

Lecture Series With Reb T, The Show Where We talk A Topic Per Session with Some Practical Lessons: “**The Prism of Optimism : The Inspiration of Rebbe Akiva**”

Sources from Sefaria (unless noted otherwise)

All Shirum on shiurenjoyment.com/shiurim/shiurim-reb-t/ -Shoutout to Jake W.!

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Shiur dedicated liyluy nishmas Chaim Yitzchok Ben Michoel Shlomo and Menachem Tzvi Ben Chaim Yitzhak

What is the idea of optimism or positivity? How would you define such a term and such an attitude? The dictionary defines positivity as “the practice of being or tendency to be positive or optimistic in attitude.” The dictionary further defines “optimism” as “hopefulness and confidence about the future or the successful outcome of something.” These terms then really are types of life outlooks and ways to go about your existence on this Earth. When we think about different characters in history, especially Jewish history and throughout Tanach, we find this element to be prevalent. So many people had so much stacked up against them and yet they stood up, stayed positive, and tackled whatever came their way. Think about Rabbi Akiva, who led a very difficult life—starting with learning torah at 40, through difficulties and a tragic death, and yet he seemed to be the essential optimist. David Hamelech also had great difficulties and tragedies yet if you look at Tehillim, you could easily see his positivity, hope and faith in Hashem.

Think about the idea of the Klausenberg Rebbe, a very close friend of my wife’s great grandfather’s family. Wikipedia even explains the remarkable story of this man:

***Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam** (January 10, 1905 – June 18, 1994) was an Orthodox rabbi and the founding Rebbe of the Sanz-Klausenburg Hasidic dynasty.*

Halberstam became one of the youngest rebbes in Europe, leading thousands of followers in the town of Klausenburg, Romania, before World War II. His wife, eleven children and most of his followers were murdered by the Nazis while he was incarcerated in several concentration camps. After the war, he moved to the United States and later to Israel, rebuilt Jewish communal life in the displaced persons camps of Western Europe, re-established his dynasty in the United States and Israel, founded a Haredi neighborhood in Israel and a Sanz community in the United States, established a hospital in Israel run according to Jewish law, and rebuilt his own family with a second marriage and the birth of seven more children

This story and character is remarkable to me What power and self preservance and optimism to live through what he did and get up and accomplish all that he did! Would anyone ever have blamed him if he wanted to just lie down and give up? Would anyone have faulted him for wanting to?

ou.org points out the famous example of “

The pessimist looks at the half filled glass and bemoans that it is half empty. “Oh poor me! There is only half a glass. It is very nearly empty.” The optimist looks at the very same glass and rejoices that it is half full.

chabad.org also points out that this trait was found within the Lubavitcher rebbe:

The Rebbe was an uncompromising optimist, not because he wasn't a realist or because he was uninformed about all the difficulties of the Jewish people and humankind. The Rebbe was actually one of the best informed people on earth because he had more than one thousand shlichim couples who were situated literally around the world. He knew from them all the problems and all the issues. He was a realist, but he approached reality from the perspective of optimism.

He insisted on using language to express positive thinking and optimism rather than negativism. For example, he never used the traditional Hebrew word for hospital – beit cholim, which literally means a house of sick people. He insisted on calling it a beit refuah, a house of healing. Why? Because he wanted the people who were in that hospital to know that they were there to gain greater health and not because they were desperately ill. He wanted to focus their minds on the solution rather than on the problem.

When he visited with handicapped soldiers who had been wounded in the wars of Israel, he refused to call them nechai Tzahal - handicapped; he used the word metzuyanim- exceptional. He told them that “if a person has been deprived of a limb or a faculty, this itself indicates that G-d has also given him special powers to overcome the limitations and to surpass in other areas the achievements of ordinary people. You are not disabled or handicapped but special and unique, as you possess potential that the rest of us do not.

When there was a lot of pressure for him to finish a project, he never referred to the finishing time as a “deadline.” He didn't like that word. Instead, he used the word “due date.” Deadline connotes death, while due date connotes birth.

The Rebbe never dwelled on the Holocaust. When he occasionally spoke of it, his emphasis was not on the six million martyrs but on how the survivors rebuilt their lives. He turned the preoccupation with the catastrophe into a celebration of achievement.

He had the same optimism when it came to religion. When he met a person who said he wasn't religious, he would ask him or her to do a mitzvah; to start lighting candles before Shabbat, or to put on tefillin or put a mezuzah on his or her home. But he would go further. He would say: “Are you honest? Do you give charity? Do you pay your employees on time? These are religious acts too! Why do you focus on what you are not? G-d loves you for all you are, for the mitzvot you do, and now why not add to those mitzvot?”

How are there some people who are just so positive and optimistic? Where does such an outlook come from? How can we acquire such a type of worldview? I think the key is to look at famous characters and examples and learn from their life and their views, specifically the great Rabbi Akiva and his rebbe.

Personal Note: March is the hardest month of the year (both yartsheits in march) yet also the happiest month of the year, the time when I got married—same month, drastically opposite feelings—all about outlook and what we focus on (especially in nowadays crazy times)

We're going to move around some sources on positivity/optimism and then focus on Rabbi Akiva (and his teacher), one of my personal favorite heroes from the Talmud.

Sources found with the help of sefaria.org as well as others

Before we look into the life of Rabbi Akiva and his teacher, let's see a clear example of his outlook:

Makkot 24a-b

וכבר היה ר"ג ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי יהושע ורבי עקיבא מהלכין בדרך ושמעו קול המונה של רומי מפלטה [ברחוק] מאה ועשרים מיל והתחילו בוכין ורבי עקיבא משחק אמרו לו מפני מה אתה משחק אמר להם ואתם מפני מה אתם בוכים אמרו לו הללו כושיים שמשתחווים לעצבים ומקטרים לעבודת כוכבים יושבין בטח והשקט ואנו בית הדום רגלי אלהינו שרוף

§ Apropos tribulations of exile and hope for redemption, the Gemara relates: **And it once was that Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva were walking along the road in the Roman Empire, and they heard the sound of the multitudes of Rome from Puteoli at a distance of one hundred and twenty mil.** The city was so large that they were able to hear its tumult from a great distance. **And the other Sages began weeping and Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him: For what reason are you laughing? Rabbi Akiva said to them: And you, for what reason are you weeping? They said to him: These gentiles, who bow to false gods and burn incense to idols, dwell securely and tranquilly in this colossal city, and for us, the House of the footstool of our God, the Temple, is burnt**

באש ולא נבכה אמר להן לכך אני מצחק ומה לעוברי רצונו כך לעושי רצונו על אחת כמה וכמה

by fire, and shall we not weep? Rabbi Akiva said to them: That is why I am laughing. If for those who violate His will, the wicked, it is so and they are rewarded for the few good deeds they performed, for those who perform His will, all the more so will they be rewarded.

שוב פעם אחת היו עולין לירושלים כיון שהגיעו להר הצופים קרעו בגדיהם כיון שהגיעו להר הבית ראו שועל שיצא מבית קדשי הקדשים התחילו הן בוכין ור"ע מצחק אמרו לו מפני מה אתה מצחק אמר להם מפני מה אתם בוכים אמרו לו מקום שכתוב בו (במדבר א, נא) והזר הקרב יומת ועכשיו שועלים הלכו בו ולא נבכה

The Gemara relates another incident involving those Sages. **On another occasion they were ascending to Jerusalem** after the destruction of the Temple. **When they arrived at Mount Scopus** and saw the site of the Temple, **they rent their garments** in mourning, in keeping with halakhic practice. **When they arrived at the Temple Mount, they saw a fox that emerged from the site of the Holy of Holies. They began weeping, and Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him: For what reason are you laughing? Rabbi Akiva said to them: For what reason are you weeping? They said to him: This is the place concerning which it is written: “And the non-priest who approaches shall die” (Numbers 1:51), and now foxes walk in it; and shall we not weep?**

אמר להן לכך אני מצחק דכתיב (ישעיהו ח, ב) ואעידה לי עדים נאמנים את אוריה הכהן ואת זכריה בן יברכיהו וכי מה ענין אוריה אצל זכריה אוריה במקדש ראשון וזכריה במקדש שני אלא תלה הכתוב נבואתו של זכריה בנבואתו של אוריה

Rabbi Akiva said to them: **That is why I am laughing, as it is written**, when God revealed the future to the prophet Isaiah: **“And I will take to Me faithful witnesses to attest: Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah” (Isaiah 8:2).** **Now what is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah?** He clarifies the difficulty: **Uriah prophesied during the First Temple period, and Zechariah prophesied during the Second Temple period**, as he was among those who returned to Zion from Babylonia. **Rather, the verse established that fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah is dependent on fulfillment of the prophecy of Uriah.**

באוריה כתיב (מיכה ג, יב) לכן בגללכם ציון שדה תחרש [וגו'] בזכריה כתיב (זכריה ח, ד) עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברחובות ירושלם עד שלא נתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה הייתי מתיירא שלא תתקיים נבואתו של זכריה עכשיו שנתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה בידוע שנבואתו של זכריה מתקיימת בלשון הזה אמרו לו עקיבא ניהמתנו עקיבא ניהמתנו

In the prophecy of Uriah it is written: “Therefore, for your sake Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become rubble, and the Temple Mount as the high places of a forest” (Micah 3:12), where foxes are found. There is a rabbinic tradition that this was prophesied by Uriah. **In the prophecy of Zechariah it is written: “There shall yet be elderly men and elderly women sitting in the streets of Jerusalem” (Zechariah 8:4).** **Until the prophecy of Uriah with regard to the destruction of the city was fulfilled I was afraid that the**

prophecy of Zechariah would not be fulfilled, as the two prophecies are linked. Now that the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, it is evident that the prophecy of Zechariah remains valid. The Gemara adds: The Sages said to him, employing this formulation: Akiva, you have comforted us; Akiva, you have comforted us.

Even society can recognize the power of this thinking:

Martin Seligman, Founder of Positive Psychology Movement

Pessimists believe their flaws cannot be overcome, whereas optimists are convinced that they can.

R Meir Soloveitchik

"Akiva" is essentially an Aramaic variant of *Yaakov*, or Jacob. Like Akiva, the patriarch Jacob is depicted as having a remarkable capacity to persevere, mainly by working for his deceitful uncle Laban for fourteen years in order to earn the right to marry his beloved Rachel. Moreover, the names Jacob and Akiva both derive from the word *ekev*, or heel.¹³ As my father, Rabbi Eliyahu Soloveichik, once pointed out, the heel is the lowest portion of the body, yet, at the same time, it is the first part of the body used to take a step forward. In other words, it is precisely one's initial downfall that can ultimately emerge as a key to progress.

[הגדה של פסח, מגיד, הא לחמא עניא ג'](#)

הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים. פל דכפין ייתי ויילל, פל דצריך ייתי ויפסח. השתא הכא, לשנה הבאה בארעא דישראל. השתא עבדי, לשנה הבאה בני חורין.

Keeping An Optimistic Feeling:

[תהילים ק:ב'](#)

עבדו את־ה' בשמחה באו לפני בְּרִנָּה: (ב)

[Psalms 100:2](#)

(2) worship the L-RD in gladness; come into His presence with shouts of joy.

The Dignity of Difference p. 206

Rabbi Sacks

“One of the most important distinctions I have learned in the course of reflection on Jewish history is the difference between optimism and hope. Optimism is the belief that things will get better. Hope is the belief that, together, we can make things better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It takes no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to

have hope. Knowing what we do of our past, no Jew can be an optimist. But Jews have never – despite a history of sometimes awesome suffering – given up hope”

[תהילים קכ"ו:א-ר'](#)

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב ה' אֶת־שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ כְּחֻלְמִים: אֲזַי וְיִמְלֵא שְׂחֹק פִּינוּ וְלִשְׁנֵינוּ רִגְהָ אֲזַי יֵאמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם הַגְּדִיל ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת עִם־אֱלֹהִים: הַגְּדִיל ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּנוּ הָיִינוּ שְׂמֻחִים: שׁוּבָה ה' אֶת־שִׁבּוֹתֵנוּ [שְׁבִיתָנוּ] כַּאֲפִיקִים בְּנֶגֶב: הַיּוֹרְעִים כְּדַמְעָה כְּרִגְהָ יִקְצְרוּ: הָלוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ | וּבָכָה נִישָׂא מִשָּׂדֶה־הַגֶּזֶרַע פְּא־יָבֹוא בְּרִגְהָ נִישָׂא אֶל־מִתְּיוֹ:

[Psalms 126:1-6](#)

A song of ascents. When the LORD restores the fortunes of Zion —we see it as in a dream— our mouths shall be filled with laughter, our tongues, with songs of joy. Then shall they say among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them!” The LORD will do great things for us and we shall rejoice. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like watercourses in the Negeb. They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. Though he goes along weeping, carrying the seed-bag, he shall come back with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves.

[Sefer HaChinukh 241:2](#)

(2) It is from the roots of the commandment that a person know and put into his heart that everything that happens to him - good and bad - the cause of it coming to him is from God, blessed be He. And from the hand of man - from the hand of a man to his brother - there would not be anything without the will of G-d, blessed be He. Hence, when a person caused him pain or hurt him, he should know for himself that his [own] sins caused [it], and that G-d, may He be blessed, ordained this for him. And he should not place his thoughts to taking vengeance from [the one who pained him], since he is not the cause of his evil, but rather the sin is the cause; like David, peace be upon him, stated (II Samuel 16:11), "leave him to curse, since the Lord told him [so]" - he made the matter depend upon his [own] sin, and not upon Shimei ben Gera. And there is also a great benefit found in this commandment, in quieting a dispute and removing enmity from the heart of people. And when there is peace among people, G-d, may He be blessed, will make peace for them.

[Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 17:6](#)

(6) Fifth Theory.--This is our theory, or that of our Law.

Another fundamental principle taught by the Law of Moses is this: Wrong cannot be ascribed to God in any way whatever; all evils and afflictions as well as all kinds of happiness of man, whether they concern one individual person or a community, are distributed according to justice; they are the result of strict judgment that admits no wrong whatever. Even when a person suffers pain in consequence of a thorn having entered into his hand, although it is at once drawn out, it is a punishment that has been inflicted on him [for sin], and the least pleasure he enjoys is a reward [for some good action]; all this is meted out by strict justice; as is said in Scripture, "all his ways are judgment" (Deut. 32:4); we are only ignorant of the working of that judgment.

[Berakhot 60b:7](#)

חייב אדם לברך כו': מאי "חייב לברך על הרעה פ'שם שמברך על הטובה"? אילימא פ'שם שמברך על הטובה "הטוב והמטיב", כן מברך על הרעה "הטוב והמטיב", והתנן על בשורות טובות אומר "הטוב והמטיב", על בשורות רעות אומר "ברוך ... דיין האמת"! אמר רבא: לא נצרכה, אלא לקבולינהו בשמחה.

We learned in the mishna: **One is obligated to recite a blessing** for the bad that befalls him just as he recites a blessing for the good that befalls him. The Gemara asks: **What** does it mean: **One is obligated to recite a blessing for the bad just as for the good? If we say** this means that **just as one recites a blessing for a positive event** with the formula: **Who is good and does good, so too one recites a blessing for a calamity** with the formula: **Who is good and does good, didn't we learn** in our mishna that **over good tidings one recites: Who is good and does good**, while **over bad tidings one recites: Blessed...the true Judge?** Rather, **Rava said:** The mishna's statement **was only necessary** to instruct us **to accept** bad tidings **with** the same **joy** with which we accept good tidings, not to instruct with regard to which blessing to recite.

[ברכות ס' ב:י"ב](#)

אמר רב הונא אמר רב משום רבי מאיר, וכן תנא משמיה דרבי עקיבא: לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר: "כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד".

[Berakhot 60b:12](#)

Rav Huna said that Rav said that Rabbi Meir said; and so it was taught in a baraita in the name of Rabbi Akiva: One must always accustom oneself to say: Everything that God does, He does for the best.

[בן יהודע על ברכות ס' ב:א'](#)

לא נצרכה אלא לקבלינהו בשמחה. נראה לי בס"ד מלוי שמחה בזה שי"ן מ"ם חי"ת ה"י [520] עולה מספר דיין האמת [520], רמז שיברך דיין האמת בשמחה, ולזה אמר אחר כך (תהלים נו, יא) באלהים אלהל דבר, זו מדת פרענות כי שם 'אלהים' הוא חמשה אותיות, וחמשה הוא אותיות 'שמחה' בהפוך אתוון.

[Ben Yehoyada on Berakhot 60b:1](#)

It only means to accept it happily:

When you count the hidden part of the Gematria of the word "Simcha", you get 520, which is the same Gematria as "True Judge" (Dayan HaEmes) – 520.

This hints to the idea that one must bless the True Judge happily.

This is why the Talmud later says, "'in Elokim we will praise' – this is the trait of catastrophe..." As the word Elokim has 5 letters, and the Hebrew word "Chamisha", 5, is an anagram for "Simcha", happiness.

[chabad.org:](#)

Nahum Ish Gamzu was Rabbi Akiva's rabbi for 22 years. He is called by this name because he always said the expression: "This is also for the good." (in Hebrew: *ish gamzu* = the man (who

says) this is also [good]) And his student Rabbi Akiva also would say: "All that G-d does is for the good." He was called by the title 'Ish Gamzu' - because whenever anything unpleasant happened to him, he would say '*Gam Zu le'Tovah*'.

The connection of the Two:

Chagigah 12A

שאל רבי ישמעאל את ר"ע כשהיו מהלכין בדרך א"ל אתה ששימשת את נחום איש גם זו כ"ב שנה שהיה דורש כל אתין שבתורה את השמים ואת הארץ מה היה דורש בהן א"ל אילו נאמר שמים וארץ הייתי אומר שמים שמו של הקב"ה עכשיו שנאמר את השמים ואת הארץ שמים שמים ממש ארץ ארץ ממש

§ The Gemara relates: **Rabbi Yishmael asked Rabbi Akiva a question when they were walking along the way. He said to him: You who served Naḥum of Gam Zu for twenty-two years, who would expound** and learn that every appearance of the word *et* in the Torah is meant to teach something, **what would he expound from the phrase: “The heaven and the earth”** [*et hashamayim ve’et ha’aretz*] ([Genesis 1:1](#))? **He said to him:** These words should be expounded as follows: **Had it stated:** In the beginning God created *hashamayim vеха’aretz*, i.e., the heaven and the earth, without the word *et*, **I would have said: *Shamayim* is the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and the same goes for *aretz*, and the verse would sound as if it meant that God, whose name is *Shamayim* and *Aretz*, created the world. Since it states “*et hashamayim ve’et ha’aretz*,” it is clear that these are created objects and that *shamayim* means the actual heaven and *aretz* is the actual earth. It is for this reason that the word *et* is necessary.**

Berachot 22A

תנו רבנן: בעל קרי שנתנו עליו תשעה קבין מים — טהור. נחום איש גם זו לחשה לרבי עקיבא, ורבי עקיבא לחשה לקבן עזאי...

Our Rabbis have taught : A Ba'al Keri upon whom nine Kabs of water have been poured becomes clean. Nahum, the man of Gam Zu, whispered this to R. 'Akiba, who whispered it to Ben 'Azzai...

Let's See the Story of NaChum Ish Gamzu:

Taanis 21A

אמרו עליו על נחום איש גם זו שהיה סומא משתי עיניו גידם משתי ידיו קיטע משתי רגליו וכל גופו מלא שחין והיה מוטל בבית רעוע ורגלי מטתו מונחין בספלין של מים כדי שלא יעלו עליו נמלים פעם אחת [היתה מטתו מונחת בבית רעוע] בקשו תלמידיו לפנות מטתו ואח"כ לפנות את הכלים אמר להם בניי פנו את הכלים ואח"כ פנו את מטתי שמובטח לכם כל זמן שאני בבית אין הבית נופל פיננו את הכלים ואחר כך פיננו את מטתו ונפל הבית

§ The Gemara relates another story about a rundown building. **They said about Naḥum of Gam Zu that he was blind in both eyes, both his arms were amputated, both his legs were amputated, and his entire body was covered in boils. And he was lying in a dilapidated house, and legs of his bed were placed in buckets of water so that ants should not climb onto him, as he was unable to keep them off in any other manner. Once his students sought to remove his bed from the house and afterward remove his other vessels. He said to them: My sons, remove the vessels first, and afterward remove my bed, as I can guarantee you that as long as I am in the house, the house will not fall. Indeed they removed the vessels and afterward they removed his bed, and immediately the house collapsed.**

אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי וכי מאחר שצדיק גמור אתה למה עלתה לך כך אמר להם בניי אני גרמתי לעצמי שפעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך לבית חמי והיה עמי משוי ג' חמורים אחד של מאכל ואחד של משתה ואחד של מיני מגדים בא עני אחד ועמד לי בדרך ואמר לי רבי פרנסני אמרתי לו המתן עד שאפרוק מן החמור לא הספקתי לפרוק מן החמור עד שיצתה נשמתו

His students said to him: Rabbi, since you are evidently a wholly righteous man, as we have just seen that as long as you were in your house it did not fall, why has this suffering befallen you? He said to them: My sons, I brought it upon myself. Naḥum of Gam Zu related to them the following: **As once I was traveling along the road to my father-in-law's house, and I had with me a load distributed among three donkeys, one of food, one of drink, and one of delicacies. A poor person came and stood before me in the road, saying: My rabbi, sustain me. I said to him: Wait until I unload the donkey, after which I will give you something to eat. However, I had not managed to unload the donkey before his soul left his body.**

הלכתי ונפלתי על פניו ואמרתי עיני שלא חסו על עיניך יסומו ידיי שלא חסו על ידיך יתגדמו רגליי שלא חסו על רגליך יתקטעו ולא נתקררה דעתי עד שאמרתי כל גופי יהא מלא שחין אמרו לו אוי לנו שראינוך בכך אמר להם אוי לי אם לא ראיתוני בכך

I went and fell upon his face and said: May my eyes, which had no compassion on your eyes, be blinded; may my hands, which had no compassion on your hands, be amputated; may my legs, which had no compassion on your legs, be amputated. And my mind did not rest until I said: May my whole body be covered in boils. Naḥum of Gam Zu prayed that his suffering might atone for his failure. His students **said to him: Even so, woe to us that we have seen you in this state. He said to them: Woe is me if you had not seen me in this state, as this suffering atones for me.**

ואמאי קרו ליה נחום איש גם זו דכל מילתא דהוה סלקא ליה אמר גם זו לטובה זימנא חדא בעו לשדורי ישראל דורון לבי קיסר אמרו מאן ייזיל ייזיל נחום איש גם זו דמלומד בניסין הוא שדרו בידיה מלא סיפטא דאבנים טובות ומרגליות אזל בת בההוא דירה בליליא קמו הנך דיראי ושקלינהו לסיפטיה ומלונהו עפרא (למחר כי חזנהו אמר גם זו לטובה)

The Gemara inquires: **And why did they call him Nahum of Gam Zu?** The reason is **that** with regard to **any matter that occurred to him, he would say: This too is for the good [gam zu letova]. Once, the Jews wished to send a gift [doron] to the house of the emperor. They said: Who should go and present this gift? Let Nahum of Gam Zu go, as he is accustomed to miracles. They sent with him a chest [sifta] full of jewels and pearls, and he went and spent the night in a certain inn. During the night, these residents of the inn arose and took all of the precious jewels and pearls from the chest, and filled it with earth.** The next day, when he saw what had happened, Nahum of Gam Zu said: This too is for the good.

כי מטא התם [שרינהו לסיפטא חזנהו דמלו עפרא] בעא מלכא למקטלינהו לכולהו אמר קא מחייכו בי יהודאי [אמר גם זו לטובה] אתא אליהו אדמי ליה כחד מינייהו א"ל דלמא הא עפרא מעפרא דאברהם אבוהון הוא דכי הוה שדי עפרא הוה סיפיה גילי הוה גירי דכתיב (ישעיהו מא, ב) יתן כעפר חרבו קקש נדף קשתו

When he arrived there, at the ruler's palace, they opened the chest and saw that it was filled with earth. The king wished to put all the Jewish emissaries to death. He said: The Jews are mocking me. Nahum of Gam Zu said: This too is for the good. Elijah the Prophet came and appeared before the ruler as one of his ministers. He said to the ruler: Perhaps this earth is from the earth of their father Abraham. As when he threw earth, it turned into swords, and when he threw stubble, it turned into arrows, as it is written in a prophecy that the Sages interpreted this verse as a reference to Abraham: "His sword makes them as the dust, his bow as the driven stubble" (Isaiah 41:2).

הויא חדא מדינתא דלא מצו למיכבשה בדקו מיניה וכבשוה עיילו לבי גנזיה ומלוהו לסיפטיה אבנים טובות ומרגליות ושדרוהו ביקרא רבה

There was one province that the Romans were unable to conquer. They took some of this earth, **tested it** by throwing it at their enemies, **and conquered** that province. When the ruler saw that this earth indeed had miraculous powers, his servants **entered his treasury and filled Nahum of Gam Zu's chest with precious jewels and pearls and sent him off with great honor.**

Now Let's Look at the story of Rabbi Akiva:

[Avot D'Rabbi Natan 6:2](#)

(2) What were Akiva's beginnings? It is said: Up to the age of forty, he had not yet studied a thing. One time, while standing by the mouth of a well in Lydda, he inquired, "Who hollowed out this stone?" and was told, "Akiva, haven't you read that 'water wears away stone' (Job 14:19)? - it was water falling upon it constantly, day after day." At that, Rabbi Akiva asked himself: Is my mind harder than this stone? I will go and study at least one section of Torah.

בראשית רבה ק"ז

רבי עקיבא עשה בור ארבעים שנה, ולמד תורה ארבעים שנה, ושמש את ישראל ארבעים שנה.

Nedarim 50A

In the winter they would sleep in a storehouse of straw, and Rabbi Akiva would gather strands of straw from her hair. He said to her: If I had the means I would place on your head a Jerusalem of Gold, a type of crown. Elijah the prophet came and appeared to them as a regular person and started calling and knocking on the door. He said to them: Give me a bit of straw, as my wife gave birth and I do not have anything on which to lay her. Rabbi Akiva said to his wife: See this man, who does not even have straw. We should be happy with our lot, as we at least have straw to sleep on.

Yevamot 62b

ר"ע אומר למד תורה בילדותו ילמוד תורה בזקנותו היו לו תלמידים בילדותו יהיו לו תלמידים בזקנותו שנא' בבקר זרע את זרעך וגו' אמרו שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא מגבת עד אנטיפרס וכולן מתו בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה

Rabbi Akiva says that the verse should be understood as follows: If one **studied Torah in his youth he should study more Torah in his old age; if he had students in his youth he should have additional students in his old age, as it is stated: "In the morning sow your seed, etc."** **They said** by way of example that **Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of students** in an area of land that stretched **from Gevat to Antipatris** in Judea, **and they all died in one period of time, because they did not treat each other with respect.**

והיה העולם שמם עד שבא ר"ע אצל רבותינו שבדרום ושנאה להם ר"מ ור' יהודה ור' יוסי ורבי שמעון ורבי אלעזר בן שמוע והם הם העמידו תורה אותה שעה

And the world was desolate of Torah until Rabbi Akiva came to our Rabbis in the South and taught his Torah to them. This second group of disciples consisted of **Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua. And these are the very ones who upheld the study of Torah at that time.** Although Rabbi Akiva's earlier students did not survive, his later disciples were able to transmit the Torah to future generations.

Berachot 60b

אמר רב הונא אמר רב משום רבי מאיר, וכן תנא משמיה דרבי עקיבא: לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר: "כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד".

Rav Huna said that Rav said that Rabbi Meir said; and so it was taught in a *baraita* in the name of Rabbi Akiva: One must always accustom oneself to say: Everything that God does, He does for the best.

— כי הא דרבי עקיבא דהנה קאזיל באורקא. מטא לההיא מתא, בעא אושפיזא לא יתבי ליה. אמר: "כל דעביד רחמנא — לטב". אזל וכת בדברא, ונהה בהדיה תרנגולא וחקמרא ושרגא. אתא זיקא פבייה לשרגא. אתא שונרא אכליה לתרנגולא. אתא אריה אכליה לחמרא. אמר: "כל דעביד רחמנא — לטב". ביה בליקא אתא גניסא, שבייה למתא. אמר להו: לאו אמרי לכו כל מה שעושה הקדוש ברוך הוא הכל לטובה.

The Gemara relates: **Like this incident, when Rabbi Akiva was walking along the road and came to a certain city, he inquired about lodging and they did not give him any. He said: Everything that God does, He does for the best. He went and slept in a field, and he had with him a rooster, a donkey and a candle. A gust of wind came and extinguished the candle; a cat came and ate the rooster; and a lion came and ate the donkey. He said: Everything that God does, He does for the best. That night, an army came and took the city into captivity.** It turned out that Rabbi Akiva alone, who was not in the city and had no lit candle, noisy rooster or donkey to give away his location, was saved. **He said to them: Didn't I tell you? Everything that God does, He does for the best.**

Berachot 61b

רבי עקיבא אומר: "בכל נפשך" אפילו נוטל את נפשך.

Love Hashem your G-d ... Rabbi Akiva says "With all your life", this means even to take your own life.

תנו רבנן: פעם אחת גזרה מלכות הרשעה שלא יעסקו ישראל בתורה. בא פפוס בן יהודה ומצאו לרבי עקיבא שנהיה מקהיל קהלות ברבים ועוסק בתורה. אמר לו: עקיבא אי אתה מתגרא מפני מלכות?

The Rabbis taught in a *braita*" Once upon a time, the evil empire decreed that the Jews could not deal with studying Torah. Came Pappus the son of Yehuda and found Rabbi Akiva who was gathering large groups in public and learning Torah. He said to him: Akiva, are you not scared of the government?

אף אנחנו עכשיו שאנו יושבים ועוסקים בתורה, שכתוב בה: "כי הוא חייך וארך ימך", כך, אם אנו הולכים ומבטלים ממנה — על אחת כמה וכמה!

(Rabbi Akiva talks now) So too we, now are sitting and learning Torah, as it says: "For Torah is your life and a way to live a long time", therefore if we veer away and stop learning Torah, even more so we will die.

אמרו: לא היו ימים מועטים, עד שתפסוהו לרבי עקיבא וכתשוהו בבית האסורים, ותפסו לפפוס בן יהודה וכתשוהו אצלו. אמר לו: פפוס, מי הביאך לכאן? אמר לו: אשריך רבי עקיבא שנתפסת על דברי תורה. אוי לו לפפוס שנתפס על דברים בטלים.

They said: It was only a few days until they caught Rabbi Akiva and tied him up in jail. They caught Papus the son of Yehuda and tied him up. He said to him Papus Who brought you here? He said to him (Papus said to Akiva) Praiseworthy are you Rabbi Akiva, that you were caught on the matters of Torah, Woe is to Papus who was caught for silly matters.

בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהוֹצִיאוּ אֶת רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא לְהַרְיֵגָה זְמַן קָרִיאַת שְׁמַע הָיָה, וְהָיוּ סוֹרְקִים אֶת בְּשָׂרוֹ בְּמַסְרָקוֹת שֶׁל בְּרֹזֶל, וְהָיָה מְקַבֵּל עָלָיו עוֹל מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם. אָמְרוּ לוֹ תַלְמִידָיו: רַבֵּינוּ, עַד כָּאן?! אָמַר לָהֶם: כָּל יְמֵי הַיִּיְתִי מִצְטַעַר עַל פְּסוּקַי זֶה "כָּכֵל בְּפִשְׁוֹ" אֲפִילוֹ נוֹטֵל אֶת נִשְׁמָתוֹ. אָמַרְתִּי: מַתִּי יָבֵא לְגִדִי וְאֶקְיָמֶנּוּ, וְעַכְשָׁיו שָׁבָא לְגִדִי, לֹא אֶקְיָמֶנּוּ? הָיָה מֵאַרְיֵה בְּ"אֶחָד", עַד שִׁיצְתָה נִשְׁמָתוֹ בְּ"אֶחָד". יָצְתָה בֵּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה: "אֲשֶׁרִיךְ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא שִׁיצְאָה נִשְׁמָתוֹ בְּאֶחָד"

At the time when they took Rabbi Akiva to be killed, it was the time of reading the Shema. While they were brushing his flesh with metal combs, he was accepting upon himself the yolk of heaven. His students said to him: Our Rabbi, until here He said to them: My entire life, I felt bad about this verse, "With all your life" even to take your own soul. I said When will I have a chance to fulfill (the words of the verse?) Now when I have that chance, would I not fulfill the verse? He extended the word "One" until his soul left his body. A heavenly voice came out and said: Praiseworthy are you Rabbi Akiva, that your soul left your body at "One"

—As a side note, if anyone is ever interested, there are other audio burst shiurim I give throughout the week through Shiur Enjoyment related to the Daf, Parsha, and Pirkei Avos as well an OT podcast show throughout the week to help all live more independently and functionally, using fine motor and functional life skills. There is also the “Daily Dose of Divinity” materials I can share (Facebook/Whatsapp/Youtube) of “the moving minute” Daf video minute and the writings of daily lessons of Rabbi Nachman. Links for all can be found here:

Shiur Enjoyment Daf/Parsha/Pirkei Avot:

<http://www.shiurenjoyment.com/shiurim/shiurim-reb-t/>

OT:

www.anchor.fm/mrt1

Daily Dose of Divinity—Moving minute/Rabbi Nachman:

