

# Orchos HaAmud

Weekly Presentation Highlighting an Amud of the Week



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## BERACHOS 61B

BY RABBI AVIGDOR BERENSTEIN

“When they (the Romans) took Rabi Akiva out to be killed, it was time to say *K'rias Sh'ma*. They were tearing his flesh with iron combs, and he was accepting the yoke of *Hashem's* reign. His students asked him, “Our master! To such an extent?” He said to them, “All my life, I have suffered about this *posuk*: ‘with all your soul’, meaning [to love *Hashem*] even if He takes away your soul. I said, ‘When will it come to my hand so I may fulfill it?’ Now that it has come to my hand, should I not fulfill it?” (*Brochos* 61b)

This requires much explanation. What was Rabi Akiva's suffering? Why did he so yearn to fulfill that *posuk*?

There is more. The *Gemara* there continues that the angels asked *Hashem*, “This is Torah, and this is its reward?” It would seem that the angels' question was that after Rabi Akiva toiled all his life, learning Torah and serving *Hashem*, why did he suffer such a difficult end, killed while enduring frightful suffering? However, the *Gemara Menachos* 29b relates that when Moshe Rabeinu ascended to Heaven, he found *Hashem* sitting and tying crowns onto letters. *Hashem* explained to him that this was because in the future, Rabi Akiva would infer piles and piles of *halachos* from each crown. Moshe was very impressed when *Hashem* showed him Rabi Akiva's Torah-learning and even suggested that the Torah be given through Rabi Akiva rather than through him. Later, he said, “*Ribono shel olam*, You have shown me his Torah-learning. Show me his reward.” *Hashem* told him, “Step back.” He stepped back and [prophetically] saw Rabi Akiva's flesh being weighed for sale in the meat market, upon which he said, “*Ribono shel olam*, this is Torah, and this is its reward?” *Hashem* replied, “Be quiet! This is what I thought.”

The two Gedolim, Rav Yosef Dov Halevi (Rav Berel) Soloveitchik *ztz"l* and Rav Meshulem Dovid Halevi (Rav Dovid) Soloveitchik *ztz"l*, sons of the Brisker Rav *ztz"l*, in their *shiurim* on *Maseches Menachos*, ask a powerful question on this *Gemara*. Moshe Rabeinu did not ask *Hashem* to show him Rabi Akiva's end; he asked Him to show him Rabi Akiva's reward! Why did *Hashem* show him Rabi Akiva's torture and bitter end? The question is not why Rabi Akiva suffered; we know that even *tzadikim* sometimes suffer and we do not question *Hashem's* ways. The question is, why did *Hashem* show Moshe Rabeinu something he did not ask for and not what he asked for?

Indeed, this is the true understanding of Moshe Rabeinu's question: “This is Torah, and this is its reward?” How can this terrible torture be the reward for learning Torah? Now we must try to understand the answer, how having his flesh weighed in the meat market was his reward.

*Chazal* say that “words of Torah are ‘poor’ in one place and ‘rich’ elsewhere”, meaning that often the explanation of one topic is to be found elsewhere. Rabi Akiva's torture and death are mentioned in greater detail in *Yerushalmi Brochos*

9:5 and *Sota* 5:5 and in *Midrash Mishlei* 9, where much light is shed on this subject:

“That day, Rabi Akiva was judged before Turnus Rufus. The hour of *K'rias Sh'ma* arrived. They were tearing his flesh with iron combs and weighing it in the meat market, and he was saying *Sh'ma* and laughing. [Turnus Rufus] said to him, ‘Old man, old man, either you are a sorcerer (who does not feel pain) or a masochist (who welcomes pain), and therefore you are laughing.’ Rabi Akiva told him, ‘I am neither of them. I am laughing happily because all my life I have said the *posuk* “You shall love *Hashem* with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” I knew that I love Him with all my heart and with all my might, meaning my possessions, but I did not know whether I had reached the level of loving Him with all my soul.”

Of course, Rabi Akiva knew that he would willingly give up his life for *Hashem*, but he was unsure whether his love was so complete that he would feel no sadness about giving up his life, or whether he would still feel a tinge of sadness.

This is how Rabi Akiva explained his behavior that day. Finally, he was being put to the ultimate test. He was required to give up his life, suffered unspeakable torture, and had his flesh hacked by iron hooks and weighed in the market. When the hour of *K'rias Sh'ma* came, and he felt that he accepted *Hashem's* reign with the same joy and love that he always felt, with the same elevated feeling of cleaving to *Hashem* that he felt in the *Beis Medrash*, when he learned and taught Torah, when he felt so connected to *Hashem* that he felt no sorrow for losing his life or for his physical pain, then he knew that he had reached his lofty goal of loving *Hashem* with all his soul.

Now we may begin to understand Rabi Akiva's suffering during most of his life. He was constantly troubled whether his love for *Hashem* was sufficient, whether it would endure if he had to give up his life. This was much more than a prick of conscience. Since Rabi Akiva was unsure whether he had fulfilled his obligation, he strove

mightily to increase his love for *Hashem*, but he was still unsure whether he had succeeded.

This is how he explained his intense joy when he was being tortured and killed, his immense relief when his doubts were dispelled, and he knew that his life had been successful. We cannot adequately visualize his boundless joy that made him smile amid his terrible tortures because it overshadowed all his pain and suffering.

Now the *Gemara* in *Menachos* becomes clear as well. When Moshe Rabeinu asked *Hashem* to show him Rabi Akiva's reward, *Hashem* showed him Rabi Akiva's final ecstasy that superseded the most unimaginable suffering and pain. No outside observer could have grasped it, but Rabi Akiva basked in the sublime knowledge that all his efforts had borne fruit, to the degree that no suffering could dampen his bliss. This, indeed, was his reward in this world, the assurance of *Hashem's* approval of his achievement of human perfection.

Rav Aharon Yehuda Leib Steinman *ztz"l* used to say that one should speak about lofty concepts because if one speaks only of lowly concepts, he remains lowly, whereas speaking about elevated ideas generates lofty ambitions. On the other hand, Rav Dovid Povarsky *ztz"l* used to quote his *rebbeim*, giants of *mussar*, as saying that one must speak about concepts to which one can really relate. Let us try, then, to find how we can relate to what has been discussed above. Rejoicing during horrific suffering is beyond our reach but let us remember the *Gemara Arachin* 16b where Rabi Elazar says that even an ill-fitting garment, a drink mixed with water of the wrong temperature, an inverted garment, or pulling out the wrong amount of coins from one's pocket is also considered suffering (that helps atone for one's sins). When things do not go according to one's plan or one must redo something, that is also considered suffering. By maintaining our faith in *Hashem* and continuing to serve Him with love even during moments of distress and frustration, we, too, can relate on our level to the lofty accomplishment of Rabi Akiva.

*Amud HaYomi recently began its 1st cycle through Shas with Masechta Brachos! This historic initiative will enable deeper comprehension of Shas. Additionally, there are optional monthly bechinos with stipends, which affords one a much greater opportunity to be koneh Shas through Dirshu's proven retention and accountability methods.*

### UPCOMING AMUD HAYOMI LIMUD SCHEDULE

DAF HAYOMI	AMUD HAYOMI	DATE	תאריך	יום
בבא קמא קא	ברכות טא.	2/11/24	ב אדר א	א
בבא קמא קב	ברכות טא:	2/12/24	ג אדר א	ב
בבא קמא קג	ברכות טב.	2/13/24	ד אדר א	ג
בבא קמא קד	ברכות טב:	2/14/24	ה אדר א	ד
בבא קמא קה	ברכות טג.	2/15/24	ו אדר א	ה
בבא קמא קו	ברכות טג:	2/16/24	ז אדר א	ו
בבא קמא קז	ברכות טד.	2/17/24	ח אדר א	שבת
בבא קמא קח	שבת ב.	2/18/24	ט אדר א	א
בבא קמא קט	שבת ב:	2/19/24	י אדר א	ב
בבא קמא קי	שבת ג.	2/20/24	יא אדר א	ג
בבא קמא קיא	שבת ג:	2/21/24	יב אדר א	ד
בבא קמא קיב	שבת ד.	2/22/24	יג אדר א	ה
בבא קמא קיג	שבת ד:	2/23/24	יד אדר א	ו
בבא קמא קיד	שבת ה.	2/24/24	טו אדר א	שבת