

YOU CAN'T TAKE THAT FISH OUT OF WATER!

PARSHAS NITZAVIM

The **Talmud** (Brachos 61B) relates a story about Rabbi Akiva. The Roman Empire decreed that the Jews were forbidden to learn Torah. Papos ben Yehudah observed that Rabbi Akiva was teaching Torah in public. He said, "Akiva! Are you not scared of the government?" Rabbi Akiva answered him with a parable. A fox was walking on the bank of a river and noticed a fish in the water, darting from place to place. He asked the fish why it was doing that. The fish replied that it was trying to avoid the fishermen's nets. The sly fox told the fish that he would be safer if he went up to the dry land. The fox said, "Then, you and I will live together, just as your fathers lived with mine." The fish told the fox that he was a fool! He had no chance of living if he would leave the water and go onto dry land. Fish need water to live. Rabbi Akiva said that it is the same with a Jew. Just as a fish cannot live without water "so too a Jew cannot survive without learning Torah", as the pasuk says "for it [Torah] is your lives and the length of your days" (Devarim 30).

The **pasuk** says, "It [Torah] is not in heaven, [for you] to say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and acquire it for us, and inform us of it, and we will fulfill it?' Nor is it overseas, [for you] to say, 'Who will travel overseas for us, and acquire it for us, and inform us of it, and we will fulfill it?'" (Devarim 30:12,13) The **Talmud** (Eruvin 55A) says the pasuk teaches us

that had the Torah been in heaven or beyond the sea, we would have been obligated to find a way to get it. **Torah is so crucial for our existence that even if it would be extremely difficult to acquire, we would still have to make every possible effort necessary to study Torah.**

The more we appreciate the value of Torah study, the more we will be able to overcome any obstacles that might prevent us from studying Torah. Some obstacles may seem insurmountable. However, **a person with a burning desire to study Torah will find a way to achieve their goal of learning Torah.**

The **Rogatchover Gaon**, Rabbi Yoseph Rosen zt"l, said something fascinating at the funeral of Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (the author of the Meshech Chachma). Rabbi Rosen's father had been wheelchair bound ever since he could remember. His father had

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lived on the second floor of a house. When Rabbi Rosen was a young boy his father's house caught fire and started burning down. Someone ran into the house to save his father. His father said that he could not go because he had an old aunt who lived there. She was unable to walk, and he felt that he could not leave her behind. Suddenly,

Rabbi Rosen's father jumped up, and WALKED over to his aunt. He put her over his shoulder and ran out of the house. Then he sat back in a chair. How was it possible for someone who could not move his legs to be able to jump up and carry his weight plus the weight of his aunt on his shoulders and run out of the house? Rabbi Rosen said that when there is a fire burning, a person is empowered with supernatural powers. Then Rabbi Rosen said that Rav Meir Simcha was able to accomplish so much for Torah because he always pictured a fire burning in front of himself. (Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Schmeltzer on Vayemain)

It says in **Pirkei Avos** (2:9) that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai quoted the oral tradition that he had received from Hillel and Shammai. He said, "If you have learned much Torah, do not claim credit for yourself, because that is the purpose for which you were created."

The **Talmud** (Shabbos 88A) says that all of Creation hung tentatively in the balance until Bnei Yisroel accepted the Torah on Har Sinai. Hashem had made a condition with the act of Creation. If Bnei Yisroel would accept the Torah on the sixth day of Sivan, then the world would continue to exist. If Bnei Yisroel would not accept the Torah then the world would be returned to its previous, primordial state of chaos and disorder. **The world only continues to exist because there is Torah currently being learned.**

The **Chofetz Chaim** zt"l ([Chofetz Chaim al HaTorah](#)) says that a person has a choice. Would he prefer to be poor for a short while and then be rich for eternity or would he prefer to be rich now and then be poor for eternity? Obviously, a smart person would answer that

he would prefer to be poor at first and then be rich forever and ever. The **Chofetz Chaim** zt"l continues that the reason for our existence is to learn Torah (and do mitzvos). If one is devoid of Torah because he spends his time earning more and more money, he will be rich in this world which is finite but poor in the next world which is infinite. If one chooses to spend less time earning money in his lifetime and spends more time learning Torah then he may not be rich in his lifetime, but he will be rich for eternity. One will also be rich for eternity if he supports others who learn Torah. The **Chofetz Chaim** zt"l also quotes the Zohar about the further benefits of learning Torah. Torah protects one in his grave, protects one from Gehinnom, helps one merit Olam Haba (the World to Come), and helps one merit to go up from one level to the next in Gan Eden.

Every morning, we say the brachos, thanking Hashem for giving us the special gift of the Torah. The Torah is that which sets us apart from the rest of the world. We should always appreciate this special gift. Accordingly, we should increase our Torah learning. Even a few extra minutes of learning Torah every day will be very significant and beneficial for us! Learning Torah is the raison d'etre of our existence and the existence of the entire universe!

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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