

"And he (Yaakov) sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen." (46:28)

Rashi cites the *Midrash* which interprets the word, *ruvk* as "to teach." This implies that Yehudah, the leader of the brothers, was sent ahead to prepare a place in which the family could study *Torah*. This first "*yeshivah*" in Egypt represents the essence of *Klal Yisrael*, setting the historical precedent for the primacy of learning. We are viewed as the Nation of the Book because the core of our lives is interwoven with *Torah*. Priority number one in every Jewish community has been the establishment of a *Torah* educational system. The *Midrash* concludes that wherever Yaakov went, he would study *Torah*, following the example set for him by his father and grandfather.

Chazal emphasize the remarkable devotion that the Patriarchs demonstrated for *Torah* study. Their commitment to *Torah* was so intense that it withstood the trials and tribulations, the suffering and tragedies, which they endured. Indeed, Yaakov *Avinu* believed that Yosef was still alive only when Yosef indicated which subject they had last studied together -- twenty-two years earlier! Yaakov knew that Yosef would continue to study *Torah* throughout his exile, in whatever place he would live, regardless of the physical or emotional duress to which he was subjected. *Torah* was the lifeblood that sustained him.

This devotion to *Torah* study has been the hallmark of our people throughout the ages. Regardless of the situation, we have always studied *Torah*. Countless stories relate the *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, the Jewish People exhibited for *Torah* study during the terrible years of World War II, when so many suffered at the hands of the accursed Nazis. Historically, our enemies have always been aware that successful destruction of the Jewish people should be initiated by challenging our ability to learn *Torah*. It has been our refusal to bend to the evil decrees banning *Torah* study which has kept us alive.

This defiance took on new dimensions during the Holocaust years as inmates in the concentration camps vigorously and resourcefully, under the most trying and dangerous conditions, continued their *Torah* study. Some would recite entire pages of *Talmud*, quoting from memory the *shiurim* they had learned, during their daily march from the "block" to the factories where they slaved all day. Their march was accompanied by the *niggun*, melody, of their *Talmudic* study. Others would gather together late at night, starved and dirty, bone-tired and weary, from the most menial, debilitating labor, to study *Mishnayos*.

One of the diarists of the Holocaust describes a moving scene which took place on *Hoshanah Rabbah* in 1942. He walked into a shoe repair shop in the Warsaw Ghetto. A group of religious scholars and lay people were assembled in the room "mending" shoes. For all appearances, they were engrossed in the menial task of pulling out nails from old shoes. Their spirits, however, soared to other worlds, as everyone was deep in discussion regarding a passage in the *Talmud*. To look at them one would never believe that they were surrounded by the most heinous form of

humanity, subjected to hunger, misery and persecution. Where was their fear of death? They had none, for their minds were elsewhere, soaring in the Heavens as they studied *Toras Hashem*!

What has happened to all of the *mesiras nefesh*? Can each of us say that we devote our time to *Torah* study, or do we find every excuse to absolve ourselves from our responsibility as Jews? Probably the most common response is that with the pressures of earning a living, one simply does not have the time or strength to find that hour or two to learn *Torah*. After all, we must provide for our children!

There is an anecdote which delivers a profound insight exposing the fallacy of this excuse. A *chasidishe Rebbe* once met one of his *chasidim* rushing to the market. "Come with me to the *Bais Ha'Midrash* to study *Torah*," the *Rebbe* implored the harried man. "No *Rebbe*, I'm in a rush, I must go to the market to earn a living," he replied. After the *Rebbe* continued badgering the man to come regardless, the man countered, "I must earn a living for my children. If I will study, I will not be able to provide for my family."

Many years later the *Rebbe* met another man running through the streets on the way to the market. Being consistent, the *Rebbe* invited this gentleman to accompany him to the *Bais Ha'Midrash* to study *Torah*. While the same dialogue was repeated, the *Rebbe* suddenly stopped and looked at the man and said, "I recognize you. I had a similar encounter with your father many years ago. At that time he told me he was too busy to study *Torah*, because he had to earn a living for his children. Now, I meet his son who tells me the exact same thing. *Ribbono Shel Olam*, when will I meet that one human being for whom all

of the generations labored so assiduously?" This, regrettably, is the story of life. We permit ourselves to fall into a vicious cycle. While we ignore our religious obligations as Jews, we work ourselves to the bone, so that our children should study *Torah*. Does that happen? Not really, since we have unfortunately sent the wrong message to our children by default. Instead of setting an example demonstrating the significance and value of *Torah* study, we have taught them the converse. Sometimes what people think is the pragmatic approach, in reality represents the ultimate absurdity.