

TORAH-LIKE WATER

by Rabbi Label Lam

There is no water except Torah! (Bava Kama 17A)

The Talmud is replete with statements that on the surface make little sense. On the most basic level we can appreciate that whenever the Torah speaks of "water" there is in some symbolic way a hint of the concept of Torah. Our patriarch Yakov removes a heavy rock from the well and provides water for the sheep of Rachel, aha, this is more than feeding time at the zoo. In a perhaps abstract manner of thinking Yakov is teaching Torah to the masses. That is one way to look at life with the eyes of an "impressionistic" painter and more.

One can also explore the ways in which Torah and water have similar properties. Water promotes growth. All living things are predominantly composed of water. So with regard to Torah we say before Shema every evening, it is our life, "Ki Heim Chayeinu". It promotes spiritual living and catalyzes growth. We can go on and on with comparisons!

I was in Israel a few years ago and hurrying by cab to my Shabbos destination with only minutes to spare. I decided I was going to strike up a deep and meaningful conversation with my secular Israeli driver even if he seemed disinterested. I always take that as a challenge. Time was working against me though. I asked his name. "Uri" he uttered barely opening his mouth. "Where do you live, Uri?" I asked him. Again a one word response, as if he was annoyed already with the length of the conversation, "Yerushelaim!" I sensed a blunt pride in his tone and maybe this was my opportunity. I told him in my best classic Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew which must sound like someone speaking Shakespeare or Chaucer to us, "Uri, ata kmo dag!- Uri, you are like a fish!" He almost let me off right there, shooting at me a wild glance. I certainly had his attention. As I made my meaning clear, he not only calmed down but his head started to shake in agreement and we even parted with a friendly and respectful exchange of Shabbat Shalom.

I simply explained as best I could that the most obvious thing about a fish is that he lives in water. The fish however does not realize that he is living in water. He is surrounded by it all the time and he cannot imagine what life would be without it. Water is his air. I told Uri, "You live here in Yerushelaim! I'm jealous of you! You are like that fish. You can't know how fortunate you are. I traveled from a far distance and paid a handsome sum of money just to be here for a few days in the holy city of Yerushelaim, while you are here all the time!"

The Sefer Chovos Levavos offers a short list of thirty points to ponder. Some of them are so obvious

that one wonders after they are mentioned, "Like, where have I been all my life?!" They are as obvious as water to a fish and the eyes through which we read. A few hyper-abbreviated samples: 1) HASHEM made us. We were not owed this existence. And He made us humans. He could have made you and me a squirrel or an arachnid. 2) He made us whole and with functional limbs! What's that worth!? 3) He gave us an intellect and a consciousness with which to explore and understand ourselves and the world around us. 4) He gave us a Torah to navigate happily through this world as we draw closer ultimately to Him in the world to come. 5) How much more valuable is the Torah than any commodity in the universe!? If a mere mortal king we to send us a letter, would we leave any part unread or lightly understood? If a time capsule would be unearthed in the middle-east with a hieroglyphic message for our time from some wise man of the ancient world, would the world ignore it or celebrate its every word?

Why don't we think this way without a reminder from the Chovos HaLevavos? Perhaps it's because there are certain features in life that are so near to us so often they can easily become part of the furniture of our existence and fade in importance like background music that's not heard after a time. In that way we too may resemble a fish, like Uri in over there in Yerushelaim, we are living constantly with **Torah -like water**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.