



RAV YOSEF ELEFANT

Hold On to the Light



There are many mitzvos that we are obligated to perform constantly, but Torah is different: “When you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise...”



The phrase “*Uvelechtechta vaderech*” teaches that Torah must accompany you. What does this mean?

Yaakov Avinu received a unique brachah of “*Ufaratzta yamah vakedma*,” an assurance that he and his children would spread out across the world. That blessing taps something unique to Yaakov.

In *parshas Vayetzei* we read that Yaakov Avinu, the Father associated with Torah learning, comes to a place seemingly devoid of holiness and falls asleep. Upon arising, he exclaims, “*Achen yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh, ve’anochi lo yadati* — Indeed, Hashem is in this place, and I did not know.”

Yaakov Avinu was able to discern the latent kedushah in that bare hilltop, the potential for spiritual ascent that was there, just beneath the surface. This ability, this vision, says the Sfas Emes, was the factor that resulted in the brachah. For someone who can uncover holiness in a place where it’s hidden will carry blessing with him wherever he goes. That’s the “*emes*” of Yaakov Avinu, the ability to find the truth under layers of deceit, and the reason why he merited the “*nachalah bli metzarim* — the boundless inheritance” (which we refer to in Shabbos *zemiros*): The whole world is his.

The *ohel*, the tent associated with Yaakov, who’s described as the *ish tam yoshev ohalim*, hints at the nature of his gift, the Torah. Much like a tent, it is not outside the person, but within him, able to travel with him from place to place.

How does one make Torah a part of him so that it transcends geographical limitations and time constraints? How does one make it accessible when he is “on the road”? How does one uncover the *emes*, the truth that defines both Torah and Yaakov Avinu?

The secret to acquiring that sort of connection with Torah lies in one more feature of Yaakov Avinu’s life.

The Gemara tells us that Yaakov Avinu instituted *tefillas Arvis*. Yet in another place, we learn that the *tefillos* correspond to the daily *korbanos*; while Shacharis and Minchah represent actual *korbanos*, Maariv represents the burning of the leftover fats and limbs, which takes place throughout the night.

The Meshech Chochma explains the duality inherent in Maariv: It’s both the *tefillah* of Yaakov, and the parallel to the residual *korbanos* of the previous day. He points out that the *nevuos* perceived by Yaakov Avinu were given at night, because that was Hashem’s way of telling him that even though night was about to fall — he was about to descend into *galus* — he would still be able to experience that connection with Hakadosh Boruch Hu.

Because he’d already formed that connection earlier, before the descent into galus.

A relationship cannot be created in darkness, but once it’s created in a time of clarity, it can then continue even within the darkness.

Yaakov Avinu established *tefillas Maariv*, the prayer of the nighttime — of *galus*, and the burning of the leftover parts of the *korbanos*. Those leftovers are remainders of the holiness, a continuation of a connection formed during the time of light.

The same principle is the key to Torah’s

ability to spread. It can accompany its master throughout a long, dark night — but only if it comes from a sacrifice made during the day.

And this is the answer to the questions of hundreds of pure, sincere young couples looking for a way to hold onto that which they experienced during their years in kollel, yeshivah, and Bais Yaakov.

Find the light. The connection must be formed at a time when the doors are open.

And then you will have a wellspring from which to draw.

And even after those years are over, we still have times of light within the darkness. Make them count!

When in kollel, a young man learns on Sunday just as he does every day. Now imagine he’s left kollel, he’s become an accountant or property manager or electrician. That’s from Monday to Friday. Why has Sunday changed?

Of course, any *talmid* who’s learned seriously in yeshivah knows about balance, about the realities within each home, and the responsibility to meet the needs of his wife and children. Of course she has a real claim to his time.

Sunday is just the *mashal*, the first battleground they can eye together, a means of opening a door to light that will help illuminate the week ahead. If he can learn an intense, serious, yeshivah-style seder on Sunday, his week will look different, and then he will look different. His home will benefit, his wife will benefit, his children will benefit.

Not every working *ben Torah* will walk down the street thinking in learning, but at the very least, he should have what to think about in learning.

The connection has to be vibrant, and then, when there are challenges, that early foundation of Torah becomes a reservoir supplying him with clear water. That’s what it means that Torah accompanies you “*velechtechta vaderech*.”

That’s the mandate to learn Torah

constantly: It can and should be a steady companion, whatever your situation is. Use Shabbos and Motzaei Shabbos, Sundays, and vacation days correctly, and the effect will spill over into every area of your life. When you learn Torah with focus and responsibility, you are uplifted, you will form a deeper connection with the Borei Olam.

A mature person knows how to plan a Sunday without depriving his family of their rights to his time. Seize the times of *kodesh* and then your *chulin* will be holy as well.

Then you can bring kedushah to every place, like Yaakov Avinu, the father who forged the path of finding light within darkness, of remaining connected within *galus*.

The ones determined to make the most of each moment find that when they cannot learn — when they are overwhelmed at the office, when it’s tax season or trade show season — they can still dig deeper and find holiness.

The Torah they have made a part of them, that they still make a part of them when the opportunity arises, is there for them. It gives them a place to escape to that’s a bit higher than their surroundings, the strength to fight the allure of the contemporary street, the pride and confidence to stand tall.

How fitting that the place of which Yaakov Avinu said “*ve’anochi lo yadati*” ultimately became the site of Hakadosh Boruch Hu’s *dirah betachtonim*, a level of *hashraas haShechinah* the world had never known before or since.

The transition to work only looks like it’s devoid of kedushah. To one willing to toil, to dig deep, it can be a place where he discovers that “*yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh!*” ●

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