

# TO REACH THE STARS

by Rabbi Label Lam

*If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is like your own soul will entice you secretly, saying; "Let us go and worship the gods of others"- that you did not know, nor your forefathers, from the gods of the peoples that are all around you, those near to you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth- you shall not accede to him and hearken to him; your eye shall not take pity on him, you shall not be compassionate nor conceal him. Rather you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be the first against him to kill him, and the hand of the people afterwards. You shall pelt him with stones and he shall die; for he sought to make you stray from near HASHEM your G-d, Who takes you out of Egypt from the house of slavery. All Israel shall hear and fear, and they shall not again do such an evil thing in your midst. (Devarim 13:7-12)*

I realize that these words sound awfully barbaric and all too brutal in our sensitive and civilized times. It should be understood though that this is not an incitement to violence.

- 1) For these events to unfold we need to employ a court with the license to administer capital punishment.
- 2) We haven't had such a body for thousands of years.
- 3) We are bidden to obey the laws of the land, in the places in which we find ourselves.
- 4) Even still, the Talmud informs us that a court that killed once in seventy years was already considered a murderous court. So what is the practical value of learning about this "seducer"?

Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv ztl. turns the whole lesson around. He said that we have a principle that **HASHEM's** reward for good deeds always far outweighs His punishment for bad deeds. Now a "mesis umadiach"- a seducer or recruiter who tries to lead Jews to idol worship is punished with death, even if his efforts were unsuccessful. From here we can deduce how great is the reward of one who tries to bring his friend closer to G-d.

The Chovos HaLevavos writes the following remarkable words, "My brothers you should know, that if a person would reach the loftiest levels of perfection in the eyes of The Almighty and already have achieved the level of the prophets having their quality of character, praiseworthy conduct, selfless devotion, and pure love of the Creator- he still will not have approached the accomplishments of the

individual who directs people to the proper way and who draws close those who are distant to the service of The Almighty. His merits increase and are compounded by the moment through the achievements of those who were affected to serve The Creator."

According to the 1990 CJF National Population Study regarding American Jewry

1. The intermarriage rate for Jews is a staggering 72%
2. More than half of Jewish children under the age of 18 are raised outside the Jewish faith.
3. Out of the 5.5 million Jews, an estimated 3.5 million are not affiliated with synagogues or other Jewish Institutions.

There's a story about thousands of star fish left to dry in the sun when the tide retreated and a man is busy throwing them one by one into the sea. An onlooker asks critically whether he hopes to save all the star fish to which the man replies, "No, but for the ones I reach it makes a huge difference!"

Fourteen years have passed since this survey was taken and I'm not sure matters have improved significantly. Therefore we have less of an imperative to throw stones but rather we do have an abundance of opportunities **to reach the stars**. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.