

This is the teaching regarding a man who will die in a tent. (19:14)

There is a well-known statement made by *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 83b) that the Torah endures only at the hands of one who is prepared to give up his life for it. This concept is derived from the above *pasuk*, with the *ohel*/tent serving as a reference to the *ohaloh shel Torah*, the tent of Torah, the *bais ha'medrash*. *Chazal* (*Berachos* 61B) relate that the wicked Roman government decreed that people should not engage in Torah study. This did not stop Rabbi Akiva, who continued his regular schedule of learning and teaching Torah. When questioned by Pappus ben Yehudah, "Are you not afraid of the regime?" Rabbi Akiva responded with a parable. He compared the Jews' relationship to Torah to a fox walking alongside the river who chanced upon fish swimming to and fro to escape the fisherman's nets. The fox suggested that they come out of the water and live alongside him. Obviously, this was no option. They replied, "If in the climate that sustains our life, we are afraid, should we not all the more so be afraid in the climate that will induce our death?" A fish cannot live out of water, so it had two strikes against it on land. Likewise, with Torah, which is the "water" of our lives, we are still in danger of the evil regimes; certainly, our lives are imperiled without the Torah's protection.

An excellent analogy, but is it really necessary? Could Rabbi Akiva not simply have said that a Jew cannot live without Torah? It is his lifeline, without which he cannot exist. Why relate a story about fish, nets and a fox? **Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl**, feels that Rabbi Akiva's *mashal*, parable, imparts a penetrating concept, a powerful lesson which teaches us the Torah's *hashkafah*, perspective, concerning this world and its material pleasures. For example, when a fish is taken from the water, does it immediately die? No! During its first land-based moments, it jumps all over, seemingly alive, satisfied, overjoyed with life on dry land. When it is in the water, it is calm, relaxed, swimming with other fish, following a pattern. Once it is out of the water, it seems to "live".

This is how it appears to the innocent spectator who is clueless concerning the metabolism of a fish. He does not realize that what appears as "dancing" is actually the fish's death throes. He is not filled with joy. He is choking – dying!

Is it any different when a person abandons the Torah life? Once he severs his relationship with the *bais ha'medrash*, it might appear that he has more time, is happy; he goes places; he is alive. He is the one who is enjoying life, while his counterpart in the *yeshivah*, in the world that he left, is wallowing away lifeless, without joy, without pleasure, without satisfaction. All we have to do is wait as the dancing slows down, and the materialism takes its toll, and the one who thought that he was living it up was sadly living it "down".

It is not necessary to elaborate about the vacuity of a life removed from Torah. Anyone who reads this knows the truth. Some might attempt to fudge it, to paint it over, but when life is stripped down to its bare truth, we see that what others project as life is really its converse.