

In Rabbi Herzfeld's Facebook pre-Shabbos d'var Torah on Bamidbar, he spoke of Rav Yaakov Golynsky, who went to Navardik to learn Torah. While there, Golynsky heard a young man studying Gemara who cried out "the world is a wedding feast...grab and eat, grab and eat." Rav Golynsky was encouraged to study Torah and he eventually became a great rabbi. Our Community Kollel is an opportunity for all to "grab and eat" while we're in the wilderness.

I immediately thought of the Daf we studied with our chevruta partners this past Tuesday night. Yoma 35B relates a story from the Gemara that was taught by the sages: "A poor person, a wealthy person, and a wicked person come to face judgment before the Heavenly court for their conduct in this world."

The story goes on to tell the story of Hillel who was so poor that one time he did not have the half-dinar needed to enter the study hall, but climbed on the roof of the hall and peered through the skylight to hear the words of Torah taught by Shemaya and Avtalyon. During the night, snow fell and he was buried in 3 cubits of snow. The next day was Shabbos, so Shemaya and Avtalyon desecrated Shabbos in order to save Hillel's life, by cleaning him up, rubbing him with oil, and warming him by a fire.

The wealthy man, Rabbi Elazar ben Harsum, who owned 1000 ships and 1000 villages, traveled daily "from city to city and state to state to study with the Torah scholars in each of those places."

The Rambam says "All Jews, poor and wealthy, ill and healthy, are obligated to study Torah. Even the poor, who depend on charity to survive must devote time to study Torah." (Rambam, *Sefer HaMadda, Hilkhos Talmud Torah* 1:8)

The Gemara further explains that Rabbi Elazar ben Harsum "...never went and saw all his possessions and property; rather, he would sit and engage in the study of Torah all day and all night." (Yoma 35B)

As we observe Shavuot this week, we spend the first night studying Torah. The reason for this study comes from a Midrash according to Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld. In his article, *Staying Up Shavuot Night*, on Aish.com, he writes "There is a Midrash which states that on the morning of the Revelation at Sinai the Jewish people overslept. God descended upon Mount Sinai to give the Torah to Israel, and we hadn't even arrived yet! Moses had to rouse us and hurry us over to the mountain for this earth-shattering event. To make up for this, we stay up the entire night of Shavuot – in order to be absolutely certain we will be awake Shavuot morning..." He writes, "We must therefore see Torah study as an exhilarating experience, as a means of getting closer to God and strengthening the love between us and Him. To me, staying up all night studying is an expression of that love. We show God that we are crazy about the wonderful gift of His Torah."

Rabbi Herzfeld encouraged us all to take regular time each day, or even during a week in order to study Torah or Talmud. This regular study increases our love of Torah and mitzvot, but it unites us to the rest of the Jewish world that is studying every day, and it also unites us to G-d. "...do not say: 'When I will have free time I will study,' for perhaps you will never have free time" (*Pirkei Avot* 2:4)

Most of you don't know my story of returning to Judaism. It's a long story that I'm happy to share with anyone, but the short version is that I was raised Catholic in an Italian family, went to college to study music, and served as the music director in a variety of Protestant churches. However, I started to have a crisis of faith and was searching for something more. It was during this time that I was hired by a large Conservative synagogue to be the Music Director and eventually also the Membership/Outreach Director. The more that I studied privately with the rabbi, I was drawn in more and more. This ultimately led me to the decision to return to Judaism—I say return because my neshama was trying to return to Har Sinai.

I had known that there were Jewish members in my family several generations back, but not sure of what it meant to me. I began to do some genealogy and found that my Great-grandmother was Jewish, and, as I did further study, found that both sides of my family were Conversos, originally from Spain, and forced to convert during the Inquisition. My love of Torah, Judaism, and Israel is for the over 500 years' worth of family members who were not allowed to study their texts. When I travel to Israel and pray at the Western Wall, it's for the generations of ancestors who were not able to return to our ancestral homeland.

My participation in the Kollel has strengthened my love of Torah and gives me energy each day. I feel more connected to the rest of the Jewish people. I feel more connected to Hashem. While I had several years of study, and even became an adult Bar Mitzvah, I am a beginner in the study of Talmud. At first, I was scared. I didn't know what to expect, but with the support of the Rabbi and Maharatz, they gave me the gentle push and lots of support I needed to take the first step. At times I feel like Nachshon stepping into the Red Sea, not knowing what I was getting myself into.

Several years ago, on Yom Kippur afternoon, I had the honor of giving a d'var Torah to go along with the reading of Yonah at the synagogue I used to attend in Charlotte, NC. I felt a nagging to study, but ignored it. Several of my Christian friends were going to seminaries, but I kept telling myself that I wasn't ready to study on that level, because I didn't have a strong enough Jewish education. Then Rabbi Herzfeld announced the Community Kollel and I was interested. Out of the blue, the rabbi texted me and told me that I should consider participating and to be at the first Zoom meeting. As they say, "the rest is history..."

The more that I study, the more I want to study. I have always loved learning. I love school. Being part of the Kollel has awakened my neshama in ways I could never have imagined. When I attend an evening class, after having worked all day, I am not tired, I'm energized. There are some days when I wake up early and can't wait to attend one of the 7:00 AM Daf Yomi shiurs. Just as Reb Golynsky heard the young bochur at the yeshiva, I feel like I'm at a wedding banquet and the Torah and Talmud are part of a big buffet and I can't get enough.

If I can do it, you can do it. Take regular time each week (or every day if possible!) and study Torah or another Jewish text. When you're busy or stressed from life, it will relax you. When you're tired and don't feel like studying, it reenergizes you. The study of Torah is unlike any other study. It's not work, it's fun. I can't thank Ohev Sholom and our amazing clergy and teachers enough for making this possible.

I thought that when I returned and made my first trip to Israel, a 500 year journey in the wilderness was complete and that I had returned home. Little did I know what Hashem had in store. "Man plans and G-d laughs" according to the old Yiddish proverb. That was just the appetizer and now I'm at the wedding feast grabbing and eating. Come and join me on this journey...whether we're as poor as Hillel or as rich as Rabbi Elazar, we all need the Torah and the joy it brings to our lives.

-Monty Bennett