

THE DEER TRAPPING RABBI

The great Reish Lakish used to travel around Eretz Yisroel and mark the graves of the tana'im.

One time, on one of his grave marking expeditions, he was looking for the grave of Rebbi Chiya. Yet try as he might, he couldn't find it. Assuming he was unworthy of finding Rebbi Chiya's grave, he cried out, "Did I not learn Torah like him?!"

At that moment he heard a bas kol saying, "You learned like him, but you didn't spread Torah like him."

What was unique about Rebbi Chiya's method of spreading Torah?

There was once a scholarly disagreement between Rebbi Chiya and Rebbi Chananya. In the heat of the argument Rebbi Chananya said: "Do you know who you're arguing with? If the whole Torah was forgotten I can rewrite it with my intellectual prowess!"

Rebbi Chiya responded, "It is because of me that the Torah was not forgotten to begin with."

How so? Seeing that Torah study was waning, he went ahead and planted flax. After tending to and harvesting the flax, he spun it into thread and sewed nets.

With the nets he caught deer, which he shechted and used the skin to write sifrei Torah.

He would travel from village to village, and in each one would gather five children. To each child he taught one of the chamisha chumshei Torah, and instructed them that every one should teach their friends the sefer that they learned. Then he did the same with six children and the shisha sidrei Mishnah.

In this manner he ensured that the Torah would not be forgotten.

With this story in mind, we can approach the Zohar that Harav Levi Yitzchok explains on parshas Vayeshev.

ACTIVE TEACHING

The Zohar tells the story of Rebbi Chiya and his many students. As they would approach him, he would say, "This one learns *Torah lishma* and this one doesn't."

For each set of students he had a unique *tefilah*. For the ones that learned *lishma* he would daven that they should continue on this path forever. For the ones who didn't he would daven that they find the correct path.

Once there was a student who looked a bit green. Upon seeing him Rebbi Chiya said, "I can tell that he is having sinful thoughts right now."

He secluded himself with this student, and with the power of his Torah brought him back. From that day on Rebbi Chiya managed to influence him that he should no longer have sinful thoughts, and instead always learn *Torah lishma*.

In other words, he had three types of students: Some learned *lishma*, and some didn't learn *lishma*, but they also didn't learn specifically *shelo lishma*, they just learned Torah because that's what everyone else was doing. Then there was the one who learned *specifically shelo lishma*, for sinful purposes.

HOW TO TEACH

Rebbi Chiya is the "poster child" for how to teach Torah. As seen from the story of Reish Lakish, who was



A LOOK AT THE TORAH OF
HARAV LEVI YITZCHOK
THROUGH THE REBBE'S SICHOS

told that “you didn’t spread Torah like him.”

To the extent that when Rebbi—the compiler of the Mishnah, the one who revolutionized Torah study by being the first to write down *Torah Shebichsav*—was extolling the virtues of Rebbi Chiya’s outreach efforts, he ended off with, “כמה גדולים מעשי חייא—how great are the deeds of Chiya.”

A student present there asked, “Even more than you?” To which Rebbi replied, “Yes!”

Thus, by looking into the life of Rebbi Chiya, we can learn many valuable lessons in how to approach education.

EVERYONE

Rebbi Chiya, being the world renowned scholar and compiler of *Braisos* that he was, could have easily been very selective with his students. Had he only selected the best and the brightest, he still would have had a full audience, and surely a much more enjoyable teaching experience.

Yet, although he was so spiritually refined that he could read his students’ innermost thoughts just by looking at them, he happily taught all sorts of students.

He didn’t try to force them into one mold either. He patiently dealt with each style student on his own level.

And when faced with a student who was seemingly so far gone, that in the very presence of Rebbi Chiya

he had only sin on his mind, he didn’t shout “*sheigetz arois!*” Instead he welcomed him in, and gave him **even more** attention than his star pupils. He secluded himself with him, or in the words of the Zohar “אחיד ליה—he became one with him,” and with his great love brought him back into the fold.

DO IT YOURSELF

This brings us to Rebbi Chiya’s flax fields and deer catching.

One might have thought that a great rabbi like Rebbi Chiya had many people he could have delegated the flax planting to.

When it comes to the actual teaching, it can be argued that this is something only Rebbi Chiya could have done. But planting crops and making parchment? Anyone could do that.

Here again we see Rebbi Chiya’s commitment to spreading Torah. To make a statement and show everyone the importance of his mission, he went **himself** and cultivated the flax, sewed the nets, caught the deer, etc.

DOMINO TEACHING

Only once he had painstakingly created the *sifrei Torah* from scratch, did Rebbi Chiya set about teaching.

Here too we see how to properly teach. He took children who had until then been illiterate, and taught them

in such a way that they immediately became teachers themselves.

He didn’t just teach them to read, leaving a pile of books for them to educate themselves. His teaching was so powerful, that the students were right away able to teach others what they had learned.

WITH PLEASURE

“*Marbitz Torah*”—spreader of Torah—is what the Gemara calls Rebbi Chiya.

But *marbitz* has another meaning. As Rashi explains, it could also mean “garden.”

To Rebbi Chiya, teaching Torah was like strolling in a garden, an inherently pleasurable activity.

Even when faced with students who weren’t learning *lishma*, or worse—sinful students whose negative qualities were reflected on their face—he didn’t lose his temper.

He taught them not with anger and shouting, but rather with kindness and patience, with pleasure and compassion. Until he established a connection with each one on their level, “אחיד ליה”, as the Zohar says, even with the worst ones. That was how he managed to bring them back and they all learned *lishma*.

May we all be like Rebbi Chiya. **T**

Based on the *sicha* of
Shabbos Parshas Vayeshev 5743

לע"נ אבינו
הרה"ח הרה"ר יוסף מנחם מענדל
ב"ר יצחק ע"ה
ולע"נ אמנו מרת זיסל דבורה
בת ר' אלי' הכהן ע"ה
טענענבוים
ת"נצ"ב'ה