



BS"D

To: parsha@parsha.net  
From: cshulman@gmail.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET  
ON **ACHREI / KEDOSHIM** - 5769

In our 14th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to [subscribe@parsha.net](mailto:subscribe@parsha.net) Please also copy me at [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com) A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

To sponsor an issue (proceeds to Tzedaka) email [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com)

Leil Shabbos Friday, May 1, will be day 23, which is 3 weeks and 2 days of the omer.

from TorahWeb <[torahweb@torahweb.org](mailto:torahweb@torahweb.org)> to  
weeklydt@torahweb2.org date Wed, Apr 29, 2009 at 9:28 PM

**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**  
**A Good Eye**

I

You shall love your fellow as yourself (Vayikra 19:18). "R' Akiva said, 'This is a great rule in the Torah'" (Rashi). Perhaps R' Akiva's statement is a reaction to the tragic loss of his 24,000 talmidim who perished between Pesach and Atzeres (Shavuos) because they did not [sufficiently] honor one another (Ye'vamos 62b) [See Ve'ahavta Le-Raiacha Kamocho – (ADD LINK TO 1999/moadim/rwil\_sefira.html)]. However, love and honor are two different concepts, as the Gemara (ibid.) teaches regarding a husband's attitude towards his wife (ohav, mechabed).

A somewhat different version of the death of R' Akiva's disciples is found in the Medrash (B'reishis Raba 61:3): "R' Akiva had twelve thousand disciples from Gabbath to Antipatris, and all died at the same period. Why? Because they looked grudgingly (eineihem tzara) at each other. Eventually he raised seven disciples... Said he: My sons, the previous ones died only because they grudged each other [the knowledge of] the Torah; see to it that you do not act thus. They therefore arose and filled the whole of Eretz Yisrael with Torah."

Grudging reflects a lack of love, and can even lead to hatred (Etz Yosef). The prohibitions of hating and grudging precede the commandment of loving (Vayikra 19:17,18). If, as the Medrash states, and Etz Yosef explains, R' Akiva's students violated these prohibitions, then, indeed, loving one's fellow is a great rule in the Torah.

II

The literal translation of eineihem tzara, grudging, is that their eyes were narrow. With a narrow look, one sees the faults of another, and grudges his successes. When people's eyes are not narrow towards one another, people appear nice to one another (Rashi, B'reishis 41:2).

Generally, when there is abundance, people's eyes are not narrow towards one another, and they appear nice to one another. Thus, the description of seven cows as beautiful was interpreted by Yosef as seven years of plenty (Mizrachi).

In this year of financial downturn, a special effort must be made to avoid grudging the successes of others. When one looks with wide eyes, he sees the whole picture, including the positive attributes of his fellow. Then his fellow appears nice to him, and he loves him instead of grudging or hating him.

III

Unfortunately, grudging exists in the spiritual realm as well. This seems to be the case regarding R' Akiva's talmidim who grudged each other the knowledge of Torah. When his later students did not grudge each other, they were able to fill all of Eretz Yisrael with Torah. Torah can be accepted only when there is unity (Rashi Shemos 19:2). The term Atzeres, which refers to Shavuos (Onkelos Bamidbar 28:26), means gathering (29:35). Only when R' Akiva's students avoided grudging and achieved unity could Torah be properly disseminated.

Spiritual grudging can rise to the level of hatred of others, and even of Hashem (Sha'arei T'shuva 3:160):

And they are certainly enemies of G-d if they act upon their thoughts and deter others from occupying themselves with Torah and with mitzvos. The same applies to those who are envious of the honor accorded honest, righteous Torah scholars and hate their crown of glory... Much more so when they seek to shame them or lower them.

Our great Torah leaders, starting with Moshe Rabbeinu, taught the opposite of spiritual grudging. A rebbe should be happy when others achieve spiritual greatness, even if they will no longer need him. "Would that the entire people of Hashem be prophets" (Bamidbar 11:29), and not receive prophecy from me but from Hashem (Ramban).

The Torah [referring to pilpul] was given only to Moshe and his descendants. But Moshe showed generosity (tovas ayin) and gave it to Am Yisrael (Nedarim 38a). Moshe shared the Divine methodology with all of Am Yisrael (Maharsha). Thereby, they would be independent of him and his descendants.

Great efforts must be made to have a good eye in spiritual matters as well. The accomplishments, and resultant honor, of Torah scholars and leaders should be viewed positively by other Torah scholars and the general population. We must all learn from the tragedy of R' Akiva's students, and avoid grudging and hatred of, and between, Torah scholars. When looking with a good eye, these scholars, like all Jews, will appear nice even if some faults exist. Our response to the spiritual successes of others, as to their financial ones, should be happiness borne of generosity of spirit, and not jealousy or hatred based on grudging.

IV

We observe a measure of mourning during Sefira because R' Akiva's students died. (Orach Chaim 493:1). Why? So we should distance ourselves from hatred, jealousy, desire, arrogance and honor, and acquire love, humility and peace. Those learning Torah should be especially careful to love one another (Kaf Hachayim 5).

The Maharil explains that the reason we are joyous on Lag Ba'Omer is that the students of R' Akiva stopped dying. This explanation is problematic. They stopped dying because they had all already died! Is this a cause for joy? The answer is that we rejoice because the later students of R' Akiva did not die (Pri Chodosh 2). To rejoice properly we must emulate those later students by not grudging one another and by spreading Torah.

Indeed, with respect to Torah and its scholars, "You should love your neighbor as yourself" is a great rule, as R' Akiva taught. Copyright © 2009 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org)> reply-to  
[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org), [genesis@torah.org](mailto:genesis@torah.org) to [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org)  
date Thu, Apr 30, 2009

**Rabbi Frand on Parshas Achrei Mos - Kedoshim They Died And They Died Again**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 634, Hating Another Jew. Good Shabbos!

At the beginning of Parshas Achrei Mos, immediately following the death of Aharon's two eldest sons, Aharon is given the mitzvah of the ritual

service on Yom Kippur. There is, however, a redundancy in the Parsha's opening pasuk [verse]: "Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died." [Vayikra 16:1] Why does one pasuk mention the fact that Aaron's sons died two times?

The Shemen HaTov answers this question by reference to a well known Gemara [Moed Katan 24a]: When Rabbi Yochanan was told that Rabbi Chanina died, he tore kriyah on 13 expensive wool garments (out of grief and mourning) and commented "The man I was afraid of has departed." The Talmud asks why Rabbi Yochanan tore kriyah on a hearing "distant news"? Normally one only rips clothing "at the moment of heat" (i.e. – when the tragedy is fresh news). The Talmud answers: Rabbis are different since at every moment their teachings are quoted, every moment (even after much time has passed from the death) is considered "at the moment of heat".

Here too, the two sons of Aharon were "those near to Him, through which He was sanctified." They were great men of Israel and great men of the world. With such people, it is not a matter of "they die and it's over with". The lack of their presence is felt constantly. Achrei Mos (after they died) v'ayamusu (their death is felt all over again).

Special Divine Love Brings Special Divine Responsibility

The mishna in Pirkei Avos [Ethics of the Fathers] [3:18] states: He (Rav Akiva) used to say – Beloved is man, for he was created in G-d's Image; it is indicative of a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in G-d's image, as it is said: 'For in the image of G-d has He made man' [Bereshis 9:6]. Beloved are the people Israel for they are described as children of the Omnipresent; it is indicative of a greater love that it was made known to them that they are described as children of the Omnipresent, as it is said, 'You are children to Hashem, Your G-d' [Devorim 14:1].

It is noteworthy that the pasuk chosen to buttress the idea that man was created in G-d's Image is a pasuk in Parshas Noach (Chapter 9 of Bereshis). It may seem a bit strange to quote a pasuk from Chapter 9 when there is a pasuk in the very first chapter of the Torah that states explicitly: "And G-d created Man in His Image, in the image of G-d He created him" [Bereshis 1:27]. Why did Rabbi Akiva, in impressing upon us the fact that man is beloved because he was created in the Image of G-d, take a pasuk that appears 8 chapters later, passing over the first and most explicit reference in the Torah to this very fact?

Likewise, in supporting the idea that the Almighty treats Israel as his children (banim), the Tanna goes all the way to the middle of Sefer Devorim to find the proof. This idea is also explicit much earlier in the Torah -- in the book of Shmos, where it says: "My son, My first born, Israel." [Shmos 4:22]

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik offered a beautiful insight: The 'chibah yeseirah' [greater love] that G-d grants man over the rest of the creatures of the universe, and the 'chibah yeseirah' that G-d grants Israel over the rest of the nations, comes with responsibilities. Divine Love is not a gratuitous gift. It comes with obligations and requirements. Rabbi Akiva passed over the initial mention that man was created in G-d's image and cited the pasuk in Parshas Noach because it is there that the Torah links man's Divine image with the prohibition of murder: "Whoever sheds the blood of man among men, his blood shall be shed, for in the Image of G-d He made man." Where did G-d "make known to man" his chibah yeseirah? He made it known to him when he taught him his special responsibilities.

Likewise with the chibah yeseirah of the Jewish people, the initial pasuk alluding to the father-child relationship between G-d and Israel was a gratuitous gift. This appears in a statement directed to Pharaoh. Rabbi Akiva is trying to impress upon Israel that their special relationship with the Almighty binds them to a code of behavior: The pasuk in Devorim makes such a connection: "You are children to Hashem THEREFORE you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person." The chibah yeseirah stems from the fact that the Jewish

people are different. Because they are like children to G-d, they must act differently. This is how and where He makes His special love for them known to them.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

To Support Project Genesis- Torah.org Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrand, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> or email [learn@torah.org](mailto:learn@torah.org) to get your own free copy of this mailing.

Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> -- see the links on that page.

Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email [copyrights@torah.org](mailto:copyrights@torah.org) for full information.

Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 Baltimore, MD 21208

---

From Heritage House <innernet@gmail.com> reply-to:innernet@innernet.org.il to innernet@innernet.org.il date Thu, Oct 30, 2008 at 5:52 AM subject InnerNet - "On One Foot" INNERNET MAGAZINE November 2008

\* \* \*

### "ON ONE FOOT"

by Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran

\* \* \*

A famous Talmudic episode tells of a prospective convert coming to both Shammai and Hillel, willing to convert if he could be taught the "whole of Judaism" while standing on one foot.

Shammai sent him away, but Hillel said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. The rest is commentary. Now, go and master it." The Targum Yonatan uses this expression in translation of the verse, "love your neighbor as yourself." So, it is clear from this that Hillel, and the continuum of Jewish tradition, sees the entire Torah encapsulated in the command to "love your neighbor."

Hillel's response however, suggests that the Torah commandment is fraught with emotional and practical difficulties. After all, he restates the Torah command but in the negative. He knows that it is man's tendency to care more about himself than others. That is the rabbinic legal position: "Your life takes precedence over your fellow man's." It must be thus. We are unable to truly love if we do not love ourselves first. We cannot value others if we do not value ourselves. And yet... despite this necessity of predominance, the Torah obligates us to love our fellow man as ourselves. This seems to go against nature. How could we, beings who are by instinct, designed to place ourselves first, place someone else not above us but equal in our love to ourselves?

It seems impossible. But it cannot be impossible. That is our quandary. For the Torah would not instruct us to do something beyond our capabilities. It must be doable to love our neighbor as ourselves. The difficulty then must be in understanding exactly what is meant by this command...

\* \* \*

In his "Michtav M'Eliyahu," Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler speaks of three ascending levels in the observance of "loving your neighbor" in which one's ascension corresponds to the greater identification with each individual:

The first, and most basic, level was articulated by Nachmanides: "The phrase "love your neighbor as yourself" is not meant literally, since man cannot be expected to love his neighbor as his own soul." The Torah recognizes that, sometimes a person will be interested in his neighbor's welfare in certain respects only; he may wish him wealth, but not scholarly attainment and the like. But even if he wishes him well in everything, in

wealth, honor, learning, and wisdom, he will still not want him to be absolutely equal with him.

It is human nature for every person to seek superiority over his fellow in some aspect of experience. We instinctively struggle for the corresponding recognition, believing this will establish our own uniqueness and identity within society. Without such efforts, we fear we do not possess a singularity which distinguishes us from others. We fear being lost in the multitude of our fellows. Of course, in truth our singularity resides in the quality that we share with all our fellows, that we are created in the image of God. It is this which informs the command to "love your neighbor." Nachmanides explained that our fears are the result of our baser, more animalistic instincts.

A person should wish his fellow well in all things, just as he wishes his own self and have no reservations. Torah wants for man to know that one's own sense of worth and honor is never negated or diminished by the accomplishments of others.

\* \* \*

The second level of "loving your neighbor" relies on the identification of "your neighbor" with "yourself" in an almost literal manner. By giving to him of yourself you will find in your soul that you and he are indeed one; you will feel in the clearest possible manner that he really is to you "as yourself." In this regard, such love is a pure bridge, bridging the divide between you and your fellow. The world depends on the ability to give. Without this generous, human quality no one would marry or have children. Yet for most people, the ability to love and give is, at best, limited to a small circle of relatives and friends. All others are viewed as strangers, and relationships with them are based on taking, on exploitation, and on greed.

If one were only to reflect that a person comes to love the one to whom he gives, he would realize that the only reason the other person seems a stranger to him is because he has not yet given to him; he has not taken the trouble to show him friendly concern. If I give to someone, I feel close to him; I have a share in his being. It follows that if I were to start bestowing good upon everyone I come into contact with, I would soon feel that they are all my relatives, all my loved ones. I now have a share in them all; my being has extended into all of them.

Therefore, Rabbi Dessler concludes, one who has been granted the merit to reach this sublime level can understand the mitzvah "love your neighbor" in its literal sense, "without distinction; as yourself: in actual fact."

While it seems instinctual to distinguish between the self and "the other" or the stranger, in commenting on the verse, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear a grudge," the Jerusalem Talmud makes clear that such distinctions are artificial. If an individual were in the midst of cutting meat and, by accident, cut one hand, would that individual contemplate, as an act of revenge, cutting the hand that cut the first hand? Of course not. They are clearly two parts of the same body. So too is each person part of a larger community. If one deals lovingly and kindly with all Jews, he is one with them, to the point that he couldn't possibly bring himself to avenge or take revenge...

~~~~~  
Excerpted with permission from "MEDITATIONS AT SIXTY." Published by KTAV Publishing House, Inc. - <http://www.ktav.com>.

~~~~~  
InnerNet Magazine is published monthly as an on-line digest of fascinating articles from the Jewish world. Topics include relationships, spirituality, personal growth, philosophy, incredible true stories, and special editions for the Jewish holidays.

Archives of past articles are on-line at <http://www.innernet.org.il>

Enjoy these emails? Please support our work with a donation:

<https://www.capalon.com/secure/innernet/donate.php>

(C) 2008 InnerNet Magazine

---

from **Rabbi Aryeh Striks** <[striks@vths.org](mailto:striks@vths.org)> reply-to  
[striks@vths.org](mailto:striks@vths.org) to [internetparshasheet@gmail.com](mailto:internetparshasheet@gmail.com) date

Thu, Apr 30, 2009 at 4:09 PM subject Mussar HaTorah - Parashios Acharei - Kedoshim

Valley Torah High School

Mussar HaTorah Torah insights into human nature from the weekly parasha. **Based on the talks of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l** (Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim - RSA) and dedicated in his memory. This week's Mussar HaTorah - a weekly parasha newsletter - can be downloaded at this link: [Mussar HaTorah Parashios Acharei - Kedoshim 5769](http://www.MussarHaTorah.com) Or visit the Mussar HaTorah page on [TorahStation.com](http://TorahStation.com)

Have a Gut Shabbos! Sincerely,

Rabbi Aryeh Striks Valley Torah High School

Mussar HaTorah Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons..." (Vayikra 16:1)

The Midrash on this week's parasha (Vayikra Rabbah 20:4) explains Moshe's instructions to remove the bodies of Aharon's sons. According to the Midrash, the bodies of Nadav and Avihu – Aharon's sons – were in the most sacred part of the Mishkan, the Holy of Holies (see Eitz Yosef ibid.). Moshe called upon Aharon's cousins, Mishael and Eltzafan, to remove the bodies "from the face of the kodesh" (Vayikra 10:4). The Midrash points out that the pasuk doesn't state that Moshe asked them to remove the bodies, "from before the aron" – the Holy Ark, but rather to remove the bodies, "from before the holy one" – from before Aharon HaKohen. The Midrash equates this to saying, "Remove the deceased from the presence of this mourner; how long is this mourner to suffer?"

It seems, from the Midrash, that Moshe's primary reason for removing the bodies was to reduce Aharon's pain. Wasn't there a much more pressing reason to remove the bodies? They were in the spiritual heart of the Mishkan. After the soul leaves, the lifeless body carries the most severe form of spiritual impurity, and these two corpses were resting in the holiest place in the universe. What a terrible desecration of Hashem's honor! Moshe was surely consumed with a powerful drive to restore the purity and holiness of the Kodesh HaKodashim, and every fiber of his being wanted to take action to remove this impurity. The pain of Aharon, a single individual, should be a secondary consideration in the face of the terrible desecration of the Mishkan that was taking place. In addition, Aharon's sons were dead and Mishael and Eltzafan's action would only slightly reduce Aharon's suffering. Why did Moshe feel that this small percentage of healing was so much more important than even the chillul Hashem of having corpses in the Mishkan? We tend to associate spiritual greatness with acts between man and Hashem: prayers, fasting, self-denial and similar deeds. The mitzvos that deal with relating to our fellow man somehow get downgraded to a lower priority. In reality, they are at least of equal importance, and in some ways the interpersonal mitzvos are the highest form of spirituality one can achieve. The classic example is the elaborate description the Torah gives to Avraham's chessed, while completely ignoring his self-sacrifice to avoid idolatry at the furnace of Ur Kasdim. Our most perfect emulation of Hashem, explained the Alter of Slabodka, is when we perform chessed, not by martyrdom. In a similar vein, the Alter's close talmid, Reb Dovid Leibowitz, zt"l, used to point out that we find Hashem often described as Good, Kind, and Merciful, but nowhere as being pious or frum. From this Midrash we see the same concept: Moshe's greatest concern was Aharon's feelings and how he could lessen, even slightly, Aharon's pain. It can sometimes be very tempting to focus on outward actions of serving Hashem at the expense of other people's feelings. We can get too absorbed in our "own" mitzvos and not notice the suffering of others. The Torah here is teaching us that sensitivity to our fellow man is more important than removing the most severe violation of impurity from the holiest place in the world. May we strive to keep our eyes, ears and hearts open to notice when other Jews are in pain or difficulty, and seize the opportunity to emulate Hashem with our kindness and compassion.

Based on the talks of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l, Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim – RSA © 2009 by Rabbi Aryeh Striks & Rabbi Shimon Zehnwirth. For more information call (818) 505-7999 or e-mail mht@vths.org

from Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>  
to Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> date Thu, Apr 30,  
2009 at 6:11 AM

### **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

Parshas Acharei Mos/Kedoshim

#### **PARSHAS ACHREI MOS**

With this shall Aharon come into the Sanctuary. (16:3) The pasuk continues, asserting that Aharon is to enter the Sanctuary with two animals as offerings. Why, then, does the Torah write the word b'zos, "with this," rather than b'eilah, "with these?" Rashi explains that the gimatria, numerical equivalent, of b'zos, is 410. This alludes to the first Bais Hamikdash which reigned in Klal Yisrael for 410 years. This does not imply that the prohibition against entering the Holy of Holies at any other time other than Yom Kippur was in effect only during the period of the first Bais Hamikdash. Rather, the pasuk implies that the eighteen Kohanim Gedolim, High Priests, who succeeded Aharon during the first Bais Hamikdash, were all devout and righteous, following the standard set forth by their ancestor Aharon. Thus, in this respect, Aharon is considered as if he had come into the Sanctuary during that time.

The Chida, zl, cites his grandfather who offers an alternative exposition, focusing on the word zos, this. We are aware that a gezeirah raah, negative decree, can be abrogated through the media of teshuvah, repentance, tefillah, prayer, and tzedakah, charity. Each of these virtues has a synonym: Teshuvah is tzom, fasting; tefillah is kol, voice (of prayer); and tzedakah is mammon, money. Each of these Hebrew terms has a gimatriya of 136. When they are added up, the total is 408, which implies that Aharon is successful on Yom Kippur when he enters the Holy of Holies, if he is accompanied with zos, 408, the equivalent of fasting, the sound of prayer, and the disbursement of money for charity.

In a public declaration, the Shach, zl, writes concerning the gimatriya of zos, 408, that in the year 1648, which in Hebrew is (5)648 or Tach, the Jewish People were waiting desperately. They were hoping with all their hearts that "Aharon," a reference to our long-awaited Moshiach, would arrive and redeem them from the terrible galus, exile. Lamentably, that year did not become one of celebration, but rather one of persecution, tribulation and brutal death, as hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews fell prey to the pogroms of Tach v'Tat. The cruel Chemelnicki, a Polish despot, and his hordes of sub humans ran over Poland taking the lives of so many of our brethren. The Shach writes that actually, Mei eis Hashem haysah zos, "This is Hashem's doing," hee niflaas b'eineinu, "It is marvelous in our own eyes." It was a time designated by the Almighty as one during which great wonders would occur for the Jewish People.

This concept is consistent with the episode in the Talmud Sanhedrin which relates how Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked Moshiach, Eimasai asi mar? "When will the Master (Moshiach) come?" Moshiach replied, Hayom, "Today." When the day had passed and the advent of Moshiach had not occurred, Rabbi Yehoshua asked, "But you said, hayom, today. What happened?" Moshiach answered, Hayom im b'koli tishme'un, "Today, (only) if you listen to My voice." The Shach concludes his letter with the statement, Zeh hayom asah Hashem, "Hashem has made this day." If we listen to His voice - then - nagilah v'nismecha bo, "We will rejoice in Him with our voices and in our hearts." We can transform the zos into a day of joy, if we follow the prescription for success which Hashem has given to us.

Aharon shall place lots upon the two he-goats: one lot "for Hashem" and one lot "for Azazel." (16:8)

Chazal teach us that the two he-goats were to be like one another, with each similar in appearance, height and value. I once heard someone

compare these two he-goats to our attitude concerning tzedakah, charity. We have to act with equal parity between what we do for that little Azazel within us and what we do for Hashem. To spend a fortune on luxuries and frivolities, but to penny-pinch when it comes to our relationship with Hashem, is not living a balanced life. While I am not criticizing those who spend on themselves, I am asking for equal time to fulfill Hashem's requests. Jewish education should not run a distant second behind our personal needs. Our children's education is our personal need! There is nothing wrong with having a nice home, car, etc. and living a lifestyle of affluence, as long as one recognizes the responsibility to do at least the same to meet Hashem's needs. When the two he-goats are not equal, when we do more for Azazel than we do for Hashem, we create a monster.

Perhaps we can take this idea a bit further. The areas in which the similarity between the two he-goats plays a role are appearance and value. Translating this concern to our lifestyle demands that the appearance and value of our sacred commitments be on an equal keel with our personal commitments. Our shuls and schools, the places where we and our children receive spiritual sustenance, should be no less proportionate in appearance and value than the areas of life that provide us with physical sustenance. At a minimum, we have to create parity.

And Aharon shall lean his two hands upon the head of the living he-goat and confess upon it all the iniquities of Bnei Yisrael, and all their rebellious sins among all their sins. (16:21)

Horav Levi Yitzchak zl, m'Berditchev, the legendary advocate for the Jewish People, was wont to interpret this pasuk homiletically - but very practically - in light of what has occurred to our People throughout our tumultuous history. Aharon placed all of the sins on the head of the se'ir, he-goat, which alludes to another sair, Eisav, who is referred to as sair, for the land which was his home - Har Se'ir. All of the Jewish sins are blamed on Eisav. The anti-Semitism, the cruelty, the pogroms and different types of persecutions that Eisav and his minions have initiated against us have catalyzed Jewish sin. When a person is broken; when he is constantly facing nothing but affliction; when fear is his interminable companion; and endless pain a part of his life; when humiliation and depravation are heaped upon him by those whose only excuse for living is hatred and evil, it is no wonder that it leads to yiush, despondency, hopelessness and eventual rejection of the focus of all this hatred: Judaism. Yes, the Jewish People have thrown in the towel; they cannot take anymore, and they have rebelled. The se'ir, Eisav haRasha, the wicked, engendered this reaction. The Berditchever entreated Hashem that all of the sins should rebound to the one that created the scenario for our capitulation.

A perusal of Jewish history supports this claim. We have only to go back two centuries to western Europe, specifically Germany and France, prior to - and especially following - the French Revolution, to observe this reality in action. The Enlightenment and its Jewish spin, the Haskalah movement, had begun to take hold of the hapless Jews. As the fortunes of the Jews in the larger cities changed, so did their attitude towards religion in general and Orthodoxy in particular. The small town and village Jew continued to maintain his faith and commitment, because he was not exposed to the degradation that was rampant in the larger communities. Suddenly, a nation that had suffered for so long at the hands of their enemies was now turning to embrace the religion of its oppressors.

Many Jews felt that they had been scorned long enough. Their hope was that the innovations which the Revolution set into motion would remove some of the walls of separation that existed between the Jew and the gentile. Perhaps, now they could become equals. How quickly they had forgotten the lessons of the past, all of the suffering and misery that had been so much a part of their lives. It was all forgotten, as they sacrificed their Judaism and their traditional way of life to the ideals of the Revolution. Instead of taking pride in the Torah, they were envious of their neighbors. After so many years of persecution, they sought acceptance. What the Christians had not succeeded in accomplishing via the fires of the

auto-de-fe` and the sword, the French Revolution achieved with its granting of equal rights.

After living for years under conditions that were, at best, miserable, the Jew was now breaking out. Is it any wonder that to the poor, depressed Jew, the cultured, intelligent gentile was the apex of his aspirations? Torah education was limited, and centers were uncommon. Without the centers to teach and imbue the youth with Torah knowledge and pride, the Jew was relegated to live a life of hopeless depression. Torah infuses one with national pride, helping to override the contempt and scorn the Jew felt whenever he came in contact with the gentile. When parents feel the disdain of others and are unable to develop a healthy sense of self, how can they possibly transmit a positive feeling about their heritage to their children?

The Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, explain that life is a challenge, a constant test of our ability to cope with- and triumph over- adversity. When one sees his co-religionist fall under the influence of Eisav ha'rasha, assimilating and joining forces with- and becoming part of -his society, he is puzzled. "Where is the punishment?" he asks. "Where is my reward for remaining committed and maintaining my devotion to our traditions?" he wonders. One who studies Torah, to whom Torah perspective is a way of life, has no questions. He is acutely aware that assimilation leads to spiritual extinction. True, there might be temporary benefits, but, in the long run, Eisav never accepts the Jew. He has now lost both worlds: estranged from his Jewish brethren; and reviled by his Eisavian friends.

Eisav has created nothing but trouble for the Jewish People. He attempts to pull us away from our source of holiness with promises of success and acceptance, and then persecutes us in the cruelest manner to remind us that Yaakov and Eisav can never coalesce. Regrettably, by then it is often too late.

Parshas Kedoshim You shall be holy for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d. (19:2)

It is not enough for a Jew to be good or virtuous. He must be holy. Holiness should be our goal. Exactly what holiness means, what activity or virtue defines this state of being, is a dispute among the Rishonim. Rashi feels that kedushah means to be parush, removed from arayos, sins of sexual immorality as defined by the Torah, as well as any sin that is related to such breaches in morality. Ramban contends that kedushah is a reference to the lack of excess even in those areas in which one may indulge. A glutton is not a kadosh. His excess undermines the very principles of kedushah.

We may understand kedushah from the perspective of the second part of the pasuk: ki kadosh ani, "For holy am I." We are to maintain a level of holiness, because it is G-d-like to be holy. We are to emulate Hashem. Clearly, we cannot fathom such a level of kedushah, but we can and should use Hashem as the barometer for everything that we do. In other words, when we act with integrity, it should be because that is what Hashem instructs us to do. When we are kind, it is because it is Hashem's way. Whatever we do, it is because of Hashem. The following episode elucidates this idea.

Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, relates that his father was a student in the university, majoring in accounting. The degree was issued after one passed a final test, which was given only at a specific time and lasted a maximum of four hours. When Mr. Stern saw that the test was being given on the second day of Shavuous, he went to the dean and explained that, as an observant Jew, he was forbidden to take the test at that time. The dean listened and passed the buck to his assistant, whom he asserted might be more understanding, since he was also Jewish. The assistant dean was understanding, but weak. He claimed that if he would provide him with a deferral, it would be alleged that he favored Jews. No "respectable" educator could take such a chance. Mr. Stern returned to the dean and thanked him for his time. He was not taking the test. The dean asked him to reconsider. After all, "no one" was going to see him taking the test on the

festival. Mr. Stern explained that he was not concerned with "no one;" it was G-d who concerned him. G-d sees and records everything.

The dean saw that the young Jewish student was uncompromising in his conviction, which, of course, is the way one should be. "What will you do now that you cannot take the test?" the dean asked. Mr. Stern replied, "I will take the course over again." "What if it is given next year on a Saturday or a Festival?" the dean asked. "Then, I will take the course over again," Mr. Stern replied.

"This kid is for real," the dean thought. He would try to help him. "Young man, sit down," the dean said. "There are two weeks left before the test. Come to my office the day before the holiday. We will talk."

Erev Shavuous found Mr. Stern waiting in front of the dean's office. "Come in, young man," the dean motioned, as he locked the door with three locks. "I am going to do something for you that I have never done in my entire life," the dean began. "If I am discovered, I will be ruined. My reputation in the academic community will be besmirched, and all of my honor will be lost, but I feel I must help a young man who is so sincere in his convictions and so committed to his religion."

The dean went over to the safe and removed a copy of the test, placed it in an envelope and sealed it. "Young man, here is the test that will be given in two days' time. I trust that you will not open this envelope until that time, and you will not talk to anyone concerning the contents of the test. It is to be concealed in your house until the night after the holiday when you are permitted to write. You will then open the envelope and take the test. After exactly four hours, you will stop and place the test in another envelope, seal it, and bring it to me the next day. No one is to know a word of this entire episode."

When the young man came home with the test and related to his father what had occurred, his father responded, "Give me the test. The dean trusted you. I do not." Rav Moshe Aharon interjected that his grandfather was a student of the saintly Chafetz Chaim, and this is how he would have reacted. He understood human nature and the guile of the yetzer hora, evil inclination.

On Motzei Yom Tov, following Havdalah, his father sat him down, gave him the test and started the clock. He was the inspector. When four hours were up, he asked for the papers. "But, Daddy, I am in the middle of an answer. It will only take two more minutes."

"No," his father said, "you gave your word. It is already four hours." This is kedushah. They answered to a Higher Authority.

Perhaps we may add a higher dimension to the concept of kedushah. The kadosh, one who has achieved sanctity status, is an individual who no longer lives on the same plane as ordinary man. He has the unique ability to transcend the physical, to surpass the mundane and connect with his Higher Source. A kadosh establishes a bond with Hashem which eclipses the prosaic existence for which many of us settle in this world. The following classic conveys this idea.

On one particular Chanukah in the dread death camp in Bergen-Belsen, the Nazi beasts were into their own diabolical perception of sport: taking Jews at random and shooting them. While the Jewish inmates of the camp were acutely aware that they were part of Hashem's plan, this cruel activity was focused on dehumanizing whatever pride the Jew had left. One group of Jews somehow found within themselves the strength and the power, under such extreme circumstances, to continue living as Jews. They still performed mitzvos with a resolute devotion that goes beyond description. They were able to locate some shoe polish, and they removed a thread from one of their prison uniforms. They assembled that night together to light Chanukah candles.

Their leader, spiritual mentor, was the venerable Blushover Rebbe, Horav Yisrael Spiro, zl. He arose to light the "candle" and make the brachah, blessing. He recited the first brachah, L'hadlik ner shel Chanukah. Then he recited the second blessing, She'asah nissim l'avoseinu bayamim ha'heim b'zman ha'zeh, "Who wrought miracles for our forefathers in those days at this season." He then paused and looked around. The group waited quietly,

anxiously. After a few moments, the Rebbe concluded with the third blessing of: Shehechyanu v'kiyamanu v'higianu l'zman hazeh, "Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season."

As soon as the Rebbe completed the emotional lighting of the "menorah," one of the inmates approached him and asked, "Rebbe, I can understand why you recited the first two brachos, blessings, but why did you recite the last blessing, the brachah of Shehechyanu? How could you make such a brachah after all that we have endured? Is this life?"

The Rebbe looked into the inmate's face and replied, "You know, I, too, pondered this difficulty. How could I make this blessing? Then I looked around the room at the faces of those assembled. I wondered, where are we? We are in Bergen Belsen, surrounded by death. We do not know if we will even be here tomorrow. There can be no more adverse conditions, no worse situation than this. Yet, even under such deplorable circumstances, Yidden can gather together to light Chanukah candles. I said to myself, 'If this is what Yidden are, and if this is the power of the Jews, then for that reason alone I could and should say that Hakodesh Baruch Hu brought us to this season.'"

This is kedushah: the ability to transcend the most calamitous circumstances, to confront misery and continue on the path of service to Hashem, because one has established an inextricable link with the Almighty.

You shall not cheat your fellow and you shall not rob; you shall not withhold a worker's wage with you until morning. You shall not curse the deaf. (19:13,14)

In his commentary to this pasuk, the Baal HaTurim notes the juxtaposition of the Torah's admonition not to curse a deaf person upon the admonition against withholding a worker's wages. He explains that the Torah is teaching us a valuable and practical lesson. One who has been wronged by his employer has no right to curse him. Rather, he should take him to court to have the matter adjudicated. Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, explains that the Torah is establishing for us defined set of parameters with regard to what is justifiable and what is not, how far one can go when he has been wronged, what he may do when he has been hurt and what is prohibited.

It happens all of the time. One has been cheated and seeks to retrieve his loss. There is a rabbinical court of law where this issue should be settled. Cursing, name calling, humiliation, are not part of what is permissible. We often get carried away in our reaction to those who have taken advantage of us. Imagine the worker in the Torah's context. He put in his honest effort, and he labored in accordance with his employer's demands. Times are difficult, and money is scarce. His family is in need. The paycheck is crucial to their survival, their dignity, their hope. By withholding the paycheck, his employer has dealt a severe blow to him and his family. Bearing this in mind, the employee feels justified in doing almost anything to retrieve his pay and to inflict damage on his employer. The Torah tells him: There are things you may do and things you may not do. Certain actions are not permissible. There are defined boundaries, and cursing one's employer is out of bounds. We think that once there is an area of approval, it extends to whatever we want. It is not like that. We are observant Jews who are guided and disciplined by the Torah. We do not do what we want - regardless of how justified it might "seem."

A similar exposition is to be found in Devarim 19:11, "If there will be a man who hates his fellow, and ambushes him...and strikes him mortally...and he flees to one of these cities (of refuge)...Then the elders of his city shall take him from there and place him in the hand of the redeemer of the blood, and he shall die. Your eye shall not pity him... You shall not move a boundary of your fellow." Once again the Baal HaTurim makes note of the juxtaposition of the intentional murderer, who attempts to save himself by fleeing to the city of refuge and is handed over to the relative of the victim who is permitted to kill him, upon the admonition against moving someone's boundary marker. It is a form of theft. The Baal HaTurim explains that one might think that since he is allowed to avenge his relative's blood, he might also take some of the murderer's land. The Torah has set up boundaries. The murderer pays with his life. His land is not to be touched - regardless of the heinous nature of his crime. This is where the yetzer hora, evil inclination, rears its ugly head, by convincing the person that "all" is permissible. We are Torah-observant Jews. Rioting, looting, and other perverted forms of revenge and self-expression are not part of our way of life. We ascribe to a higher form of discipline - the Torah. Everything has its measure, its time, its place, its boundary.

Al tivtechu b'neivim b'ven Adam she'ein lo teshuah. Do not rely on nobles, nor on a human being for he holds no salvation.

In his Be'er Shmuel, Horav Shmuel Rosenberg, zl approaches this pasuk practically. We all make the mistake of trusting in human beings. Our error is compounded when

we take into account that even the individuals in whom we have placed our hopes and trust are "also" dysfunctional without Hashem. Why bother with neivim altogether, if in the long run, they too cannot succeed without Hashem's blessing? David HaMelech says in Sefer Tehillim 118:9, Tov lachasos b'Hashem m'betoach b'neivim, "It is better to take refuge in Hashem than to rely on nobles." The Psalmist is telling us not to bother placing our trust in nobles-or any human being for that matter, but rather to place our total reliance on Hashem, Who is the source of all salvation. David HaMelech was a great and powerful king - as long as Hashem showered him with His blessing. Without this Divine Providence, he was nothing. He acknowledges this as he encourages others to place their trust only in Hashem.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, notes the use of the word yeshuah, salvation. He explains that this word is used to describe something which endures. A human being, regardless of how well-intentioned he may be, cannot possibly possess the ability to carry out his promise, because he will eventually leave this world. Only Hashem is infinite.

Sponsored by Adina and Jeffrey Soclof in honor of their son Moshe

-- I am using the free version of SPAMfighter. We are a community of 6 million users fighting spam. SPAMfighter has removed 4524 of my spam emails to date. Get the free SPAMfighter here: <http://www.spamfighter.com/len>

The Professional version does not have this message  
Peninim mailing list [Peninim@shemayisrael.com](mailto:Peninim@shemayisrael.com)  
[http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim\\_shemayisrael.com](http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim_shemayisrael.com)

Yeshivat Har Etzion <[office@etzion.org.il](mailto:office@etzion.org.il)>

to [yhe-holiday@etzion.org.il](mailto:yhe-holiday@etzion.org.il)

date Tue, Apr 28, 2009 at 6:13 AM

subject VBM-Special Yom HaAtzmaut Shiur

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

yom ha-atzmaut 5769 For more articles about Yom Ha-Atzmaut, see:

<http://www.vbm-torah.org/yerush.htm> [www.vbm-torah.org/archive/chag69/atzmaut69.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/chag69/atzmaut69.htm)

## "Ha-Tikva" – Then and Now

By Harav Ya'akov Medan

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Israel's national anthem, "Ha-Tikva," is the first stanza of a poem written by Naftali Herz Imber (1856-1909), with amendments to its closing lines. Over a hundred years ago, the poem was the unofficial anthem of the early pioneers in Eretz Yisrael. It was, for all intents and purposes, the anthem of the Zionist movement; it was sung when David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the state, and later became the official national anthem. The strange circumstances under which it attained its official status, the problematic personality of its composer, and - most of all - its content, which is seemingly irrelevant to a nation that has already realized its vision and dwells in its land, have given rise to the question of whether it should be replaced by a more appropriate choice.

Such suggestions have been raised by various groups from time to time, and especially by Religious Zionists. One of the more widely known proposals was to adopt chapter 126 of Tehillim (Shir ha-ma'alot be-shuv Hashem...) as our national anthem. After certain figures in the government who had signed the Oslo Accords proposed replacing "Ha-Tikva" with "Shir ha-Shalom" (the "Song of Peace"), a song that depicts the soldiers and citizens who gave their lives for the establishment of Israel as victims who died in vain, the Religious Zionist camp became the most vociferous defenders of the present anthem.

I will attempt here to identify some elements connecting this poem with concepts emanating from authentic Jewish sources.

### A. Exile and Hope

The words, "od lo avda tikvatenu," "our hope is not yet lost," are borrowed from Yechezkel's prophecy concerning the dry bones. In that context, the House of Israel in exile declare, "Our bones are dried and our hope is lost

(avda tikvatenu); we have been cut off" (Yechezkel 37:11). The composer of "Ha-Tikva" argues that the loss of hope is the result of an internal process, rather than objective circumstances that are imposed upon the nation by external forces.

An independent nation in its own land is a living organism, with a brain and a heart. A nation that loses its land and its independence is like a body that is brain-dead; it is incapable of doing anything, but its heart continues to beat. A body with a beating heart, even if its brain is not functioning, is not dead; it exists in a coma. It cannot actively perform any action, but the body does not decay and decompose. When salvation comes for the brain, the body will be ready to carry out its commands. Similarly, as long as the nation in exile retains hope in its heart, its flesh will not decompose and its bones will not scatter. When the time of salvation arrives, there will remain a nation that is ready to be redeemed.

The prophet Yechezkel speaks about an exiled nation mired in despair; they are thus compared to corpses that are not only lifeless but whose flesh and skin have decomposed and whose bones have been scattered. "Ha-Tikva" likewise describes a nation in exile, but the soul of this nation is alive and its eyes look towards Zion. (As Rav Charlap explains ["Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'a," part I, in Mei Marom, vol. VI], the anticipation of salvation is often greater than the salvation itself.)

#### B. Hope and Reality

Both Yechezkel's prophecy and "Ha-Tikva" speak of despair and hope in exile. The prophecy, as we would expect, also addresses the solution to the problem. According to Yechezkel, the end of the exile lies entirely in the hands of God, just as only G-d can resurrect the dead. In contrast, the poem (in its original form) concludes with the nation still in exile, leading to the claim that it is inappropriate as the anthem of a State that has shaken off the dust of exile and risen from the ashes.

However, hope has another aspect to it, as expressed in the words of Iyov:

A mortal, born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble. He emerges like a flower, but is cut down; he flees like a shadow and does not endure... Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with You; You have set his bounds and he cannot pass them. Turn from him that he may rest, until like a hireling his day is accomplished. For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again and that its tender shoots will not cease. While its roots may grow old in the earth and its trunk die in the ground, from the scent of water it will bud and bring forth branches like a living plant. But man dies and is laid low; man perishes and where is he? With all the waters of the sea, and after the river is parched and dried up, man lies and does not rise, until the heavens are no more; they shall not awaken nor be raised from their slumber... Surely the mountain falling crumbles, and the rock is moved from its place. As the waters wear away the stones, its torrents washing away the dust of the earth, so You cause man's hope to be lost. (Iyov 14:1-19)

In Iyov's metaphor, man is compared to a plant that withers – "until like a hireling his day is accomplished." Man has no connection with the earth, whose days are without number. His labor upon the earth is like the work of a hireling on his master's land. The time allotted for his work is set in advance, and when it is over, he leaves with no care or feeling for the fate of the land that he has tilled. For man, the land is nothing but a source of financial profit. Severed from the land, which expresses eternity, his life is a fleeting moment, like a wildflower with no roots to anchor its existence. His death is inevitable and hopeless, like that of a withering plant. The inescapable conclusion is that "You cause man's hope to be lost."

For a tree, in contrast, there is hope. Even if it is cut down, it may yet sprout anew. Even if it grows old and withers, it will come alive at the mere hint of water. Its fate is different from the fate of man, owing to its connection with the timeless earth. The tree's roots are firmly planted in the ground, and it continually draws its sustenance and nourishment from the earth. Death is therefore foreign to it; more importantly, it knows no despair.

Above, we contrasted the hope expressed in Imber's "Ha-Tikva" and the lack of hope among the exiles in Babylon in Yechezkel's prophecy. Let us now consider a similar contrast between the loss of hope for man in Iyov and the hope expressed by the Rambam in his presentation of the commandment to sanctify the new moon:

I shall add the following explanation for you: Were it possible, for example, that there would be no Jews living in Eretz Yisrael (Heaven forefend that G-d should do this, for He promised that the remnants of the people would never be entirely uprooted)... then our calculations would not help us in any way whatsoever [and we would lack the ability to sanctify the months and the festivals]... (Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, positive commandment 153)

According to Iyov, a tree has hope because its roots are planted in the ground; thus, even if its trunk is cut, new life may spring from its concealed roots. Man, on the other hand, is severed from the earth, and his death represents final and irrevocable cessation. The Rambam asserts that the roots of the Jewish nation are planted and anchored in the ground of its land. Even during the exile, there was never a time when the Jewish presence in the land ceased entirely. The small number of families who maintained the continuity of Jewish settlement, under foreign domination and very difficult conditions, represent the roots concealed in the earth by virtue of which the nation will once again come alive and flourish in its land. Had these roots ceased, heaven forefend, the remnants of the nation in the land would have disappeared entirely, the sanctity of the festivals would have no validity, and the blessing "Who sanctifies Israel and the appointed times" would no longer have any meaning.

Both in Iyov's metaphor and in Rambam's halakha, hope is dependent upon a connection with eternity, represented by a connection with the land. According to Iyov, man's connection with the land is devoid of roots, while the Rambam maintains that roots do indeed exist, at least in terms of the nation as a whole.

Let us now compare the Rambam's "hope" with that of Imber. Both address the riddle of Israel's endurance throughout exile, but in different ways. In his youth, Imber received a Chassidic education. In his view, even a nation that has been extinguished in exile, and which has no roots in and grasp on reality, may still draw the source of its vitality from the inner, psychological processes of "nefesh Yehudi homiya" ("a Jewish soul stirs") and "ayin le-Tzion tzofiya" ("its eye looks to Zion"). The Rambam adopts a more realistic understanding of history. He seeks the roots of an awakening in reality itself, in the actual presence of Jews in God's land. If the isolated families living in the land were, in Rambam's view, the roots preserving the life of the nation, whose trunk and branches were in exile, then now, with the trunk sitting firmly in God's land, there is certainly a firm basis for hope.

#### C. Stones Eroded by Water

In his battle against the despair projected by Iyov, the Rambam is preceded by his great master in the laws pertaining to Israelite kingship – Rabbi Akiva. Like Iyov, Akiva was also brought to the brink of despair when he undertook, as an illiterate, mature adult, to start studying Torah in all its immense breadth and depth. Akiva's mind and heart were blocked up after so many years of shepherding and harboring resentment towards the Torah and its scholars. Interestingly, both Iyov and Akiva, as they approach despair, are confronted with a similar sight of stones that are shaped and molded by drops of water that flow over them. Iyov responds to this sight by declaring, "As the waters wear away the stones, its torrents washing away the dust of the earth, so You cause man's hope to be lost." In other words, there is no hope for man against the natural forces of wear and tear and decay. He will perish and be consumed just like the stone that is worn away by the water flowing over it.

Akiva considers the same phenomenon from a different perspective:

How did Rabbi Akiva start out?

They said: he was forty years old and had never studied anything. Once he stood at a well. He said, "Who engraved this stone?"

They told him, "[It was] the water, which drips upon it every day." And they said to him, "Akiva, are you not familiar [with the verse,] 'As the waters wear away the stones?'"

On the spot, Rabbi Akiva made the following deduction: If something soft [like water] could chisel its way through something hard [like stone], then surely the words of Torah, which are as hard as iron, can penetrate my heart, which is flesh and blood!" Immediately, he returned to studying Torah.

He went with his son, and they sat in front of teachers of young children. He said, "Rabbi, teach me Torah!" Rabbi Akiva held one end of the tablet and his son held the other end. He wrote him "alef" and "bet" and he learned them. Then he wrote from "alef" to "tav" and he learned it. He taught him *Torat Kohanim* and he learned it. He continued studying until he had learned the entire Torah. (Avot De-Rabbi Natan, version 1, chapter 6)

Iyov looked at the stone's erosion and it led him to despair. Akiva focused on the power of the water and its effect on the stone, and that gave him hope and strength.

It was not only for himself that Rabbi Akiva drew hope, but for his entire nation. Just as the stone was strong and hard, so the Roman empire was strong and hard towards the nations that were crushed under its dominion. But the nation of Israel was as weak and soft as water. And just as water flows from a high place to a low place, Israel fell from the elevated, glorious heights of the Hasmonean kingdom to the abyss of subjugation and the destruction of the Temple. Nevertheless, Rabbi Akiva maintained his faith in their power:

On another occasion, they went up to Jerusalem. When they reached Mount Scopus, they tore their garments. When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerging from the place of the Holy of Holies. They began to weep, but Rabbi Akiva laughed.

They said to him, "Why are you laughing?"

He said to them, "Why are you weeping?"

They said, "The place concerning which it is written, 'The stranger who approaches shall be put to death,' now has foxes roaming over it; shall we not weep?!"

He said to them, "That is why I laugh... The text links the prophecy of Zekharia to that of Uria. In Uria's case, it says, 'Therefore, because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field.' In Zekharia it says, 'Old men and old women shall yet sit in the courtyards of Jerusalem.' So long as Uria's prophecy had not yet been fulfilled, I feared that Zekharia's prophecy would not come about. Now that Uria's prophecy has come about, I know for certain that Zekharia's prophecy, too, will be realized."

With these words they said to him, "Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us." (Makkot 24b)

Perhaps one might think that Rabbi Akiva concerned himself only with inner, psychological processes of consolation over the destruction, and that the processes that he envisioned were for the distant future and experienced only at great intervals. But this is not so; the hope that flooded him at the sight of the fox emerging from the place of the Holy of Holies was not mere grist for speeches. On the basis of that fox, and on the basis of that lesson, Rabbi Akiva educated a generation – tens of thousands of scholars who, led by Bar Kokhba, rebelled against the Roman tyrant. It was not mere psychological comfort that Rabbi Akiva drew from the fox and from its lesson; rather, he drew true hope and faith, with real roots planted deeply in the land. This was hope with practical consequences.

#### D. Vision and Fulfillment

Once, Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Akiva were in a boat. Rabbi Akiva made a sukka on the boat. The next day, the wind blew it away. Rabban Gamliel said to him, "Akiva, where is your sukka?" (Sukka 23a)

Cynics, skeptics, and those who hold our sages in scorn could view the above beraita as a summary of Rabbi Akiva's entire national endeavor in the Bar Kokhba rebellion: unrestrained optimism and excess energy, producing castles in the air unable to stand up to a moderate wind; a tree boasting a thick trunk and heavy branches, but with no real roots, easily overturned in

the breeze. The skeptics would no doubt take such a view of Rabbi Akiva's speech upon seeing the fox. After all, it was not elderly Jewish men and women who sat enjoying the sunshine in the courtyards of Jerusalem after the Bar Kokhba rebellion had ended; rather, there were piles of corpses – tens of thousands – with no one to bury them. But this is not so: "If the Holy One, blessed be He, ensures that no mistake comes about through the animals of the righteous, then how much more so through the righteous themselves!" (Ketuvot 28b).

Like the prophecies of the biblical prophets, Rabbi Akiva's vision and teaching were not unaffected by the decisions taken by the generation of redemption and its leaders. Bar Kokhba was worthy of redeeming Israel, and Rabbi Akiva's students were worthy of bringing about the redemption together with him. According to the testimony of the Jerusalem Talmud (Ta'anit 4:5), Rabbi Akiva declared concerning Bar Kokhba, "This is the King Messiah." However, the Rambam (Hilkhot Melakhim 11:3-4) interprets these words as meaning, "He has the potential to be the Messiah." Only "if he would act successfully... then it would be certain that he was the Messiah." Bar Kokhba was assumed to be the Messiah "until he was killed, for his sins," and it is not for slight wrongdoings that the redemption was postponed.

Bar Kokhba's declaration to God, "Do not aid us and do not hinder us," and his killing of Rabbi Elazar ha-Moda'i (Jerusalem Talmud, *ibid.*) express the degree to which he was disconnected from the spiritual process of redemption guided by the spiritual leaders of the generation. This may also explain why entire regions in Eretz Yisrael failed to cooperate with Bar Kokhba in his rebellion against Rome. Rabbi Akiva's original hope was a true and genuine one, but it failed owing to the sins of the generation.

#### E. Hope and Despair

The voice of the skeptic is not yet stilled. The vision and the hope, he claims, are all very well, but the attempt to bring about their realization is a messianic delusion, carrying a high spiritual price when the time comes for realistic awakening and disappointment. Many people end up abandoning the path of faith when their expectations of redemption are not fulfilled.

Our response to such an argument is that one cannot be a disciple of Rabbi Akiva by half measures. When the military and political rebellion led by Bar Kokhba failed, Rabbi Akiva persisted with full force in his fight for the spiritual independence of the nation. He gathered groups and taught Torah in defiance of Roman law, never heeding the advice of Pappus, son of Yehuda, who asked him, "Akiva, have you no fear of the law?" (Berakhot 61b). Even on the fateful day when he was sentenced to death for his activities and he was taken to have his flesh torn with iron combs, Rabbi Akiva did not lose his faith. On the contrary, the failure of his political efforts and the terrible death that he suffered served only to increase his love of God, with the clear knowledge that not all of God's decrees can be understood by the human mind. In this respect, too, Rabbi Akiva was different from Iyov who, when beset with suffering, began to curse.

A person who decides to follow the path of realizing the hope and vision of Rabbi Akiva must also be able and willing to pay the price when the time comes, not to blame God, Heaven forefend, but to increase one's love of Him. One must also know that the spiritual battle is not over, and that the true values for the sake of which the battle was waged remain valid. The hope for the revival of these values is proportional to one's faith in them during difficult times.