

How Can One Who is Too Stressed Out to Concentrate Fulfill His Obligation to Learn Torah?

Rav Chaim Weg

Question: Reuven has a very stressful job. By the time he gets home, his brain is “fried” and he can’t concentrate on learning. How can he fulfill the obligation to learn Torah if he cannot function?

Answer: It is interesting to note that when the Rambam describes the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*, he says that everyone is obligated to learn Torah, whether the individual is rich or poor, and even if he is old or in ill health or has a family. The Meforshim explain that one might think that if someone has problems and worries that make it hard for him to learn, he is exempt from the obligation because he cannot learn with clarity. However, the Rambam is teaching us that even if someone has problems or worries, he still must learn Torah, and he has the ability to do so because part of the obligation to learn Torah is to clear one’s mind of his worries, and Hashem grants a person *siyatta d’shmaya* to be able to do so. The Rambam is recognizing that some people are very stressed, but he rules that still must clear their minds in order to be able to learn.

There are several practical tips to help with this. Learning with a *chavrusah* or a *chaburah* and in a bais medrash all aid a person with his concentration.

If one still finds it impossible to concentrate on his learning, he can fulfill his obligation of *talmud Torah* by reciting Kriyas Shema in the morning and at night and by supporting others who are learning Torah.