

## **Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents. (25:27)**

Yaakov *Avinu* was morally and ethically wholesome, attributes attested to by the Torah. He is characterized as “abiding in tents.” *Rashi* explains that this is a reference to Yaakov’s total devotion to spending his time in the tents of Torah, under the direction of Shem and Eiver. Yaakov did not simply “learn.” He studied with a passion, totally devoted to the Torah. During the fourteen years that Yaakov spent in *yeshivah* engrossed in Torah study, he did not willingly go to sleep in a bed. This does not mean that he was superhuman. Yaakov slept only when sleep overtook him. He did not just go to bed. He sat by his *sefer* and, when his head drooped, he dozed. This was Yaakov’s idea of sleep – in *yeshivah*.

In *Pirkei Avos* 6:9, *Chazal* relate an episode which has become paradigmatic concerning a *ben Torah*’s view of a life devoted to Torah. Rabbi Yosei *ben Kisma* relates that he was once walking on the road, when he was met by a man. The man greeted the sage, who returned the greeting. The man then asked Rabbi Yosei, “Rabbi, from what place are you?” Rabbi Yosei replied, “I am from a great city of scholars and sages.” The man then asked whether Rabbi Yosei would consider moving to his city in exchange for an enormous amount of money. Rabbi Yosei replied, “Even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah.” The *Mishnah* goes on to quote a number of *pesukim* which underscore the value of Torah in contrast to material wealth. While all of the *pesukim* address the issue, the last *pasuk* from *Chaggai* 2:8, “Mine is the silver, Mine is the gold, says Hashem, Master of the Legions,” does not seem to emphasize the significance of Torah, only that material abundance all belongs to Hashem.

*Horav Mordechai Weinberg, zl*, cites the *Chasam Sofer* who explains that this *pasuk* is addressing the first *pasuk* cited by the *Mishnah*, *Tov li Toras Picha meialfei zahav va’kessef*. “I prefer the Torah of Your mouth above thousands in gold and silver” (*Tehillim* 119:72). David *Ha’melech* states that the *kinyan Torah*, acquisition of Torah, to “own” Torah, supersedes material procurement. One would think that the reason for this is that the value of Torah is greater. To this, the *Mishnah* quotes the second *pasuk*, to teach that only with regard to Torah can one say that he has actually acquired something, that it really belongs to him. Why? Because material wealth belongs to Hashem. *Li ha’kessef v’Li ha’zahav*, “Mine is the silver, Mine is the gold.” A person may think that the material wealth he attains is his. Wrong! It all belongs to Hashem. The only substance of value that one can call his own is Torah. The reason that David *Ha’melech* says, “I prefer Your Torah,” is that the possession is really his.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* takes this idea further. *Baalus*, ownership, of the Torah does not mean that one may do whatever he wants with it; rather, ownership catalyzes responsibility, demanding greater and more meticulous supervision to guard the holy Torah within him that it does not become tainted, desecrated or denigrated in any way through his actions. Yes, a *ben Torah* carries enormous responsibility. After all, he has acquired something that heretofore has belonged to Hashem.

Rav Weinberg compares this to a large corporation with many sections and branches, with each branch having its own administrative hierarchy. There are hundreds of managers, a multitude of vice presidents, scores of workers and underlings. While each individual senses his responsibility for his immediate area, he does not feel responsible for the collective corporation. If something goes wrong in his department, he will find someone to blame. He will sleep at night. Someone else's head will roll. Another individual is involved, however, who cannot afford to shift blame on anyone else. It would make no difference, because at the end of the day the loss and blame is all his. He is the company's CEO. He is the owner. He is the last bastion of authority. This is where the buck stops.

This is how a *ben Torah* should feel about his Torah study. He must feel that any error on his part denigrates **the** Torah – not just **his** Torah, but **the** Torah. He must feel a sense of *achrayus*, responsibility, for Torah – period. He is the CEO.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* relates a powerful thought that he heard from the *Satmar Rebbe, zl*, concerning a Jew's accountability for accepting responsibility. We find that despite Noach's overwhelming devotion to each and every creature on board the *Teivah*, Ark, he once came late with the lion's dinner. Once – during an entire year. Once – to a single animal out of all the myriad creatures under his care. Yet, when he came late, the lion, acting according to nature, smacked him hard. The injury left Noach limping. Is this what Noach deserved after an entire year of consummate devotion to the needs of all of these creatures? Is this punishment perhaps a bit much?

The *Rebbe* explained that only two members of each species of Creation were allowed into the Ark. Only two – male and female. The future of the world was dependent on that Ark. Each and every creature had an enormous mission to repopulate the world. The responsibility was enormous, the consequences of failure unpardonable. Noach had to imagine in his mind that it was not simply one lion, one meal, one act of *chesed*. He was responsible for the future of every lion from then to posterity. If something happened to this lion – that was it. The lion would become extinct. There was no room for error. This is the meaning of responsibility.

Rav Weinberg concludes that this idea aptly applies to every *ben Torah*. He must sense responsibility for Torah in such a manner that his failure would impact Torah for all time. The responsibility is much greater than he is. He is acquiring Torah directly from Hashem's mouth. When a person realizes this and reflects on the source of the Torah he studies, his attitude towards guarding it changes immeasurably.

The notion that one's responsibility extends for generations is underscored by a famous episode that occurred in *Mesivta Torah Vodaath* one blustery, snowy morning. The *Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Shlomo Heiman, zl*, came to his *shiur* prepared, as usual, with his lengthy lecture. Since New York had been hit overnight by a blizzard, public transportation was at a standstill. The streets were not plowed, so very few students were able to show up. The *Rosh Yeshivah* walked into a classroom

filled with four students. Yet, it did not seem to faze him. He began his lecture in earnest, raising his voice passionately, as he mulled through the topic. There was a certain excitement when Rav Shlomo gave a *shiur*. It was an epic experience. Usually the room would be filled, with nary a seat available, but today only four students were present.

This was pre-World War II America, and one of the students asked, “*Rebbe*, there are only four of us. Is it necessary to get so worked up in delivering the *shiur*?”

The *Rosh Yeshivah*’s response has become a classic. “You think that I am talking only to you? I am speaking to you and your students, and to your students’ students. I am speaking to generations of Jews to come. That is why I am so worked up!”

We must remember our responsibility. It is not only to those around us, but to those yet unborn who will derive guidance from our Torah study. It may be ours to keep – but it is not ours to lose!

The Torah tells us that during the pregnancy with her prodigal twins, Rivkah *Imeinu* felt that the fetuses in her womb were agitated. *Chazal* explain the source of this agitation. When Rivkah passed the *bais ha’medrash* of Shem and Eiver, Yaakov “ran” and struggled to come forth; and when she passed a house of idol worship, it was Eisav who struggled to come forth. The commentators question this. After all, Yaakov was in his mother’s womb studying Torah from the expert tutelage of a *Malach Elokim*. What in the *bais ha’medrash* could supersede this type of learning? Many explanations are presented by the various commentators, two of which stand out: Studying in the presence of an Eisav taints even the prospect of learning with an angel. Without question, the learning was superior to anything that he could find in the *bais ha’medrash*. At least in the *bais ha’medrash*, however, there would be no Eisav. Environment plays a critical role. This is something we may never forget when selecting a school, a *yeshivah*, a class.

Second is an explanation that follows along the same lines as our original thesis. True, studying with an angel is without peer, but it is too easy. Yaakov wanted to work, to toil, to *horeve* for his Torah achievement. He was not satisfied to have it all spoon-fed to him. He wanted to make the *kinyan*, act of acquisition. His act was *ameilus*, toil, in Torah.

This indicates the value of Torah. In order for one to acquire Torah, he must appreciate its infinite value. When this is the case, no hurdle is impossible to traverse. No obstacle is impervious to man’s ascendancy. The following vignette demonstrates a mother’s realization of the value of a Torah education for her sons and the degree of *ameilus* that **she** evinced in providing this education to her sons.

One of the preeminent Torah leaders of our generation grew up in Yerushalayim in a home of abject poverty. There were three boys in the family, and they all had to go to *cheder*. During the summer, this was no problem. It was winter time – when the cold, wet snow penetrated the holes in their torn shoes – that the poverty became a difficult challenge. If the boys could not go to school

on snow days, they would end up spending much of the winter at home. If they were to become sick, they would still be at home. What was a resourceful mother, who cares deeply about her son's learning, to do?

There was one pair of whole shoes. They were far from new, but, at least they had no holes. So – **every day** – the mother walked one son with this whole pair of shoes to school. He would then don a pair of torn shoes, after which his mother brought the whole shoes home to his brother. After walking brother number two to school and exchanging his shoes, she returned for son number three. The same process was repeated at the end of the day when the boys returned home. This went on all winter! The mother walked to school and back six times! Is it a wonder that each of her sons became a Torah scholar of great distinction? She valued Torah, and she demonstrated her esteem in a unique fashion.