

OPEN TO RECEIVE

by Rabbi Label Lam

This is the Torah (Teaching) of a man who would die in a tent: Anything that enters the tent and anything that is in the tent shall be contaminated for seven days. (Bamidbar 19:14)

Reish Lakish says, "From where do we know that the Torah is only maintained by someone who kills himself over it? As it says: This is the Torah of the man who would die in a tent..." (Brochos 43B)

Every man of Israel is obligated in learning Torah whether he is poor or rich whether he is physically wholesome or languishing whether he is a youngster or an elder whose energies have waned, even if he is a poor person that must be provided for from charity and he needs to go door to door and even a man with a wife and children is obligated to fix for himself time to learn. (Rambam: Laws of Talmud Torah 1:8)

If the Torah is "a tree of life" then why is one expected to kill himself over it? What does that mean? It seems too extreme.

It is well known that R. Ephraim Margulies, the author of the *Mateh Ephraim* was not only a great scholar but a wealthy businessman. Many hours in the day he would cloister himself in his study and would remain removed from all his worldly concerns while he became immersed in Torah study. Even the most important business matters would not distract him from his learning. How did he do it? He posed the following hypothetical to his family and associates, "Imagine for your selves what you would do if I was dead, no longer in this world and you had no other address for your urgent questions. During these times I am to be considered as though I am no longer here." So he explained the verse, "This is the Torah regarding the man who would die in the tent..." A local businessman and close friend was determined to carry on his regular learning schedule on the day he was to move. His wife was none too pleased, at first, but he decided in principle that he wasn't going to miss out on his daily diet of learning no matter what.

Later in the morning he drove out of town to rent the truck he would need for the move. The truck rental place asked him for a \$500.00 deposit. He didn't have anything like that kind of money on him and it meant that he would have to double back and delay the move until he could go home and get the money and return again. Now he was really going to be late and he was fearful he would be testing overmuch his wife's nerves.

When he stepped outside the rental office in some industrial section of this town he noticed a fellow Jew passing by. He told him about the dilemma and the man pulled out \$500.00 cash without hesitation and handed it to him as a loan for the deposit. My friend was amazed. What was this fellow doing there at that time? How likely is it to find someone with \$500.00 cash on hand? Who says that even after all that that this fellow would be so agreeable to hand him the money? He felt that because he had kept his sacred learning appointment HASHEM had given him a little extra help and wink about which he was very grateful.

Nowadays the test and the need is greater than ever to gain even a few uninterrupted moments of concentration without intrusions from the ubiquitous cell phone. We might ask ourselves, "What if our phone battery was dead and we would be for a period of time unreachable?" If one would take Torah-Learning so seriously that he turns off his cell phone on his own, it would be no small thing and who knows what other signals he might be open to receive. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.