

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT EMOR

DVAR TORAH: TO THE CAVE AND BACK

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was not impressed by Roman society and did not hide his feelings: “All that they made was for themselves; they built market-places as a setting for harlots; they built baths to pamper themselves; and they built bridges to collect the tolls.” Pretty soon there was a warrant out for his arrest. The Roman government sentenced him to death and he hid in the beit midrash. That became too dangerous, so Rabbi Shimon, with his son, hid in a cave.

The Gemara emphasizes a number of details that highlight their retreat from society to nature. In the first stage of their retreat Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s wife (family) brought him bread (processed food) and a jug (man-made vessel) of water to the beit midrash (Torah society’s home base). When they fled to the cave, they ate of a carob tree and drank spring water, specially God-given natural food in a natural setting. They had totally retreated from society and were alone with God in nature. It goes further, though. Except for when they prayed, they buried themselves in sand (to preserve their clothing), and if one were to look at them, they appeared as two human beings growing out of the ground, two heads talking Torah.

After twelve years of extreme elevation they were not yet ready to return. They exit the cave, gaze on normal people involved in normal activities, and the fields are consumed by their fire. God sends them back to the cave. They must first learn to tolerate the world, and that would take another twelve months of elevation. When they leave the second time not only Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai but even his son learn to not only tolerate but also to appreciate the world. “Look at how Israel loves the mitzvot,” says Rabbi Shimon to his son when they see a man running with two myrtle branches as Shabbat comes in – one, he explains, for zachor (remember the Shabbat) and one for shamor (keep it).

But they needed to make one last step – not only to tolerate and appreciate, but to give to society. After twelve years of being buried up to their necks in sand it took the Tiverian hot baths to heal their cracked skin. They wanted, in some way, to show their appreciation and asked the people of Tiveria how they can help. They got an offbeat response: Can they discover the locations of the unmarked graves in the marketplace of Tiveria so Kohanim can once again enter it? Using his mystical insight Rabbi Shimon marks the graves of Tiveria’s marketplace and gives back to Tiveria.

Rabbi Shimon and his son were forced to retreat from society and hide in the cave; but that unfortunate death sentence brought about unprecedented personal elevation. They were now faced with a new challenge, relating with love to the world they left behind. This took them an extra year in the cave. They learned not only how to tolerate the world, how not to look at it without everything burning up, but how to appreciate and give to it. They were able to take the special gifts they received in the cave and use them to make a unique contribution to society.

But as unique as they were, Rabbi Shimon and his son are also role models. They teach us to strive to transform our unfortunate situations into elevating ones. They also teach us to take the elevation we attain in our own caves and share it with others.

SOURCE GUIDE: JOY AND TORAH

The days of Sefirat Haomer are devoted to personal change, repairing what we might have harmed, and purifying ourselves. This theme is incorporated into a prayer that appears in a number of early siddurim and many say after counting the Omer.

This dovetails with the custom the Rema (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 292:2) records, to learn Pirkei Avot during the summer months. We refer to the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avot as Perek Kinyan Torah, a baraita tacked on to the five chapters of Mishnah Avot. It includes a list of forty-eight things one should focus on in order to “acquire” Torah, שהתורה נקנית בהם. One of those forty-eight is joy, simchah.

This source guide collects the Maharal’s and Rav Chaim Volozhin’s comments about the special connection between joy and Torah, in addition to a number of related passages in the Gemara.

Acquiring Torah with Joy

Here is where joy appears in the baraita of Kinyan Torah:

<p>1. Pirkei Avot 6:6 And the Torah is acquired through forty-eight things. They are: through learning, listening with the ear, formulating with the lips, understanding with the heart, with awe, fear, humility, joy, purity ...</p>	<p>אבות ו:ו ... והתורה נקנית בארבעים ושמונה דברים, ואלו הן, בתלמוד, בשמיעת האזן, בעריכת שפתיים, בבינת הלב, באימה, ביראה, בענוה, בשמחה, בטוהרה</p>
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Why is it important to learn with joy?

Efficiency

Rav Chaim first explains that learning with joy is simply more efficient than learning with sadness:

<p>2. Ruach Chaim on Avot 6:6 For a person who learns one hour with joy can learn much more than he will learn in a number of hours in sadness.</p>	<p>רוח חיים על אבות ו:ו כי הלומד בשמחה בשעה אחת ילמוד יותר הרבה ממה שילמוד בכמה שעות בעצבות.</p>
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The Maharal goes in a similar direction:

<p>3. Maharal Derech Hachaim 6:7 ... For because of the depth of the Torah one’s mind must be clear. And thus they said in Eiruvin 65a: Rav Nachman son of Yitzchak said “Torah learning requires clarity like a cool day.” The explanation is as follows: His mind must be clear like a day when a northerly breeze blows, where the day is exceedingly pure and clear. There is no need to prove this, for when a man’s head is clear his heart is open wide. In Shabbat 77b: Rav Ada found Rav Yehudah standing at the opening of his father-in-law’s house and saw that he was in a joyous mood and if he would ask him to reveal all the secrets of the universe he would have. You see that a mindset of joy is a great cause of learning Torah.</p>	<p>דרך החיים ו:ז כי לעומק התורה צריך שתהיה דעתו צלולה וכן אמרו בפרק הדר (עירובין ס"ה ע"א) אמר ר"נ בר יצחק שמעתא צריכא צלותא כיומא דאסתנא, פי' שצריך שיהיה צלול בדעתו כיומא דמנשב בו רוח צפון שהיום הוא זך וצלול ביותר. ודבר זה אין צריך ראייה כי כאשר האדם דעתו צלולה לבו פתוח יותר, ובפרק המוציא (שבת ע"ז ע"ב) רב אדא אשכח לר' יהודה דהוה קאי אפתחא דבי חמוהי וחזית' דהוה בדיחא דעתיה ואי בעי מיני' כל חללא דעלמא הוה אמר לי' ע"כ. הרי לך כי בדיחת הדעת היא סבה גדולה לתלמוד תורה.</p>
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Completion

The Maharal explains that not only is joy essential to learning Torah efficiently, but it is also the proper mindset for Torah learning. Joy is the appropriate inner environment for the Torah.

<p>4. Maharal Derech Hachaim 6:7 For joy is a great character trait. For when a man is joyous he is in a state of wholeness, and through this he receives the Torah that brings man wholeness (completeness). But when a man is in pain he is deficient and cannot receive the Torah which is man's wholeness. The principle is: man is not fitting for this Divine wholeness, the Torah, unless he is joyous, which is wholeness of the soul. And when a man's soul is joyous then it is fitting to receive the wholeness of the Torah.</p>	<p>דרך החיים ו:ו כי השמחה מדה גדולה כי כאשר האדם הוא בשמחה הוא בשלימות ועי"ז מקבל התורה שהיא שלימות האדם, וכאשר האדם בצער אז הוא בחסרון אין מקבל התורה שהיא שלימות האדם, כלל הדבר כי אין ראוי לאדם שלימות האלקי הזה היא התורה כ"א ע"י שמחה שהיא שלימות נפשו, וכאשר האדם נפשו בשמחה אז ראוי לקבל נפשו שלימות התורה.</p>
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See Netivot Olam, Chapter 4 of Netiv Hatorah, where he further develops this point. Joy is associated with wholeness and sadness with fragmentation. The Torah completes man, brings him wholeness, and receiving it requires a joyous environment. This idea illuminates a passage in Gemara Shabbat:

<p>5. Shabbat 30b ... The Divine Presence does not rest on a person when he is in a state of sadness, laziness, laughing, lightheadedness, conversation, or idle chat – rather, when he is joyous over a mitzvah. For the verse says (Melachim II 3:15), “Now take me a musician, and when the musician played the hand of God was upon him (Elisha).” Rav Yehudah said: The same is true for Halachah. Rava said: The same is true for a good dream.</p>	<p>שבת ל: ... אין שכינה שורה לא מתוך עצבות ולא מתוך עצלות ולא מתוך שחוק ולא מתוך קלות ראש ולא מתוך שיחה ולא מתוך דברים בטלים אלא מתוך דבר שמחה של מצוה, שנאמר “ועתה קחו לי מנגן והיה כנגן המנגן ותהי עליו יד ה'.” אמר רב יהודה: וכן לדבר הלכה. אמר רבא: וכן לחלום טוב ...</p>
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Joy is the appropriate inner state for wholeness and (see Netzach Yisrael Chapter 62) connectedness. In prophecy, Torah learning, and dreams (one sixtieth of prophecy – Berachot 57b) man is completed, made whole, through his connection with the Divine. The same is true for prayer (see Berachot 31a).

Plaything

Rav Chaim Volozhin adds another line to explain the joy-Torah connection:

<p>6. Ruach Chaim on Avot 6:6 Furthermore, the Torah is the plaything of the Holy One, blessed be He, and he should be joyous about something as great as that.</p>	<p>רוח חיים על אבות ו:ו וגם כי התורה היא שעשועים של הקב"ה צריך שישמח בדבר גדול כזה.</p>
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He refers here to Mishlei 8:30, “[The Torah says ...] I was His plaything every day, playing before Him at all times.” The Torah is likened to God's beloved child, which He plays with constantly. The Torah is intimately connected with God, full of Divine secrets, that which He looked into and created the world. Being able to be involved with such a lofty thing – brings great joy.

We now have three approaches:

1. Joy is necessary to properly learn Torah; it allows one to think clearly, opens up the heart.
2. Joy is appropriate for Torah; for Torah brings with it wholeness and joy is the emotion of wholeness.
3. Learning Torah brings joy; for we are fortunate to be able to encounter God's beloved Torah.

EXCITED JEWISH CHILDREN BY RABBI YITZCHAK LERNER

Our parshah begins with a prohibition against the Kohanim becoming tamei, impure. It begins, “Say to the Kohanim the children of Aharon, and you should tell (literally, say) to them ...” (Vayikra 21:1). Rashi comments that the repetition of the words אמור, say, and אמרת, you should say, is meant to admonish adult Kohanim not to allow their children to become tamei.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, in the sefer Darash Moshe, asks, “Where is there any allusion in the verse to the Kohanim’s children?”

To answer this, Rav Moshe gives some child-rearing advice. He says that the attitude of “It’s hard to be a Jew – s’iz shver tsu zayn a Yid” but nevertheless I continue to do mitzvos – will not transmit well to the next generation. They may say – and history has proven in many cases that they actually did say – “You may want to commit even though it is hard, but I do not want to follow.”

On the other hand, if one’s attitude is, “It’s a privilege to be a Jew; what a great simchah it is to be a Jew; even though there are restrictions, we are always involved in avodas Hashem,” then children will naturally want to follow suit. Children want to see that what you are doing has tremendous meaning and joy in your life.

Said Rav Moshe: the idea of telling about the restrictions even to the children is based on the explanation of another repetition. The verse says, “Say to the Kohanim the children of Aharon.” Is it not obvious that only the children of Aharon are Kohanim?

Rav Moshe answers: First Hashem told them what is involved in being a Kohen. “Say to the Kohanim” all the laws, the details, and prohibitions. Then Moshe spoke with them in a way that would cause it to be passed down to the “children of Aharon.” He explained to the Kohanim the beauty, magnificence, and privilege of being a Kohen. With this approach the father will have the mitzvah and delight of being a Kohen even with all its restrictions, and his children will naturally be educated by it and want to follow it.

This issue is dedicated in memory of
David ben Tzvi, ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v’Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples’ programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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