

WE HAVE TIME

by Rabbi Label Lam

Rabbi Isaac says; 'It was only necessary to begin the Torah from, "This month is for you... (Exodus 12:3)" (Rashi-On the first word in Chumash-"Breishis")

Rabbi Isaac explains why the Torah started way back when with "Breishis" but we are left to ponder, "Why should the starting point of Chumash have otherwise been all the way here in Sefer Shemos?" This first commandment signals the beginning of the redemption; the birthing of a nation. How so? A slave, by definition, has nothing. His time is not his own. At this moment the Jewish People are empowered to take back control of their time and participate in creating a calendar. Controlling one's own schedule is the first great step of freedom.

One of the 6 questions we are asked after 120 years is, "Did you fix times for Torah?" (Shabbos 31) The Maharal explains that since the intellect is the supreme function of human the question tests not whether or not we learned as much as whether or not we had fixed appointments to learn. The ability to create goals, set aside times, and climb deliberately through the gauntlet of daily needs and urges testifies that one's spirit had succeeded to rule over his earthy tendencies.

Sefer Cheshbon HaNefesh writes, "The animal spirit has a short attention span. It observes the world with material eyes, seeing only that which is close, obvious, and immediate...The intellectual human spirit is in constant danger of itself being swallowed up by the desires of the animal spirit." Rabbi Yisrael Salanter ztl. had observed about this aspect of the human condition that "a man is a drop of intellect in a sea of instinct". Who can forget the current images and accounts of people clutching to trees for their lives as all is swept away below? Fixing times for Torah is no less "a tree of life to those who grasp it!" (Mishle' 3:18)

The Talmud (Rosh HaShana) demonstrates anecdotally that the word for "fixed"-keva as in "Fixing times for Torah" also means "to steal". How are the concepts of "fixing" and "stealing" compatible?

In order to fix times for Torah one has to steal from other competing interests. While waiting for the bus or an important phone call there are thousands of hours that at risk of falling by the wayside waiting to be retrieved or stolen back and fixed as times for Torah learning. The Mishne in Avos reminds us, "Don't say when I'll be free I'll learn. Maybe you'll never be free." Some present need will always be there to push out learning if it is not locked away in pockets sacred appointments.

There's a problem we all have with time. It runs through our hands like water. We cannot hold it. Eventually it is spent. We take photographs and stash away money but time slips like sands through

the hour-glass and we are helpless to stop the clock. Time spent busy with Torah is time stolen from the world of temporality and deposited, effectively fixed forever.

The Alter from Kelm ztl. instituted a mandatory five minute learning session to teach the value of small amounts of time. The accumulative accomplishments of those well used moments became measurable monuments to the potency of this lesson. He also regimented the students to rise at 3:30 AM and eat breakfast and learn from 4 to 7. The purpose of this daily exercise was to teach zeal and to train them to fix times for Torah even under unusual circumstances. Making such good use of time is symptomatic of a genuinely free person. When doing so, we gain mastery over something otherwise illusory and impossible for a man to grasp. It can truly be said then, "We have time!" Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.