

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

Chazal (*Shabbos* 83b) teach, “One should never refrain from (going to the) *Bais ha’Medrash* and from studying words of Torah – even during the moments prior to his taking leave of this world.” Torah reigns supreme and, without it, our lives are not the same. We should devote every minute that is available to Torah study – even at the time of death. Furthermore, *Ein haTorah miskayemes ela b’mi she’meimis atzmo alehah*; “The Torah is not maintained in a person unless he dies for it.” *Adam ki yamus b’ohel*, “If a man dies in a tent” has become the catch phrase for *limud haTorah*. One must give it his “all” – even to the point of his life. *Parashas Chukas* is synonymous with Torah study. The *Magen Avraham* (*Orach Chaim* 580:9) cites the custom of fasting *Erev Shabbos Parashas Chukas* because a number of evil decrees against the Torah were issued on that day. In 1242 the most infamous incursion was the burning of twenty-four wagon loads of the *Talmud* in France. Over 10,000 manuscripts of the Oral Law went up on a pyre, an action initiated by Nicholas Donin, a Jewish apostate, and sanctioned by Pope Gregory. It is specifically for this reason that it is vital for the week of the reading of *Parashas Chukas* to engender a renewed and stronger commitment to Torah study.

One question stands out that requires resolution. Understandably, *Parashas Chukas* is a time for increased Torah, but what does Torah study have to do with *Parah Adumah*, the Red Cow? The entire procedure is laden with esoteric mystery. Indeed, the entire set of laws involving *tumah v’taharah*, ritual impurity and purity, are beyond our mortal cognitive abilities.

Horav Shmuel Auerbach, zl, explains the relationship between, “The Torah is not maintained in a person unless he (is prepared to) dies for it,” and *Parah Adumah*, the paradigmatic *chok, mitzvah* which defies human rationale. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that just as the rationale behind *parah adumah* is beyond our ability to understand, success in Torah is also not within the limits of human comprehension. One is either all in or all out. Partial involvement does not apply to Torah. If one does not apply all of himself to Torah, he will have nothing.

Horav Auerbach applies an analogy to a contractor who is building a house. He builds the house in stages. First comes the foundation, followed by the walls, and then the roof. After that, he works on the inside, laying the floor, creating the various rooms until everything is framed. Once all this is successfully in place, he begins the finishing aspect of the job. If, for some reason, the contractor stops in middle of the job, can one suggest that he had done nothing? No! He completed a percentage of the job. He will either continue until completion or someone else will step in and complete the remainder of the job. Likewise, in most endeavors, even if one has not completed the work, what he has achieved is apparent in the percentage of the work he has completed. In some areas of endeavor, however, it is all or nothing. For example, if one is about to make a phone call and he is missing one of the ten numbers, can he say that he has ninety percent of the number? Absolutely not! He has nothing. One either has the entire ten numbers, or he has nothing at all.

Another case in question. Someone comments, "I met my good friend with whom I have not spoken in years." He then adds, "Truthfully, the person that I met looks about seventy percent like my friend." We will laugh at this person, because a seventy percent likeness is meaningless. He is not the fellow who had been his friend. We have no room for percentages. He either is his friend, or he is not.

This idea applies to a *chok*. If the barometer of learning is such that one must learn to the point of *meimis atzmo adehah*, killing himself for it, halfway is no way. We have no room for percentages. He either learns properly, or he does not learn! *Chukim* are not given to change. The person must carry out the *chok* one hundred percent. Anything less is not learning. This is how one acquires Torah.

Understandably, one does not become a *gadol b'Yisrael*, Torah giant, unaccompanied by extreme diligence and toil in Torah study. If I were to relate stories on this topic, I would not know where to begin and certainly not where to end. I have selected three short vignettes which have inspired me.

Horav Akiva Eiger, zl, was *Rav* of Posen and probably one of the greatest *gaonim* in a generation of *gaonim*. It is related that during a trip, he was stuck in a storm, which compelled him to take a room at an inn. Originally, his plan had been to return that night. As a result, he had no *sefarim* with him from which to learn. He asked the Jewish innkeeper if he had any *sefarim*. The innkeeper was a devout, but unlearned, Jew. He brought out the only *sefer* he had: a *Rashba* on *Meseches Yevamos* (which probably had been left there by a previous guest).

Rav Akiva Eiger began to learn from the *sefer* with great enthusiasm until he reached a page that had apparently fallen out. Rather than skip that page, the *gaon* wrote the *Rashba* word-for-word from memory. He completed the entire text of the missing page and placed it into the *sefer*.

Most people view this story as a testament to the *gaon's* phenomenal memory. It has been noted, however, that the lesson of the story is much more profound. Apparently, *Rav Akiva Eiger* knew the entire *Rashba* on *Yevamos* by heart. Nonetheless, despite his uncanny proficiency in the work of this *Rishon*, he still sat and reviewed it with an insatiable desire and excitement.

A number of years ago, an elderly Jew knocked on the door of *Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman's* apartment and asked to speak with the sage. He related that when *Rav Aharon Leib* was accepted in *yeshivah*, he was much younger than the other students. In addition to his young age, he was also short in stature. The other students, who were older, resented his presence among them. As a result, they decided to ignore him and not volunteer to be his *chavrusa*, study partner. [While this may appear selfish and immature, *yeshivah* students took their learning and self-esteem seriously. They obviously felt that this "little boy's" acceptance into the *yeshivah* impugned their self-esteem.] When they saw that *Rav Aharon Leib* kept on learning diligently and was not affected by their rejection of him, they decided to go one step further (or perhaps backwards): they put a doll on his

bed, intimating that he was a child who should be playing with dolls, not attending *yeshivah*. When a few weeks passed and the doll still lay on the bed, remaining in the same place, they realized that the young boy was such an incredible *masmid*, diligent student, that he never went to bed! This transformed their attitude towards him. They accepted him. Who was the elderly Jew referred to above? He came to ask *mechilah*, beg forgiveness. Why? He was the one who had placed the doll on the bed.

Horav Chaim Kreiswirth, zl, was a brilliant Torah scholar without peer. He was also an extraordinary *ameil baTorah*. He related that, while learning in Vilna, he had become stuck on a *Tosfos*. Try as he may, he could not understand the commentary. He reviewed it numerous times, to no avail. Finally, he decided to follow *Chazal's* directive to review one's lessons one hundred and one times – which he did. It took him an entire day, and into the wee hours, of the morning to complete this endeavor – all to no avail. He became terribly frustrated and decided that he had no recourse but to go to the cemetery and pray at the grave of the *Vilna Gaon*. He would ask him to intercede on his behalf to understand the *Tosfos*. He went there and prayed his heart out. He accompanied his prayers with copious weeping until, out of sheer exhaustion, he fell asleep on the *Gaon's* grave. A short while passed, and he woke up with a start. He thought for a few moments, and it all became clear to him. He now understood the *Tosfos*. This is a classic example of *yegias baTorah*, toiling in Torah.