

Dear Rabbi,

I am faced with a moral dilemma. I am afraid to study the Torah, because I'm concerned I'll see it's true and have to do it all, which is something so overwhelming and I'm not capable of doing. So I'm staying away from classes and study, which is also not right. What do you suggest?

Jessica T.

Dear Jessica,

You share a very common perspective of Torah and observance that unless you keep it all, it's not worth doing just a part of it. Let's explore this common fallacy, its source, and the true perspective of Torah and observance.

Our belief is that every mitzvah has infinite value. There's a well known parable of a man who sailed on a long, perilous journey to reach Diamond Island. On this island, instead of pebbles and rocks, there were diamonds! Large and small, of all shapes, they were everywhere. Some stored up large bags of them to take back on the ship home. Others, not realizing their worth due to their commonness, only took a few back as souvenirs. Although they could have had a lot more, that didn't detract from the tremendous value of the few diamonds the latter group brought. This describes our journey to this world, which is filled with opportunities to fulfill mitzvos. Whether a little or a lot, every mitzvah is a precious diamond on its own.

We do not believe in an "all or nothing" philosophy of Torah and mitzvos. In last week's column, we explained that G-d judges each person based upon their station in life, where their coming from and where they're going. It's not about how high on the ladder you are, but how many rungs you have climbed based upon your own, individual and personal starting point on your own climb.

Years ago I was climbing a small mountain outside of Jerusalem with my (then) young daughter Tsippi. When we started, she looked up and exclaimed, it's so high! I told her, let's just climb a little, and don't look up. After a few minutes of climbing (and slipping), I told Tsippi to look down. She exclaimed, wow! We've climbed so much! I said, let's climb a little more, just don't look up at how much more there is to go. After a few more minutes, she was again shocked how high we had come. We continued that way until we reached our destination.

You don't need to be concerned about the whole picture, just to learn, and do what you can, step by small step. Each step, however small, is priceless in the eyes of the Al-mighty.

Someone once asked the renowned sage, R' Eliyahu of Vilna, how could one possibly master the entire, vast Talmud? He replied, one page at a time!

I urge you to begin studying, and enjoy the journey!