

THE COMMUNITY Parasha Sheet



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RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL

DIRECTOR
TAL



DEVOTION TO TORAH

No, it's not your imagination. You really have been spending more time at the office since the recession hit back in 2008.

In Japan they call it karoshi and in China it is guolaosi. As yet there is no word in English for working yourself to death, but as more and more people put in longer hours and suffer more stress there may soon be.

In 2005, an American survey concluded that long working hours increased an individual's chances of illness and injury. It noted that for those doing 12 hours a day, there was a 37% increase in risk compared to those working fewer hours.

Ronald Reagan was wrong, it seems, when he said: "Hard work never killed anyone." Death from overwork is not a new phenomenon in Britain but it is largely unremarked upon.

The Torah seems to take a different approach when it comes to studying Torah.

Adam Ki Yamut B'ohel - "This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent" (Bamidbar 19:14).

The Gemara interprets this homiletically: "Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: From where do we know that the words of Torah endure only if one kills himself over them? As it is written: 'Zot haTorah, this is the Torah - Adam ki yamut b'ohel, a man who would die in a tent' (Ibid.), i.e. a man who kills himself in the tent, in the study halls of Torah, is privileged to master the Torah" (Berachot 63b).

The Rambam, in Hilchot Talmud Torah (3:12), cites this passage amidst his exhortation that Torah scholarship can only be attained by denying oneself a degree of comfort and enjoyment. A person who wishes to achieve Torah knowledge cannot indulge in sleeping, eating and other forms of physical enjoyment. He must rather devote himself tirelessly to this pursuit, at the expense of physical comfort. The image of "killing oneself" thus means compromising one's physical comfort.

The Taz, in his commentary to the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 47:1), explains this passage somewhat differently, in reference to the exertion required in the pursuit of Torah study itself. He focuses not on the withdrawal from physical delights as a prerequisite for success in learning, but rather the **hard work** that one must invest into his studies. A student cannot possibly achieve any degree of scope or depth in his Torah scholarship unless he is prepared to invest maximum intellectual effort into the field. "Killing oneself" thus refers to hard work, intense concentration and rigorous analytical thinking.

It's not just about the amount of time we spend learning Torah, it's about the quality of time we spend learning as well. This can sometimes be even more important.

The Midrash Vayikra Rabah (3:15) tells the story of how King Agrippas wished to offer up a thousand burnt offerings in one day.

He sent to tell the High Priest: 'Let no man other than myself offer sacrifices today!'

There came a poor man with two turtle-doves in his hand, and he said to the High Priest: 'Sacrifice these.'

Said he: 'The king commanded me, saying, "Let no man other than myself offer sacrifices this day."'

Said he: 'My lord the High Priest, I catch four [doves] every day; two I offer up, and with the other two I sustain myself. If you do not offer them up, you cut off my means of sustenance.'

The priest took them and offered them up.

In a dream it was revealed to Agrippas: 'The sacrifice of a poor man preceded yours.' ►

> MAZAL TOV

Kate Cohen & Jonathan Cohen
on their wedding

Family Aaron & Family Hanan
on the engagement of their children
Chaya & Yosef Chaim



THE WEEKLY QUOTE

"Those who judge will never understand, and those who understand will never judge."



DVAR TORAH

Devotion to Torah
RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL

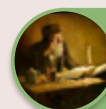
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So he sent to the High Priest, saying: 'Did I not command you thus: "Let no one but me offer sacrifices this day"?'

'Said [the High Priest] to him: 'Your Majesty, a poor man came with two turtle-doves in his hand, and said to me: "I catch four birds every day; I sacrifice two, and from the other two I support myself. If you will not offer them up you will cut off my means of sustenance." Should I not have offered them up?'

Said [King Agrippas] to him: 'You were right in doing as you did.'

Just like the poor person offers all from his heart, so to when a person devotes an hour of studying Torah, without any disturbances, he offers a special sacrifice that can match a thousand sacrifices.

Thus we have seen that we should reduce physicality's (Rambam), increase our hard work in studying (Taz) in order to succeed in Torah.

There is a further ingredient (and explanation) offered by Rabbi Menachem Tzvi Taksin, in his work Or Yekarot

to Masechet Shabbat. He explains that one must keep to his schedule of Torah studies even if it requires that he act as though he is "dead" with respect to other responsibilities. Many people understand the need to allocate time for Torah study, but they find themselves unable to afford the time to do so. The Gemara, according to this reading, teaches that a person must occasionally see himself as "dead" with regard to other matters. Just as a dead person obviously cannot tend to these matters, so must a Jew allocate a period of time each day where he simply cannot engage in other responsibilities, when regardless of other concerns he devotes himself to Torah.

On Rabbi Eliezer Yosef Lederberg's tombstone in Jerusalem, it states that Rabbi Lederberg reviewed the tractates Rosh Hashanah and Beitzah 4,000 times.

Rabbi Lederberg, an ostensibly simple Jew who lived in Batei Warsaw, Jerusalem, was a storekeeper. Every spare moment was spent learning Torah. He once needed to have brain surgery. The doctors informed him that

although he needed the surgery to save his life, he might never see again.

"How long can I delay the operation?" he asked the surgeon.

He was told that the maximum was six months. During that time he learned the two tractates, Rosh Hashanah and Beitzah, by heart, so he would be able to review them constantly if he went blind.

The surgery was a success and not only did it save his life, his vision was not affected. He kept reviewing the two tractates wherever he was, until he died in 1954.

In Japan they call it karoshi and in China it is guolaosi. We call it Amelut BaTorah - through exerting ourselves, we are not dying we are living! Ki Hem Chayenu VeOrech Yamenu - for they are our life and the length of our days!

■ Shabbat Shalom

RABBI YEHOANATAN SALEM - SHALOM LAAM DIASPORA

DVAR
TORAH



WHO IS TO BLAME?

Having suffered more setbacks on their journey through the desert after some thirty-eight years on their way to the Holy Land, the Jewish People were getting weary. They began complaining about their general predicament and about the manna, with which they were divinely-sustained on a daily basis. G-d punished them by sending poisonous snakes, which attacked those who complained, injecting them with venom and killing many of them. Realising that their complaining was unjustified, and full of remorse, the people came to Moshe Rabbenu, asking forgiveness and requesting him to intercede on their behalf with G-d, to remove the plague. After Moshe prayed, G-d instructed him to prepare a copper snake and to hang it up high, as a banner for the people to look at. Anyone who had

been bitten and would look at the snake, would live.

Let us understand, why did G-d command Moshe Rabbenu specifically to make a snake for the people to look at, in order to cure them, if snakes were used to punish them? Moreover, the Ramban (Chukat 21:9) points out that medically, if one was bitten by a certain animal, to then go and stare at that animal or even to mention its name may cause the victim irreparable or even fatal damage. The emotional trauma will cause the victim to deteriorate further. If so, what was the rationale to make a snake figure in order to heal them?

The Ramban explains that G-d specifically wanted them to be healed through what naturally would be fatal for them. By doing so, the people would understand that it is not a snake which causes death, or, which brings a cure. Rather, when a person follows in G-d's ways then he is spared, but if he falls to sin, then a snake may be used as a means for getting him back onto "the straight and narrow." When we realise that crises come in order to make us contemplate our actions and raise our hearts to heaven, then, to blame the crisis on the snake is as irrational as to credit the snake with the cure. G-d wants us to

stay on "the straight and narrow," with our hearts and intentions corresponding to the will of Hashem. The objective of a crisis is not to give us a hard time, but rather, to restore our connection with G-d. When it seems to us that "we got out of bed on the wrong side" and that nothing seems to work, let us not blame our wives, children, the traffic, the bank manager or the postal service. Rather, let us contemplate our ways and pray for divine assistance, to get ourselves "back on track" as soon as possible.

When travelling recently by bus, I noticed that whenever the driver wandered slightly into another lane, or came too close to a car in front of him, a sensor started beeping him, signalling him to reposition and drive safely. This system helps him to be able to reach his given destination safely and happily. Similarly, G-d sends us warning signals when we start to deviate from the correct path, to encourage us to reposition ourselves back onto our appropriate paths.

Have a safe, enjoyable and fulfilling journey to your destination!

■ Shabbat shalom

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OUR CHACHAMIM

RABBI AKIVA EIGER

The Beit Rubinstein Yeshiva, which was under the direction of the Rav of Ponevitz, included among its teachers Rabbi Bertchik (Dov) Rickels Zatzal. He was a Torah genius, with a lucid and penetrating mind. In his courses, he always went deeply into the teachings of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, and truly weighed each word and letter of his holy words. He used to tell his students in juicy Yiddish, "My children, everyone makes a sentence out of a word, but Rabbi Akiva Eiger makes a word out of a sentence." Rabbi Akiva Eiger's teachings were concise. He was very exacting with the language he used, and he weighed words like people weigh gold.

The son of Rabbi Moshe Guens and his wife Gitel (the daughter of Rabbi Eiger the Elder), Rabbi Akiva Eiger was born on Heshvan 11, 5522 (Nov 8, 1761) in Eisenstadt, which then belonged to Hungary.

From his youth, people could see that he had the makings of greatness. He was a child prodigy who did nothing like others, and he distinguished himself by his extraordinary diligence, rapid comprehension, and his incredibly sharp mind.

People say that by the age of six, he completely knew the six orders of the Mishnah with the commentary of Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura.

During his early years, he was raised primarily by this father Rabbi Moshe, a great Talmid Chacham, and his mother, who was known for her tremendous scholarship.

At the age of 12 he went to study at the yeshiva of the Gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Yossef Teomim in Breslau, where he remained for six years. During that time he began to gain a reputation as a person who studied Torah deeply. He also began to give courses and showed his students the way that enables a person to arrive at the depths and truth of Torah.

At 18 years of age he married the daughter of the wealthy Rabbi Yitzchak Margalioth of Lissa, and there he devoted himself to Torah study and serving G-d, his mind free from all material concerns. He lived in a holy a pious way, studying intensively while eating and sleeping little.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger was a rabbi for 25 years, first in Märkisch-Friedland (in West Prussia), then in Posen. He had a large yeshiva that students flocked to from far and near to hear Torah directly from him, and he treated them with great affection. In him they saw a father, while in them he saw sons, even going to the extent of finding them wives and helping them obtain livelihoods.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger detested the rabbinate. People say that he would have preferred to be a Gabbai, or even to work in a mikveh.

It seems that one day he learned that in the neighboring town of Posen, a person who worked in the mikveh there died. He hurried to write to his daughter, who was then living in that town, and asked her to try to get him that job.

He wrote to her and stated, "In my old age, I want to earn a living in a permissible way, not in a forbidden one."

Yet since he was obligated to be a Rav, he did not enclose himself within the tent of Torah learning. He was entirely devoted

to his community, for which he performed work that was also recognized by the Government of Prussia as being exceptional.

In 5591 (1831) a plague broke out in Germany and also spread to Posen, where Rabbi Akiva Eiger then lived. More than 600 people died among the Christian population, but among the Jews only a few perished, which surprised everyone. Needless to say, the Jews had been protected by the merit of their Rav. He issued decrees on what they were to do during the epidemic, supplied the poor with food, and even taught his people the basics of hygiene. He also organized special committees to ensure that these decrees were kept. When Emperor Frederic Guillaume III learned of the Rav's great devotion for the members of his community, he personally decided to send him a thank you letter bearing his signature.

This humble spiritual giant viewed honors with disdain. When the residents of Vilna once asked him to be their Rav, he was taken aback by this. He said in response, "Who am I that I should fill the position of Rav in the city of the Gra? I would like to have the merit of being a Gabbai in Vilna's synagogue!"

One day, Rabbi Akiva went to Krakow with Rabbi Yaakov of Lissa (the author of Netivot HaMishpat). They entered an inn, and many people came to welcome these two greats of the generation. At one point, while Rabbi Yaakov was absent and Rabbi Akiva was alone in their room, someone came to the inn and knocked on their door. Rabbi Akiva opened the door asked him what he wanted.

As the man trembled with emotion, he said, "I have come to see our Rav."

"Our Rav," Rabbi Eiger replied, "is not here right now. He will return soon."

Rabbi Akiva Eiger was extremely meticulous concerning the mitzvah of hospitality. During Shabbat and holidays, he invited many people to come and eat at his table.

During one Passover Seder, while Rabbi Akiva and his guests were seated at the table and speaking of the exodus from Egypt, the hand of one of guests accidentally hit a glass of wine. The glass tipped over and the wine spilled on the white tablecloth.

In order that his guest not be embarrassed, Rabbi Akiva rattled the table to make the glass in front of him spill over. He then said, "I have the feeling that this table is wobbly."

On Tishri 13, 5598 (October 12, 1837), at the age of 76, our teacher rendered his pure soul to his Father in Heaven.

People say that up to his last moment, the one at which is soul departed, he had on his lips the verse, "My mouth will utter the praise of the L-RD." And in truth, this verse reflected all his virtues, deeds and manners, for his entire life was an embodiment of praising G-d.

Our teacher left behind seven sons and six daughters. All were great in Torah, starting with his son-in-law Rabbi Moshe Sofer, the author of Chatam Sofer. Many of his commentaries on the Mishnah and Gemara were also published, and up to our day his Torah and wisdom are studied in every yeshiva throughout the world.



HALACHOT

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

FINDING A SPOUSE: RECOGNIZING GOD'S ROLE, AND TESTING FOR GENETIC COMPATIBILITY

The Sefer Hasidim (Rabbi Yehuda Ha'hasid, Germany, d. 1217), in Siman 385 (listen to audio recording for precise citation), tells the story of an unmarried girl who did not wear makeup or jewelry. When she was told that this practice may lower her chances of finding a suitable mate, she replied that she has no reason for concern, as it is God who brings men and women together for marriage. (The Talmud indeed states that before a person's birth, God announces, so-to-speak, whom that child will eventually marry.) Sure enough, this girl ultimately married a pious Torah scholar.

This incident demonstrates the importance of God's role in the process of finding a spouse. It goes without saying that one must take personal responsibility and make every effort to find a suitable spouse, and the accepted practice is for young women to wear makeup, jewelry and nice clothing while dating. Still, one must recognize that this process is overseen by God, who ensures that everybody finds a worthy mate. Certainly a girl should not compromise her modesty to find a spouse.

Earlier (Siman 384), the Sefer Hasidim tells a different story, of a man who observed multiple fasts as a means of beseeching God to find his son a suitable bride, and the son indeed married and begot children. When the father's wife passed away, the son, as an expression of gratitude, observed no fewer than forty fasts to petition God to find his father a new wife. This demonstrates the importance of prayer as a crucial component of the process of finding a spouse for oneself and for others.

Among the Halachic questions that arise during the process of finding a spouse is the issue of testing for genetic disorders. Particularly among Ashkenazim, there are certain genetic features that are incompatible with one another, as the combination poses the risk of disease. Many young men and women therefore take a blood test in advance to determine their genetic compatibility. Are such tests permissible, or do they reflect an attempt to interfere with God's work in bringing people together, and to extend beyond the accepted range of human effort and initiative?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Russia-New York, 1895-1986), in his work Iggerot Moshe (vol. 4, Eben Ha'ezer 10), writes that it is both permissible and proper to perform such tests, as part of one's efforts to ensure compatibility. Failing to perform these tests, he writes, would be akin to walking with one's eyes closed, without taking the precautions necessary to avoid injury and harm. Rav Moshe adds, however, that these tests should be conducted discreetly in order to guarantee privacy and prevent stigmatizing and labeling should a defective gene be discovered.

Rav Shemuel Wosner (Israel, contemporary), in his work Shebet Ha'levi, likewise maintains that these tests should be encouraged, as they help prevent dangerous diseases, and that such measures are certainly within the domain of the efforts one should take to protect himself and his children.

Summary: It is important to recognize God's role in finding a suitable spouse for oneself or one's children, and therefore one's efforts in this regard must include spiritual efforts, such as praying and the like. At the same time, however, one must employ the natural means at his disposal in searching for a suitable mate, including testing for genetic compatibility to prevent the spread of genetic disorders. ■

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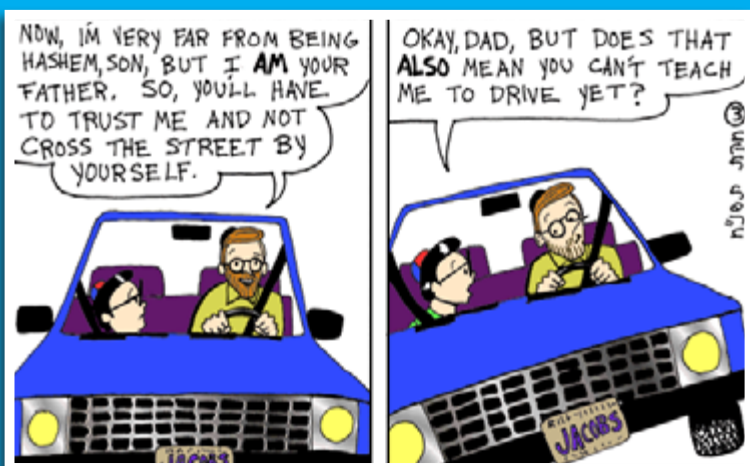
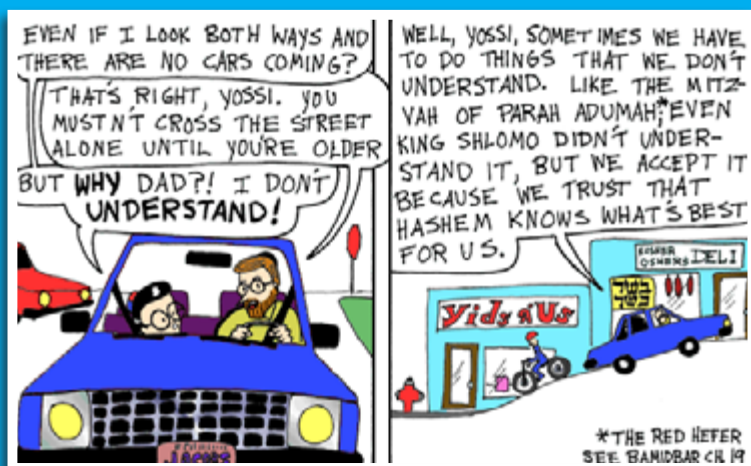
TEST YOURSELF - Q&A

- 1 "Take a perfect para aduma (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" -- temima -- mean in this context?
- 2 How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a para aduma?
- 3 A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
- 4 What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the para aduma; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
- 5 Why was the mitzvah of the para aduma entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?

Answer

1 19:2 - Perfectly red. 2 19:2 - Two. 3 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected. 4 19:21 - a) Remains tahor, b) He, but not his clothing, contracts tumah; c) He and his clothing contract tumah. 5 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the golden calf.

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STORY

THE "RED" REWARD

Chaim, how red was the Parah Adumah (red cow)?

Avi, do you mean the red cow from the times of the Beis HaMikdash whose ashes were used to purify people who had come in contact with dead bodies?

That is the Parah Adumah that I am talking about.

It was so red that if it had just two black hairs it was posul (unfit for use).

That is really red, Chaim. It must have been very rare. I never saw a cow with hair that was all one color. And I never saw a red cow at all.

It was very, very rare, Avi. In fact, it was so rare that it was worth a lot of money. Whoever was fortunate enough to have one born into his flock became a wealthy man.

Do you know, Chaim, there is a famous story in the Talmud and the Medrash about a man who merited having a Parah Adumah born in his flock.

Who was he Avi?

His name was Damma Ben Nesina. He was a Gentile who lived in Ashkelon. Do you remember what the garments of the Kohen Godol looked like?

Sure.

The Choshen (breastplate) had twelve precious gems, one for each tribe. One of the gems was lost, and Damma Ben Nesina had the gem to replace it. The sages went to him to buy the stone. They settled upon 1000 gold pieces, a fair price. Damma Ben Nesina entered his father's room to get the stone. He found his father sleeping with his leg on top of the box that contained the stone. He did not want to disturb his father's sleep, so he left the room empty handed.

The sages probably thought that he was trying to get a better price.

Exactly. They upped the price, but he refused. They offered an even higher price, but he would not wake his father. This was how much he valued the mitzvah of honoring his parents. He turned down great sums of money to avoid disturbing his father's sleep.

I must hear the end of the story, Avi, or I won't be able to sleep tonight.

When his father finally woke up, the price was up to 10,000 gold pieces!

Wow! What a profit!

Damma Ben Nesina refused to take more than the original offer of 1000 gold pieces. He put off the sale because he respected his father. Not because he wanted to make a profit.

That's a great story, Avi, but what is the connection to the Parah Adumah?

That very year, G-d sent a reward to Damma Ben Nesina. A Parah Adumah was born in his flock. He sold it for much more than 10,000 gold pieces that he was offered for the gem.

Look at how great the mitzvah of honoring parents is.

That is exactly what the Medrash says, Chaim.

I have a lot of room for improvement in this area, Avi.

We all do Chaim. Let's start today. When our fathers come home tonight, let's roll out the "red carpet" for them.

What a great idea, Avi! If we give our fathers the "red carpet" treatment, maybe G-d will give us the "red cow" as a reward.

Chaim, may the "red" reward be all yours.