

PARASHAS EIKEV

Scattered Apples

When we want to do some serious studying, what sort of environment do we seek out? Do we sit ourselves down in the center of all the hullabaloo of daily life? Or do look for a quiet corner where we can concentrate on our studies without being disturbed?

The question is, of course, rhetorical. Everyone will agree that study requires concentration and focus, with as few distractions as possible. And yet, in this week's Torah reading we find the opposite approach. Moses tells the Jewish people to ponder the words of the Torah in the midst of their daily activities at home and away so that "your days may be lengthened on the land that Hashem promised you."

Why did Moses enjoin them to ponder the words of the Torah during their daily activities? Would it not have been more appropriate to set aside a quiet time each day for Torah study? Furthermore, how does Torah study "lengthen our days"?

Let us reflect for a moment on the pace and texture of life in contemporary society. From the time we force our eyes open in the morning until we fall exhausted into bed at night, we are swept up in a never-ending whirlwind of activity. Grab some breakfast. Drive to work. Plow through stacks of faxes and e-mails. Juggle clients and associates on three different lines. Prepare for the board meeting tomorrow. Stumble home. Help the kids with their homework. Get a little exercise. Rest for a little while. Off to sleep. Tomorrow is another day.

So when do we live? We spend so much time and effort providing our families and ourselves the means to live, but when do we actually live?

This is what Moses was telling the Jewish people. If you dedicate precious time throughout your hectic day to studying the Torah yourself and to teaching it to your children, you will discover that you are really living. You will find that those little islands of holiness and serenity are the very essence of life. Instead of spending your life preparing industriously for some distant point in the future when you will really get down to living, you will enjoy the wondrous pleasures of living right now, every day, throughout the day. And you will discover that you have "lengthened your days on the earth."

A fruit peddler called upon his son to sell apples in the marketplace. He packed up a cart with the most beautiful, flawless, mouth-watering apples, placed it in a good location and entrusted it to the boy.

The marketplace filled with people, and the boy eagerly awaited his new and exceedingly responsible role.

Suddenly, a horse and rider came galloping through the narrow lanes among the carts and stalls. One of the horse's hooves caught the edge of the apple cart and flipped it onto its side, scattering apples in every direction. As the boy watched in stunned disbelief, people scrambled after the luscious apples, and within moments, not a one was left.

When the fruit peddler learned what had happened, he gave his son a very disapproving look.

"But could I have done, father?" wailed the boy.

"When everyone was grabbing for the apples," said the peddler, "you should have grabbed some for yourself as well. But you just stood by, and now you have nothing at all."

In our own lives, we sometimes get so caught up in the mad rush of our daily existence that we lose sight of the larger picture. We must not stand by as the apples scatter in all directions. Every moment we salvage is a gift. Every minute we devote to Torah study is a priceless treasure that can never be taken from us. Think about it. We put so much effort into enriching ourselves materially. If we put only a fraction of that effort into our relationship with the Creator, we would enrich ourselves spiritually beyond measure..