



## Torah Online - Rabbi Tuvia Bolton



This week's section begins with action; Moses receives the Ten Commandment Tablets on Mount Sinai, breaks them after the sin of the Golden Calf and finally receives another pair eighty days later.

But it ends on a strange note; when Moses descended with these second Tablets, rays of spiritual light shone from his face that were so intense that he had to put on a veil so as not to reveal them.

What was the cause of these lights? Why didn't they shine when he got the first Tablets? What does this mean to us today?

Also, we are now in the month of Adar preparing for the holiday of Purim. Somehow this all must be connected.

Here is a story that will help us understand.

Rabbi Akiva was the greatest Talmudic scholar of all time. It is said that the entire Oral Tradition we have today, as deep, massive and complicated as it is, is a result of his memory, erudition and holy insight.

The Torah is nothing less than the secret of life. Precious beyond words, the Creator's instruction manual on how to maintain the entire creation. So it was no wonder that the great Rabbi Akiva devoted himself to learning Torah constantly day and night.

No one knew better than he that absolutely nothing is more important than the Torah - almost.

The Talmud (Kala Rabti) tells us that Rabbi Akiva once went into the forest to seclude himself and contemplate words of Torah, when suddenly he heard a strange rustling in the distance. It sounded like a large animal was approaching. He lifted his gaze and saw a frightening sight: what looked like a human being, burned to a black crisp, ran past him like a madman, huffing and puffing and gazing straight ahead with a large pile of wood on his shoulder.

Rabbi Akiva realized that something truly unusual was happening here. He commanded the man to stop and ordered him, in the name of the holy Torah, to explain who he was and what he was doing.

At first he was reluctant; he was in a hurry and had no time, but finally the holiness of Rabbi Akiva prevailed and he spoke.

"I am not from the living" he moaned eerily, "I rather am a dead man being punished for his sins. My punishment is that every morning my soul is incarnated into this burnt crisp of a body and then I must chop wood, make a huge fire and finally jump into the flames and burn myself to death."

"What did you do to deserve such a strange and painful punishment?" asked Rabbi Akiva.

"Among other things I was a tax collector" He answered. "I would favor the rich and murder the poor."

"Is there anything that can be done to help?" Rabbi Akiva asked.

"Yes," he replied. "I heard from the other side of the 'curtain' (separating hell from heaven) that if I have a son and he says the Kaddish prayer for me it will lessen my punishment. But I don't think I have a son. Years ago when I died my wife was pregnant. Who knows what happened. And even if she did give birth and it was a boy, who will teach him? I have no friends in the world. Now please let me go."

At that moment Rabbi Akiva took on himself the project. He delayed the man for another moment, got his and his wife's names and directions to their house and then let him run off to execute his grisly sentence.

The next day Rabbi Akiva began his search. The Talmud does not tell us how much time it took but it probably wasn't that difficult.

It seems that there were not many people that the deceased left unharmed and every one to whom Rabbi Akiva mentioned the man's, or even his wife's name, immediately replied with a string of curses before giving directions.

Finally Rabbi Akiva found the house. In fact the fellow's wife had given birth to a son but it was worse than Rabbi Akiva imagined.

The lad was nothing short of a wild man; yelling, throwing stones and cursing all who passed but Rabbi Akiva produced a few candies and trinkets that won him over. He soon discovered that the child, besides being completely illiterate was also uncircumcised.

The Talmud doesn't tell us how but Rabbi Akiva succeeded convincing him to undergo circumcision and even to begin learning aleph-bait.

But again there were difficulties. After days of effort, despite the fact that Rabbi Akiva was the best teacher in the world, the child did not absorb a thing; he simply had a head of stone.

But Rabbi Akiva did not give up. He utilized the Jews most potent secret weapon of all; prayer.

He actually fasted for forty days; eating only bread and water after sunset, and prayed constantly to G-d that He open the boy's mind... and it worked. A heavenly voice announced "Rabbi Akiva, go teach him".

He taught him to read Torah and how to pray until he was proficient enough to stand before the congregation and lead the prayers. And the crowd answered "Amein, Yehay Shemay Raba M'voreach".

That night the dead man appeared to Rabbi Akiva in a dream and said. "May G-d bless you and comfort you just as you comforted and saved me from the judgment of hell."

This is a truly bizarre story, especially when we remember that Rabbi Akiva was the Holiest of holy and he 'wasted' hundreds of hours to save a murderer; the lowest of the low.

The reason he did it is that he revealed that there is something more 'holy' and 'true' than the Torah; The Jewish people. As Rabbi Akiva himself said "Loving you brother as yourself' contains the entire Torah" (see Rashi Lev. 19:18).

And where did he learn this from? From Moses.

The Tablets with the Ten Commandments were the Holy of Holies (in fact their place in the Temple was called the Holy of Holies). Yet Moses broke them in order to save idolatrous Jews that heard DIRECTLY from G-d "Don't worship idols"; the lowest of the low!! (see Rashi on Ex. 34:1).

It was worth breaking even the Holy Tablets in order to save them.

Because the Jews, even the sinners, are the sons of G-d.

And when they do return to learn the Torah and observe its commandments it brings stability, blessing and joy to the world. (Therefore the Moshiach will bring the Jews back to Torah and will also draw them to Israel and build the third Temple because only then can all commandments be fulfilled.)

That is why Moses' face shone when he brought the second tablets and not previously. Because only after he broke the Tablets and sacrificed everything he had worked for his entire life for the sake of the truth: namely the Jewish people, did he merit this highest level of holiness.

And on that first Purim it was even higher. Each and EVERY Jew made a personal decision to sacrifice everything for even a HIGHER level of truth:

To unify the Jews and the Torah.

The decree of Haman was to destroy all the JEWS. Every Jew that was willing to declare that he/she was not Jewish would be saved. But although the decree hung over their heads for one full year, not even one Jew even CONSIDERED doing such a thing.

They were not willing to be separated from Judaism even in thought!! That is the ultimate truth that Moshiach will reveal: that the Jews, G-d and the Torah must be unified... in THIS PHYSICAL WORLD!!

This is the message for our generation; the message of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. We must dedicate ourselves totally to bring every Jew (especially ourselves and our families) to true Torah Judaism. We must teach the Jews that they are the sons of G-d and the gentiles that they are G-d's masterpiece creations.

But it can only be done by being connected to the Moses, the Rabbi Akiva, the Mordechi HaYehudi and the Lubavitcher Rebbe of our generation. Then we will all be dancing with.....

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