

## **You shall count for yourselves – from the morrow. (23:15)**

The *halachah*, as recorded in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 493:1, states that the prevalent custom is not to make weddings between *Pesach* and *Shavuot* (during a specific thirty-three day period), because it was during this time that the students of Rabbi Akiva (twenty-four thousand) died. The *Talmud* (*Menachos* 29b) states: “*Rav* Yehudah said in the name of *Rav*, when Moshe *Rabbeinu* ascended *Har Sinai* to receive the Torah, he found Hashem attaching crowns to some of the letters of the Torah. Moshe asked, ‘Hashem, who is holding You back (preventing you from making the Torah larger)?’ Hashem replied, ‘One day, there will be an individual whose name will be Akiva ben Yosef, who will expound mounds and mounds of *halachos* from each point of the letters.’ When Moshe heard this, he asked, ‘*Ribono Shel Olam*, You have such a (great) person, and You chose (instead) to give the Torah through me?’ Hashem replied, ‘Be silent. This is My thought.’ (In other words, it was My decision for a reason that you are not able to understand.)”

*Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl*, asks a compelling question. If Rabbi Akiva was able to expound mounds and mounds of *halachos* from the points of the letters of the Torah, then our *Shas/Talmud* should be voluminous. What happened to the *Shas* “according to Rabbi Akiva”? How did so many *halachos* disappear from *Shas*? *Rav Abramsky* explains that, clearly, Rabbi Akiva taught these *halachos* to his *talmidim*, students, and when they died, the *halachos* disappeared with them. This is a monumental *chiddush*, innovative idea, but one that illuminates for us why we, after all of these years, still continue to mourn the untimely deaths of these twenty-four thousand Torah giants. This mourning rite seems to ignore the *halachah* that one does not mourn for the deceased for longer than twelve months. How are we to reconcile this *halachah* with our continued mourning for the *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva?

*Rav Abramsky* explains that the *gezeirah*, decree, that *ha'meis yishtakach min ha'lev*, the deceased should be forgotten from the heart, applies only when one mourns for the loss of an individual, someone external of himself. In such a case, too much expression of grief is unhealthy. Life must go on. Concerning the *talmidei* Rabbi Akiva, we are mourning for ourselves over the irreplaceable loss of wisdom that ceased with their demise. Had they lived, they would have transmitted to us the Torah expositions of Rabbi Akiva to us. Our Torah would have grown exponentially in size. Thus, their untimely passing deprived us of untold Torah wisdom. During the weeks of *sefirah*, when we mourn the *talmidei* Rabbi Akiva, we lament our loss – a loss for which we can never be compensated.

This idea (I think) applies to all of the tragedies sustained by our People throughout the millennia. When great sages are suddenly taken from us, we lose the Torah they would have transmitted to us. While there are those who have placed a number to the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust, we must add to this number the potential of Torah that was lost to our People. Had they lived... *Klal Yisrael* would have had a completely different self-image, appearance and identity. Life would have been different. Thus, we continue to grieve – and grieve.