



**Parashat
Behukatay/ Sefirat
Haomer**



English version

THINKING about ME.org

THE ART OF CONNECTING TO R' AKIVA

A popular parasha sheet in Israel wrote something that got me thinking.

People go to R' Shimon Bar Yochai to pray for miracles, borrowing an unrelated terminology from the Talmud, כדאי הוא ר"ש לסמוך עליו בשעת הדחק (Gittin 19a) It is true. People have seen miracles after praying at the Tomb of R' Shimon in Meron, and the Talmud tells us that R' Shimon was accustomed to performing miracles, seeing miracles, and having miracles in his life. (Meilah 17) But people don't go nearly as much to visit the grave of R' Akiva in Tiberias, as they go to visit the grave of R' Shimon in Meron, even though R' Akiva was R' Shimon's teacher.

After R' Akiva lost his 24,000 students, he did not give up. He restarted with just five: those five are the source of all the Oral Torah that we have today. R' Meir is all the Stam Tana of all the Mishna; Rabbi Nechamia is the Stam Tanah of Tosefta; Rabbi Yehuda is the Stam Tana of Sifra; R' Shimon is the Stam Tana of Sifri, and *all of what they taught was what they learned from R' Akiva!*

When R' Shimon told his students to learn from him, he said, "My sons, learn my Torah teachings, because my Torah lessons are a minute fraction of the finest of the finest of the teachings of R' Akiva." (Gittin 67a) R' Shimon authored not only the Zohar and Sifri, but also the Mechilta. All of this was just a "minute fraction" of the Torah he learned from R' Akiva.

If that is the case, why don't we visit R' Akiva's grave, at least as much as we visit R' Shimon? Similarly, the author asked, why don't we visit Yaakov Avinu's grave in Ma'arat Hamachpela, as much as we visit Rachel Imenu?

The answer the author gave is interesting, but incorrect. The author explained that people go to R' Shimon, to Rachel Imenu, because they want solutions to their life-problems. They don't know how to, and don't want to live with their life's problems. People want miracles and are not prepared to make the effort to build themselves through the difficulties life throws at them. Rabbi Akiva was known for going through life difficulties and accepting them with love, and positivity, not for making miracles to solve problems. Yaakov Avinu lived a life of difficulty, and he tried to accept and deal with the circumstances. Rachel, on the other hand, demanded miracles from her husband, to be a mother of a child. So, when people have problems, they don't go to R' Akiva and to Yaakov Avinu, because they were known for acceptance, and people don't want to accept. People want miracles and solutions, so they would rather go to R' Shimon and Rachel, hoping the problems will somehow either disappear or end themselves.

I brought this idea to my Rabbi, and he said, Has Veshalom! The reason why we go to R' Shimon is because R' Akiva was on such a high level that we can gain from his Torah only through his students; so people visit the graves of R' Shimon and R' Meir ba'al Hanes, both R' Akiva's students. But



R' Akiva, himself, is on too high a level for us to be able to connect to his Torah, alone and directly. Also, we know that the greatest Rabbis - Rabeinu Ovadia Bartenura, the Bet Yosef, the Ramak, the Arizal, the Ohr Hachaim and the Shlah - made a "big deal" of their visit to R' Shimon, even though those Rabbis, themselves, were not people who looked for easy lives. But the celebration of Lag Ba'omer is the celebration not of R' Shimon, alone, but of the Torah of R' Akiva. That is why we sing the song of *אמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל*, on Lag Ba'omer.

The reason why we go to Rachel Imenu is because, as Yaakov told his son Yosef, G-d wanted her grave to be positioned on the side of the road, at the entrance to Jerusalem, for people to pray there. (Bereshit 48:7) She cries for her children; she is the mother of the Jewish people, as she cries a special tear for each Jew. *רַחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל-בְּנֵיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהַנָּתֵם עָלֶי*. *בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינְנּוּ* *She refuses to be consoled for her sons, for he is not present (in Israel).* This phrase begins with plural, and ends in singular. Rachel's merit, because of which that G-d never turns down her requests, is her having overcome jealousy and her having given in to her sister, which ultimately brought about the birth of all 12 tribes. Yosef, her son, was the first to pray at her grave, as he had been sold as a slave and was on his way down to Egypt. (Sefer Hayashar) The Vilna Gaon (Tikunei Zohar 6 22a) writes that when there are no Tzaddikim in a particular generation, the Shechina, G-d's Presence, is found by the graves of the Tzaddikim, especially by the tomb of Rachel Imenu; that there is the main place where the Shechina resides. The Leshem explains that for this reason, David Hamelech was anointed in Beit Lechem, for the Shechina is there.

Although we can't connect to R' Akiva's Oral Torah without the conduit of his students, we can all learn from R' Akiva's life and struggles, and how he dealt with them. Every story of R' Akiva is a story of ultimate positivity and optimism. Optimism is broken down to three Ps. Not taking things Personally, recognizing that problems are not Permanent, and problems are neither Pervasive

nor worse than they actually are. These messages are interwoven in every story about Rabbi Akiva.

We know the stories. When he passed some water dripping slowly, but constantly, on a rock and saw that the water had made a hole in it, R' Akiva realized that *if water, with its continuous dripping, can make a hole in the stone, for sure, constant "drops" of Torah learning can make an impact on my mind.* (Avot DR Natan 6 2) Being dumb, ignorant, is not a permanent problem. It is temporary, as long as you are consistent in learning Torah. When he was lying in the barn on the hay with his new wife, Rachel, pulling out the straw from her hair, he said, "If and when I have the money for it, I will get you the head ornament, Yerushalayim Shel Zahav, that you deserve. (Nedarim 51 a) Poverty is temporary, and it is just a mindset. R' Akiva said that a rich person is not one who has great wealth in the bank, but one who is rich in his essence. *Rabbi Akiva said, Who is a rich man? A man who has a wife with good character.* (Shabbat 25b) A person is rich, not if he has what he needs, but if he feels so replete with goodness that he can give to others. When Eliyahu Hanavi appeared as a poor man and knocked on the barn door, he said, "My wife just gave birth and we are so poor, we don't have even hay to cover her. Do you have any hay you can give us?" R' Akiva and Rachel immediately gave him some hay, and when the man left, R' Akiva tells Rachel, "You see, there are people who don't even have any hay! At least we have hay!"

Ever wonder why Eliyahu Hanavi did not just come and give them a two-million-dollar diamond, or at least warm blankets, and some comfy pillows? The answer is that *you do more for a person, when you give him an opportunity to give, then when you give the person the opportunity to take.*

The story of R' Akiva with the rooster, lamp, and donkey is a story of ultimate positive thinking, the certainty that when G-d takes things from you, it is only because He has your good in mind. (Berachot 60b) The story of R' Akiva, when he was with other Rabbis who were crying when they saw the

site of the Destruction of the Temple, and foxes were walking over the place of the Holy of Holies, while R' Akiva was laughing, saying that if the prophecy of destruction came true, for sure the prophecy of the Final Redemption will come true as well, is a perfect example of acknowledging that the present is not permanent. (Makkot 24b)

The story of how his wife encouraged him, saying that, although in the beginning, people will laugh at you that at your age, you're coming to learn the basics with little children in school; but eventually, they will get used to it, and eventually you will surely see your learning blossom and the fruits of your labor. She walked with him in the market place, with a plant growing on the back of a donkey, hinting that there can be growth anywhere, and in the most bizarre and unexpected places. The people laughed at them on the first day, the second day; but on the third day, they got used to it. Midrash Hagadol Shemot 24; 13)

When Rabbi Akiva, Ben Azai, Acher and Ben Zoma went to Pardes, only Rabbi Akiva came out of there sane, because he believed that if the wicked are repaid with good, so much more so, will the tzaddikim receive good in the next world. (Hagigah 14b, Makkot 24a)

R' Akiva was even able to make his horrible death into a positive story. He did not *just die*. He said he had waited his whole life for the day when he would have the opportunity to die for G-d, to love G-d with all his soul, בכל נפשו, and, now, at the hour of his death, his wish was being answered.

Rabbi Akiva, himself, was in jail and suffered from the first day of Elul until he died on Yom Kippur. This is why we say, during the Kol Nidrei, the passuk in Tehillim, אור נרע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה, because the last letters of this passuk, spell the letters of his name, R' Akiva. The passuk that has his name hidden in it is also the passuk of positivity. *Light is sown for the Tzaddik, and for those that are straightforward, they have happiness (in the present).*

And this is the reason why it is a basic part of the day of Yom Kippur and the days leading up to Yom Kippur that we pray R' Akiva's prayer, Avinu Malkeinu. He was murdered by the Romans, who peeled the flesh off his body with metal forks. How could R' Akiva look forward to such cruelty?

R' Akiva was the tenth of the great Rabbis who were killed by the Romans. His death was the harshest death of all the ten Rabbis who were killed by the Romans, as his Rabbi, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkenas, foretold. The reason: because there was some more Torah R' Akiva could have learned from R' Eliezer, that he did not. (Sanhedrin 68a) This teaches us that a person is held responsible for what he *could* do. In spiritual matters, you are held accountable for what you *could* do.

The reason why R' Akiva died such a death, at the age 119, was because the Tribes kidnapped Yosef and sold him, something that the Torah punishes by death. We, their descendants, who still did not learn to love our brother and her his plea in times of need, still pray for atonement for this at the height of our High Holiday prayers, every Yom Kippur, כי אתה סלחן לישראל ומחלן לשבטי ישראל. There were only 9 brothers who were part of the sale, but the tribes got G-d to be the tenth and join in the decision to sell Yosef. So, G-d, Himself, who was the number 10, needed a Kaparah as well, and R' Akiva, who was the tenth, had his death as the Kaparah for G-d.

That is the way he lived his life, with the purest intentions of serving G-d, ready at every moment to give up everything for G-d. This purity is R' Akiva's song that we sing on Lag Ba'omer, a song of how we serve G-d in purity. אמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרין ומי ומטהר אתכם, אביכם שבשמים. This is why R' Akiva was so particular in keeping the mitzvah of Netilat Yadaim, even risking his life for it, when he was in jail. (Eruvin 21b)

This purity, to do everything we do exclusively for G-d's sake, is what we need to work on during the Sefirat Ha'omer, to get us ready for Shavuot,



receiving the Torah, which is the Chupah between G-d and the Jewish People. (Ta'anit 4:8) וטהר לבנו The Sefirat Ha'omer is the ultimate purification process of 7 times 7, and it starts from Pesach, which is like the Kiddushin. Ridding ourselves of Chametz is the start of the purification process, as it is putting a stop to the Yetzer Hara. This explains why the Torah refers to first day of

Pesach, ממהרת השבת, because the word *Shabbat* means to cease, stop. We are to begin the 49-day purification after we purify ourselves, after putting an end to the Yetzer Hara. And the way to do this is to think, every day, how we are ready to give everything we have, for G-d. Just like R' Akiva lived his life.

A TORAH EDUCATION

...ונתתי גשמים בעתם... אם בחקתי תלכו... *If you follow my statutes...I will provide you with rain at the appropriate time...* Rashi explains that this verse teaches us about “toiling in Torah study” (ק”א ה”א ס) (עמלים בתורה). Indeed, as the Chazon Ish (י”ב) points out, all the brachot in the following verses are reserved for those who exert themselves in studying Torah. This concept of toiling in Torah – known in Hebrew as *amal ba’Torah* – refers to more than intellectual exertion alone, as we shall soon see.

One sign of truly fulfilling the injunction to be a person who is *ameil ba’Torah* is one’s total absorption in Torah learning. It is possible to witness this in a serious *beit midrash*, where study partners often voice their opinions in booming voices without disturbing those studying right next to them. Compare this with the library or study hall in the secular world, where it is accepted that people need silence in order to concentrate.

This is just one of the many differences between the approach to learning in the *yeshiva* world and the approach just about everywhere else. Indeed, many *yeshiva* students are unaware of the many significant differences which they simply take for granted. A few years ago, a non-religious Israeli professor visited *Yeshivat Mir* in Jerusalem – host to almost 6,000 students – and recorded the differences he observed:

- The Talmudic scholar studies and explains his point of view using his hands.
- He often sways while studying.

-He usually studies with a partner.

-When he asks the teacher a question, he gets up and goes over to the teacher. Out of respect, he usually remains standing while the teacher continues sitting. This is different from the secular classroom, where the student usually raises his hand, and the teacher address the question while the student remains seated

- In Talmudic study, the student is expected to manage relatively long periods of concentration – at times, even four and a half hours. This is very different from the secular educational systems, where focused learning times or class periods tend to be no more than an hour. . . .

-The study halls of *yeshivot* thunder with noise, and it does not seem to bother anyone. Instead of learning by reading with the eyes alone, the students insist on verbalizing, considerably slowing the reading.

-A question-and-answer format is very widely used.

-No cell phones are allowed in the *beit midrash*.

After thinking about these differences, the professor reached the conclusion that the learning in the *yeshiva* *beit midrash* is education at its best. “Education” comes from the Latin word “*educor*” – to pull out or extract. And this is just what *yeshiva* learning is all about. Let us elaborate.

Upon being asked a question by a teacher, a student will extract the information from his own mind, on his own. This is far superior to being spoon-fed by a teacher. Real education involves

drawing conclusions through outside guidance. This results in recall far superior to that of the student who is responsible only for swallowing information. When studying in pairs, the students are expected to verbalize the information they have gleaned and express ideas in their own words while relaying it. By learning in pairs, each partner stimulates the other's intellect for maximum results.

Verbalizing the information and ideas with excitement (even if sometimes a bit artificial), helps one focus and contributes to long-term memory. Studies have proven that students absorb information in noisy classes better than in silent ones. The commonly used technique of starting off in a low tone of voice and gradually increasing the volume adds to the listener's excitement about the information and ideas being discussed.

The swaying while learning affects body heat and helps blood circulation, sending oxygen to the brain, which contributes to clear thought and focus. The rhythm caused by swaying enhances concentration as well. This is why it is more effective to study while standing, pacing or walking. (It is not surprising that the theory of relativity was conceived while walking!) Body movement keeps the mind awake and energetic, and brings emotion into learning.

Although the professor's observations are revealing, there are many things that he could not possibly be aware of. Behind the scenes, the first conscious decision the true yeshiva student must make is at what level he wants Torah study to be in his hierarchy of values. For the serious student, a good resource for the proper way to learn Torah can be found in the end of Pirkei Avot (6:5), where the 48 traits and techniques needed to succeed in acquiring Torah are listed. All the blessings attributed to one who toils in Torah are for learning through these 48 "ways." The first on the list is learning with continuity. We see this clearly from the Chafetz Chaim's characterization of a proper Torah study session: It must be uninterrupted Torah learning, unless something comes up that must be taken care of specifically by the learner

and immediately (Mishna Berura, Shaar HaTzion 250:9). The ultimate example of continuous learning (besides Moshe Rabbenu) was that of Rabbi Akiva.

Rabbi Akiva was encouraged by his wife, Rachel, to maximize his potential by learning Torah away from home for twelve years. Rabbi Akiva grew in his studies and became Rosh Yeshiva for 12,000 students. When the twelve years had passed, Rabbi Akiva returned home with his students, all the while expressing the gratitude he felt towards his wife. All of our Torah learning is in her merit, he told them. Before entering his home, he overheard his wife saying to a friend that if it were up to her, she would be delighted if her husband would continue learning for an additional twelve years. Upon hearing this, Rabbi Akiva returned to his yeshiva to complete a total of twenty four years of uninterrupted Torah study. (Ketubot 63b)

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz asks the obvious question: Why didn't Rabbi Akiva enter his home for a few minutes and have a cup of tea with his wife, before returning to learn for an additional twelve years? His answer is legendary: In this context, twelve plus twelve does not equal twenty four!

But, we might ask, doesn't the question remain? If R. Akiva had already left yeshiva to come home to his wife, had he not already broken his continuity?

The answer to this question provides us an important rule of thumb. As long as Rabbi Akiva was doing what the Torah expected of him – such as visiting home for family obligations – he was still in the same flow of continuity in Torah learning by living according to its obligations. But once he overheard his wife saying that she would rather he continue learning another twelve years, entering his home for his own reasons would break his 24-year learning streak.

Anything that will interrupt continuity, such as the use of cell phones, is a breach in the spirit of a proper study session. I remember a more subtle application of this important principle. In one



yeshiva where I studied, there were no cups for the students to drink from the water fountain. Wanting to offer students the option of drinking in a more comfortable way, I set up a “cup fund.” But when the Rosh Yeshiva found out about it, he approached me and asked if he could donate all the cups. He wanted to keep his yeshiva a place where nothing is “going on” except for learning – not even cup funds.

During this time of year, especially – the period of Sefirat HaOmer – we should remind ourselves that the proper approach to Torah study goes all the way back to Matan Torah and the Mishkan. The Ba'al HaTurim writes that the two Cherubim facing each other on top of the Holy Ark symbolized (among other things) two students learning together, asking questions and answering one other (Sh'mot 25:18). Furthermore, the way we accepted the Torah at Mt.Sinai – with thunder, lightning and fire – is the way it must be passed on through the generations. Practically speaking, this means that whatever excitement or “fire” that can be instilled into our Torah learning is **essential for re-living Matan Torah**. Unity and mutual responsibility – like all the 48 requirements listed in Pirkei Avot – are absolutely necessary for Torah learning. These, too, were a crucial part of accepting the Torah at Mt.Sinai (כאיש אחד בלב אחד). This is the way we accepted the Torah – and the

only way it can be passed on is in its original form. These qualities are so crucial that all 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva perished because they did not possess them to the extent they should have. Thus, despite their superior learning, they were prevented from being the ones to transmit Torah to future generations.

Students of Torah sheh-Ba'al Peh know that the Gemara repeatedly uses a question-and-answer format. Indeed, it never hesitates to question even basic assumptions. And this is a technique we can use effectively in our own lives as well. The way a question is asked is going to affect what type of answer the brain will come up with. A great question can give birth to a new approach; it can even change humanity.

One powerful question that a Jew should ask himself is the one asked by Rabbi Akiva, then a shepherd, when he noticed that steady stream of drops of water had cut through rocks. Must a rock always remain a rock, or can small, constant change as consistent and gentle as dripping water make a major revolution – either to a seemingly rock-hard assumption or even to person set in his ways? In our terms: Can I get more out of life than I am at the moment; can I change significantly for the better and realize my full potential?

TORAH LISHMAH – OUT OF THIS WORLD

The first Mishna in the sixth perek of Avot reads. כל העוסק בתורה לשמה זוכה לדברים הרבה ולא עוד אלא שכל העולם כולו כדי הוא לו. *Anyone who learns Torah Lishmah, will merit many things. Not only that, but the entire Universe was worth creating and keeping spinning for his sake. He can be called a friend of G-d, loved by G-d, etc.*

What exactly is Torah Lishmah, for its own sake? And what are the “many things” that the Mishna promises him that he will merit?

The common denominator of these two, Torah Lishma and its reward, is that they are both “out of

this world”. Both are on a level far beyond anything in our human experience, far beyond the grasp of the human mind.

For example, try explaining how chocolate tastes to someone who never tasted chocolate. You can explain what it is not. But to explain what it is, is impossible. “Is it sour?” No. “Is it salty?” No. “Is it sweet?” Yes. “Oh. So it tastes like sugar!” No. Sugar is just sweet. This has a richness to it, a blend of smoothness and bitterness. *You just cannot know how it tastes unless you taste it! It just can't be described!*



Torah Lishmah and its reward are the same. You can explain what they are not, but you cannot explain what they are. You cannot explain the experience of learning Torah Lishma. It is too abstract. It is not learning because you want a rabbinical position. It is not about learning to become smarter. It is not about learning to get a good shidduch. So, what is it? It is learning for the sake of learning, to connect to G-d, to understand His Word and to live by it. *To totally disregard myself, and place G-d in the center of my thoughts.* To be willing to change everything about me, to become a G-d-like human.

And then, what do you get for learning Torah, the real way? “Lots of stuff”. Why doesn’t the Mishna tell us what one will merit? The answer is that no words can describe the benefit of being G-d like, for it is the greatest reward, in and of itself. That reward, fulfilling your life’s purpose and the purpose of the world through learning Torah, is the apex of human experience.

G-d implanted in every human being a need to fulfill a purpose, and when that need is not fulfilled, the person feels emptiness. Nothing can cure that emptiness, unless the person fills it with his own, special purpose. And the purpose of every Jew is none other than learning Torah Lishmah.

Learning Lishma is something like taking off in an airplane: you soar aloft, and the earth below

becomes a miniature village, with tiny houses and thread-like highways. Life takes on totally different proportions when viewed from above the clouds. The problems of life, jealousy, happenstances, worries of making a living, whatever else, just become so small, because you are being G-dly. There are no words that can explain this, for no words can describe something that is literally out of this world. G-dliness. It is so out of this world, so out of focusing on human interests, and so much about focusing on G-d’s interests.

And that is דברים הרבה, *a lot of things*. Being G-dly. A person becomes so G-dly through learning Torah Lishmah that G-d listens to him and runs the world according to his requests. The Or Hachaim has a beautiful twist on the words of our Rabbis, השוטה מים לצמא מברכים עליו שהכל נהיה בדברו. Literally meaning, *Someone who drinks water out of thirst, makes the Shehakol blessing*. But the Ohr Hachaim gives the words of this halacha a new twist: Our Rabbis teach that Torah is comparable to Water. With that in mind, we can reinterpret the statement mentioned above – *Someone who learns Torah solely to quench his thirst for Torah – G-d blesses him that whatever he says will come true*.

Can you become more G-dly than that?

LIFESTYLES

One of the biggest problems facing the Orthodox Jew is the belief that a Jew can keep “the 613” while living the lifestyle of “keeping up with the gentiles”. Who is setting the standard of what we want and what we *don’t* want in life? The way we live, the path of behavior we take, will affect our fate more than anything else. In order for us to understand how to solve this problem we need to understand where it comes from, and find the tools to defeat it.

The very first thing that Ruth told her mother-in-law, Naomi, when she was certain that she wanted to convert to Judaism was באשר תלכי אלך. *Wherever you go, I will go*. The Middrash Rabbah explains this. “Naomi said to Ruth: My daughter, it is not the way of a Jewish girl to go to the theatres of the goyim.” Naomi told Ruth that to become a Jewess, one cannot follow the celebrities of the goyim and associate with them. Their way is not our way.



Why was this the most important, first message Naomi gave to her daughter-in-law who was about to convert, even before mentioning the 613 Mitzvot? And why did Naomi need to hear Ruth say, *Wherever you go, I will go*, that she would stop going to the theatres, before Naomi was willing to convert her?

Because the path that you are going in life, the lifestyle you follow, is the expression of your ultimate decision as to what type of Jew you will be. There is a huge difference between an Orthodox Jew and a Torah Jew. What is the difference? Orthodoxy means keeping 613. Not being 'reform' or 'conservative'. *As long as I do not alter even one commandment, I am still Orthodox. But, how I live my life, what car I drive, what type of wedding I make, my lifestyle – as long as it does not transgress the 613, I still fly under the radar of Orthodoxy.* A Torah Jew is something else. The word Torah has a similar root to the word Morah, which means teacher, guide, someone who shows the way. A Torah Jew, then, is a Jew who lives his lifestyle in line with the spirit of Torah. He constantly asks himself, *What is the Torah lifestyle that I can adopt? What is the Torah's path?* Naomi wanted to make sure that Ruth was going to be a Torah Jew. Not just an Orthodox one.

We sometimes forget how to enjoy the beauty of a Torah lifestyle and focus on the deeper truth of life. And once we forget, the glamour of the celebrity lifestyle flashes at us from every billboard, in every advertisement. It makes it so easy to lose track. There are only two tracks in life, and they are mutually exclusive. We are always going on one of these two tracks. It's just a matter of which one we choose. Allow me to explain.

What is an angel? The word 'anglos' in old Greek means messenger. The angel does not have thoughts of his own, nor does he have free choice. He is but a robot. He does whatever you program him to do. The human being is the opposite. No matter how you program him/her, you can never know if they are going to follow your directions. The difference between angels, who do not have free choice, and us is that angels are always

referred to as עומדים, standing still, while Humans are always referred to as הולכים, always going. This concept of going is the purpose of your life. The uniqueness of the Human. All of your life, you are going from point A to point B. *You chose* your point B. You can be getting closer to the life of the celebrities, the life of the gentiles, more Olam Hazeh. Or, you can be getting closer to your Neshama, your purpose in this world. The first mitzvah commanded to the first Jew was לך לך, "Go to you". What does it mean – to go to you? G-d told Avraham to go towards himself, to advance towards his purpose, towards his Neshama. Every Jew comes down to this world with that same command: לך לך. Go toward your purpose. That is the Torah's path.

What is the Gentile's path? Probably one of the most crucial moments in the whole Tanach is the moment when Bitya is at the Nile River to immerse for conversion, and she sees little Moshe in a basket. ותָּרַד בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לְרַחֵץ עַל־הַיָּאֵר וַיִּנְעֲרֶתֶיהָ הַלֵּלֶת עַל־יָדָהּ: הַיָּאֵר וַתִּרְאֶה אֶת־הַמִּבְּרָה בַּתֹּדֶד הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אֶמְתָּהּ וַתִּקְחֶהּ וַיִּנְעֲרֶתֶיהָ and her maidservants were walking. Where were they going? Weren't they supposed to be next to the princess Bitya?

R Yochanan answers the question. The word halicha, here, means death, as we see in the words of Esav, Behold, I am going to die. The maidservants said to Bitya, "Are you crazy? If no one else is obeying Pharaoh's command to kill the Jewish boys, wouldn't it make sense that at least his own daughter would listen to him?!" When the maidservants spoke with those words, the angel Gavriel came and struck them dead!! (See Sotah 12b, Torah Temimah Shemot 2; 5)

Although Esav was busy hunting food, occupying himself with idolatry and women, always "on the move", he was moving towards death. הנה אנכי הולך. That was his direction. The life of a celebrity, here and now. If they do not have Olam Haba, they might as well have Olam Hazeh.

Yaakov, on the other hand, was an איש תם יושב אהלים, a simple man sitting in the study hall. Although he was not moving physically, but he was steadily advancing in the direction of the Torah learning that would lead him to Olam HaBa. All of us have these same two options in life: to live Esav's celebrity life, a life that ends up as a הולך למות, or to live a life of purpose, in the image of G-d. But whatever you do, you are a הולך. You, a human being, are moving in a direction.

Our Rabbis learn the words of the beginning of the Parasha תלכו בהם בחוקותי תלכו בהם... אם בתורה. If you *follow* My statutes, to mean that you shall *toil* in Torah, learn it in depth. All of the blessings of the Torah are reserved for one who learns Torah in depth. Why does "following in G-d's statutes" refer to toil in learning? Maybe it just means to live an Orthodox life of 613?

When the Parasha tells us "to go in My statutes", it doesn't mean externally. It means internally. It means to go into your heart. It means going towards a deeper truth and making it part of your real self. Because that is the way of a Torah Jew.

BH, I have been living in Yerushalayim for 18 years. The greatest damage western culture had on me was to make me believe that "the easier the better", and "the faster the better". The Torah is teaching us that, No! אם-בְּחֻקֵי תֵלְכוּ I want you to *toil* in Torah. If someone offers you a chip to put

in your brain that will give you the knowledge of a doctor, a lawyer or a psychologist, why not? Many things in modern times are instant! But it is not so regarding Torah knowledge. G-d wants us to toil to achieve it. Although an unborn baby has learnt the entire Torah, we do not stand up, in respect, for that baby. Why not? R Chaim Shmulevitz says because that child did not toil for his Torah! This is true in regard to all self-development, and in all aspects of lech lecha, going to your life's purpose. All of the 48 ways to acquire Torah require really hard work and toil. In stark contrast to the requirements for priesthood or royalty, those requirements are presents, not things you need to work on.

The second untruth marketed by western culture is 'the faster the better'. That is not the case regarding self refinement. The greatest enemy to change is speed. וְאַת־מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ: If you go in My statutes and you **watch** My Mitzvot... The Torah does not say to keep the Mitzvot, לקיים. It says to watch the Mitzvot, to wait anxiously for an opportunity to observe them. Not to get them over with, when the time comes. But to anticipate them. To count 49 days to wait for the Torah. To count the days toward Shabbat.

Patience. Hard work. Striving for Truth. Real Truth. Living with purpose. Mastering contentment. This is a Torah lifestyle.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H



