

# Pirkei Avot 1:5

## Translation

**Shammai said: Set a fixed time for your study of Torah, say little and do much, and greet every person with a pleasant countenance.**

## Maimonides

He said, make the study of Torah the root and fundamental point and [let] all the rest of your affairs follow it. If the occasion [to engage in other interests] presents itself, it presents itself, and if the occasion does not present itself, it does not present itself, and there is no harm in its being withheld.

They said: The righteous say little and do much, as Abraham our father, who promised a piece of bread and brought curd, milk, a calf, and three measures of fine

meal. The wicked, however, say much yet do not do even a little, as Ephron, who gave everything with his words, yet in practice he did not leave off even a *perutah* from the price. (Baba Metzia 87a) *With a pleasant countenance* means that one should deal with mankind in gentleness and with pleasant and acceptable words.

## Rav Chaim of Volozhin

(Translation: Chanoch Levi in *Ruach Chaim*)

*Make your Torah study a set thing. "They will leave their wealth for others" (Psalms 49:11) – everything a man earns will be left to others when he leaves this world. The merits of Torah study are truly his, for they accompany him after death. Thus, the *mishnah* uses the expression *your Torah*. It is fitting that it should be your main focus. Alternatively, even after you have learned it well and it is*

considered yours (Avodah Zarah 19a), continue to review it. For the clarity one perceives after reviewing the material 100 times cannot compare to the clarity after reviewing 101 times (Chagigah 9b). When the government issues a new piece of legislation, everyone rushes to hear the news and it is the focus of discussion for a few days. After the initial excitement wears off, it is old news and is no longer the focus of conversation. Conversely, a person is always interested in his own job. Even if he finds it difficult and monotonous, he will continue to perform and

focus on his duties, for he realizes that this is the source of his sustenance. "Rather his desire is Hashem's Torah, and in his Torah he meditates day and night" (Psalms 1:2).

שְׁמַאי אָמַר, עֲשֵׂה תּוֹרַתְךָ  
קָבַע. אֲמֹר מְעַט וַעֲשֵׂה הַרְבֵּה,  
וְהוֹי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם  
בְּסִבֵּר פְּנִים יְפוֹת:

Whenever a person reviews his Torah study, he discovers suggests of wisdom that he had not noticed earlier (Eruvin 54b). It is always fresh news, an interesting proclamation from the king. Moreover, it is *his* Torah, his source of life and sustenance in the World to Come. Make your Torah study a set thing. It is always interesting, always fresh. It is your source of life both in this world and the next. *Say little and do much, and greet all human beings with a cheerful countenance.* That is, say "little." Remind yourself constantly that in spite of all your accomplishments you have done little in the realm of Torah study and Divine service. This will inspire you to do much, as you will feel an urgent need to improve. You will greet people cheerfully, for you will consider every person worthy of respect; perhaps he has accomplished more than I.