

This Week In Torah—a familiar ending and anew beginning

Rabbi Ben Bag-Bag, a disciple of Hillel, is quoted in *Pirkei Avot* in the Talmud as saying: “Turn it, turn it over again... for everything is in there.” He was referring to Torah—each word has depth of knowledge, direction for us on how to live our lives. Elsewhere in the Talmud, Moses magically appears in the back of Rabbi Akiba’s class room. Lost in the conversation, Moses can’t understand why God put him there until he heard Rabbi Akiba justify his teaching by saying: “This is all Torah from Sinai.”

Torah is more than words on a scroll in the Ark. It is God’s voice to us. Our study of it is essential to living ethical, moral and sacred lives. Our tradition has it that we are obligated to study Torah daily and when we do, we make a *bracha* that states that we are grateful to *la’asok*—engage like in business—the words of Torah.

No wonder *Simchat Torah* is a time of rejoicing. People dance with the Torah and they have been known to pour out of synagogues to dance in the streets! Our custom is to unroll the whole roll around the sanctuary!

One of my favorite stories about studying Torah is a classic midrash. It takes place during the Roman Empire’s occupation of Jerusalem. They banned the reading/study of Torah; they made rabbis outlaws. So, the rabbi met with their students clandestinely at night in the woods and in caves. There they rolled out the scroll for study—but what about light to read? No problem, God will provide! Fireflies would circle around the rabbi and his students; they were so excited about this that their tails would light even brighter than usual so that everyone can learn. If danger approached, the fireflies would scurry away... only to return once the Romans moved on.

As a child, I loved this—ok, as a 6- or 7-year-old boy, the idea of bugs’ tushies lighting up the night made me laugh! But what the teacher reenforced once my giggles subsided that miracles happen, especially to make a place for the study of Torah!

May your studies be sweet. May you be excited and engaged. May you find new opportunities to put in place the majestic teachings you uncover!