will figure out—you understand more or less what I mean—some kind of integrity. I don't know. I'm trying to use ancient words. So some kind of integrity or courage or backbone.

Chapter 24: Applying Virtue Through Practical Wisdom

Okay, now that's the good interpretation of it. And you take—you understand it in that way and use it in that way. And this is—there's no way of applying virtue without using your *seichel* [practical wisdom/reason], which is called practical wisdom. And you apply it in the cases, or in the way, or in the amount which is needed for that, and not in the amount which is needed to be a *gas ruach* [arrogant/inflated person]—like some other people apply it.

Chapter 25: Becoming a Mensch and the Right to Receive Torah

That's called becoming a *mensch* [morally mature person] when you're already an adult. That's called—and then, then you have a right to say that you're happy to receive the Torah. Otherwise you don't have the right, because it only made you worse.

Chapter 26: The Unanswered Question

So it still didn't have to be this Torah. I didn't answer that question because I—okay, I'm going to stop here. You can think about it yourself. It didn't have to be nothing.