

Studying Torah With the Giants

I. The Giants of Torah

A. Professor David Weiss-Halivni: The Talmud is so physically enormous, it would be nearly impossible to take two of its 20 volumes to class. Unless you had one under the left arm and one under the right. And then you would probably have to leave behind your notebook. There is simply no comparison to the years in high school, when you could hold the plane geometry, history, and Spanish books, comfortably under one arm, *and* the notebooks. On my shelf, the 20 volumes are huge, and those are only the Babylonian Talmud. The Talmud of Erez Yisrael is another seven volumes.

During the 1960's I was privileged to study with Mori VeRabbi, my teacher and rabbi, Professor Halivni, even though I did not have what is called in Yiddish, a *Gemara Kup*, the kind of mind that could follow the long strings of arguments and the many, many names of the Rabbis. I just could never keep straight who said what and why this one said this and that one said that. But I stuck to it, because Professor Halivni always treated me patiently and kindly, even though I “hung back” and didn't contribute much to the discussions.

1. Two discussions: Professor Halivni and Elie Wiesel were in Cheder (what we would call elementary religious school, though the curriculum was so different) in Sighet, until they were both sent to Auschwitz as teen-agers. A couple of years ago and a few months apart I had a reunion with them – Rabbi Eliezer (as I call Elie Wiesel) in New York and then during the summer in Jerusalem with Professor Halivni. When I mentioned Professor Halivni's name, he said “Ah, The *Illui*, the prodigy.” Already at such a young age, and even in an environment where so many were immersed in Talmud, he was known in Sighet for his genius. Professor Halivni recalled fondly the days with Rabbi Eliezer, but he added — and not with any sense of arrogance — that “When I was eight, I went to study on my own.” In retrospect, I keep thinking that when I was eight I was waiting for my father to bring me Batman and Superman comic books from the drugstore.

At the time of our reunion in the Hebrew University library, he told us many personal stories one in particular I remember. He recalled for us how a couple of years after the Shoah when he had come as an orphan to an orphanage in New York, he could still remember the taste of the glass of milk.

2. A tale: A certain rabbi who was raised in the ultra-orthodox world and its Yeshivas, left that world for several years for worldly things and eventually decided he wanted to be a rabbi. So he applied at the Jewish Theological Seminary where he was scheduled to be tested on his knowledge of Talmud by Professor Halivni. Professor Halivni asked him to read and explain a passage, but his pronunciation and grammar was so bad, Professor Halivni politely said that he would read the passage and then the man could explain it. In fact, the man recalled it was a *Tosafot*, one of the Talmudic commentaries on the side of the passage known to many as the bane of the students because of the complexity of the explanations. As the man explained to me, Professor Halivni read exactly where the man had left off, *but he had no book in front of him*. He simply recited it by heart. To give a sense of this awesome feat, there are more than 5,000 pages of Talmud, each page with the Talmud text, Rashi's and Tosafot's commentaries. I should mention also, that we ought to keep in mind that to manage the kind of work Professor Halivni does, that he has to have also absorbed the Medieval commentaries, the Midrashic literature, the Halachic works throughout the ages and modern-day articles in scholarly journals. I would think it is nearly impossible to calculate or even imagine the formidable quantity of

knowledge in Professor Halivni's mind. I believe this is true of many of the people whom I am describing.

3. Perhaps I am making it up: If the class was small, we could study in Professor Halivni's office. When there was need to refer to one of the books on his library's shelf, he immediately reached for the right book, and, while I wouldn't swear to it, I think I remember he always managed to turn to the exact page without having to thumb through or scan the table of contents or index.

4. Professor Halivni's work; For the past many years, Professor Halivni has engaged in uncovering and explaining the various chronological layers, the editing, and the redacting of the Talmud. To give some perspective, the material at hand covers the thousands of pages of Talmud, five-six centuries of life in Babylonia and Israel and hundreds of rabbinic personages. To give additional perspective of the man: when my friend Rabbi Jonathan Porath and I went to meet him in the library, he was sitting at the desk *with nothing but an open Talmud in front of him*, no notes, no pen, no computers. Only the following day would he begin to record in writing his discoveries.

To describe him as "esteemed", "distinguished" or "eminent" in his field would not be inaccurate, though "pre-eminent" is perhaps the better term. So, too with the others I am describing.

5. A fact: When I was to take my Talmud exam with Professor Halivni on 50 pages, I went to his office the day before I was scheduled and told him that I could stay up all night, study more, and come back tomorrow if he wanted. But he invited me in, asked me to sit down, open a passage that I should explain, which I did. Then he said he would choose a passage which I should explain. It was a tough one, and I sensed it was coming, but he did not do it to trick or embarrass me. I did as well as I could, and the examination was over. While I was relieved that it was over, I was not a wreck afterwards.

Because I knew that I was always safe with Professor Halivni.

B. Professor Jacob Milgrom: In physical comparison to the Talmud, the Bible seems so small, even in regular-sized print you can carry it in one hand. Since my recent personal Torah study has focused on both Talmud and Bible, I had the stray thought, "Now how difficult could it be to become a Great One in Bible?"

My humbling answer came when I began to spend time with Professor Jacob Milgrom in Jerusalem.

I first met Mori VeRabbi, my teacher and rabbi, Professor Milgrom when he was a rabbi in Richmond, Virginia. I grew up in Arlington. Richmond was part of our United Synagogue Youth region, and one year the convention was at Beth El, his synagogue. After more than a decade there, he went to Berkeley and became a professor of Bible for many years after which he moved to Jerusalem until he passed away a couple of years ago at age 87, Zichrono Livracha, may his memory be for a blessing. I often dropped in on him and his wife, Dr. Jo Milgrom, the well-known artist and educator on my many walks around Jerusalem. Occasionally I would go Shabbas afternoon when Jo would put out a creative, vegetarian, healthy spread for a few people gathered on their porch or in the living room. On one of these visits Professor Milgrom said I was welcome to join him on a late Shabbat morning when he and Professor Moshe Greenberg had their Bible study group at Professor Greenberg's apartment just up the Jabotinsky hill a few blocks. I accepted and a few weeks later went with him up the hill.

1. Bible Study: To give you an idea of who was there, there were five of us, though I think once or twice there was another. The five: Professor Milgrom, without dispute the

greatest living expert on Biblical ritual. His three-volume commentary to the Book of Leviticus, clearly the most technical of the Five Books of Moses, is 2714 pages long. Professor Greenberg, Zichrono Livracha, then in his late seventies, who had done spectacular work on the Books of Exodus and Ezekiel, though that barely touches the range of his contribution to Bible study. Professor Greenberg's wife, Evelyn was there, too, and the table had on it only some Bibles, a few things to nosh and simple drinks. I also remember that there was present a "ringer". I do not remember the entire story, but my impression was that he was a professor who apparently could read the cuneiform wedges of the Akkadian (Babylonian/Assyrian) language as easily as I, as a kid, read the sports section of the Washington Post recounting how our beloved Washington Senators had lost again. And me, with 7 ½ years of formal Bible study twice or three times a week under my belt and a considerable number of subsequent hours on my own.

2. Bible Giants: Recently, back home, as I studied Professor Greenberg's *Ezekiel* and a number of other scholarly books of the Bible, I began to consider what the two professors had to know to prepare their work: First, there are the languages (ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, perhaps some Syriac, Greek [for the Septuagint translation], Latin [for the Vulgate of Jerome], Ugaritic [Canaanite], Akkadian and Sumerian, perhaps some Hittite, more than a little Phoenician and Punic, some Persian, Arabic, and for modern articles German and most likely French. Within the realm of the ancient languages, philology, etymology, epigraphy, phonology, grammar, and syntax, which can be particularly tricky because of the nature of Biblical Hebrew. Add to that, of course: archeology, Ancient Near Eastern history and geography, agriculture, war tactics, cooking, manufacturing, the weather, geology, and how the land has changed over the past two thousand plus years, mythology and theology in the Biblical mind, including angelology, ritual, sacrifice, prayer, and magic of many nations. I have no doubt forgotten other fields of study, such as knowing the medieval Bible commentators, Jewish and non-Jewish a vast literature itself.

And there I was with these two Giants of Bible. It was exhilarating and humbling each time I went.

C. Professor Daniel Sperber: After Synagogue in Jerusalem — once on every trip, I have the opportunity to have Kiddush at the home of Professor Daniel Sperber and his wife Chana. Professor Sperber's expertise in the area of the life of the Jews of Israel in the early centuries — down to the seemingly most minor detail is staggering. Touring his library and viewing his collection of 1st-4th century keys, combs, and other artifacts is mind-bending, though there is something missing. In passing the "tourists" will notice (without Professor Sperber calling attention to it) the certificate for the Israel Prize, Israel's highest honor. But there is no computer. He must have someone transcribe his handwritten manuscripts — the "Sperber collection" fills an entire shelf in my library.

4. My Studies With the Giants: During my 7 ½ years at the Jewish Theological Seminary, as an undergraduate in the Seminary-Columbia School of General Studies Joint Program (referred to by us back then as "The Joint" and a couple of years in Rabbinical School, many of my professors were fine scholars and a few were pre-eminent in their areas of expertise, Giants.

In Talmud: Professor Halivni, described above: I recall taking eight or nine courses him.

D. Professor Saul Lieberman, considered to be "one in a generation" (and some say, in many generations). I sat in on two or three sessions of his, sitting next to Elie Wiesel in the back who afterwards would go to study privately with Professor Lieberman. While I did not get a sense from sitting in class of how very great he was in the world of Talmud, his reputation was

known everywhere. He opened to the Jewish world a view of the life of the Jews in Israel in the Talmudic period from his unsurpassed knowledge of Greek and Roman literature, particularly in his books *Greek Jewish Palestine* and *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*. The true extent of his scholarship in that realm — ask anyone who knows — is almost unfathomable. No less significant, his towering scholarship demonstrated innumerable times — particularly in his multi-volume commentary to the Tosefta — his ability to uncover the original texts that lay hidden under printed works that had been copied for hundreds of years from manuscripts and books and suffered from enormous numbers of blatant and subtle errors.

1. A note from the previous generation of The Giants: Professor Levi Ginzberg, Zichrono Livracha, was a Giant in the generation before I came to the Seminary. He died in 1953. His *magnum opus*, *The Legends of the Jews*, runs to seven volumes, four of text, two of footnotes, and one volume of an index. According to Professor David Golinkin, there are more than 30,000 footnotes referencing hundreds of volumes of ancient, medieval, and modern Jewish and non-Jewish literature. This massive feat of scholarship was accomplished without any note cards. All that knowledge was stored in his mind.

2. Once, but only once: When I was at JTS, a friend suggested we take the subway up to Yeshiva University to hear one of Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik's public lectures. There must have been more than 200 people there, in a tightly packed room. I, an early-on student, and not very adept at Talmud, did not understand a word, particularly he new and brilliant ideas he brought to the text he was explaining, but it was clear that the most advanced students in the audience were awed by his staggering insights. As is well known, anyone in the modern orthodox movement refer to Rabbi Soloveitchik as "The Rav" meaning "*The* [ultimate] Rabbi/teacher".

3. A humorous line about the Giants: At various times, all over Jerusalem billboards announce lectures being given on any one of a number of scholarly Jewish topics. Many of them list the speaker as "HaRav HaGadol – The Rabbi/Teacher, the Great". Some of them actually may have just received their PhD's or their rabbinic ordination. Usually, when people refer to Torah Giants, they say, with a slight Yiddish accent on the first syllable, "A Gadol." So I once asked if there are so many "Gedolim" around giving lectures, how do you differentiate between them and the ones I am writing about. A friend suggested that a Halivni is a "BIG Gadol."

E. Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel, Zichrono Livracha, Theology and Rabbinic Thought: is known to everyone. There is no need to write of his reputation, though I read in his biography that he, scion of grand Chassidic families, was also known as an *illui* in Talmud, beside his far-reaching scholarship in the world of Chassidim. I took a course with him in the late 60's after he had finished the first volume of important Talmudic material. Professor Heschel died in 1972. He was, of course, well known in many other areas, particularly theology and his civil rights activities, and his teachings are very much in the consciousness of younger Jews and non-Jews nowadays. When I tell the ones in their 20's and 30's that "I studied with Heschel", I almost have the sense that they want to say, "May I touch you?" Such was, and is, Professor Heschel's stature.

F. Professor H.L. Ginsberg: While I seem to recall that I officially majored in Bible and Talmud at the Seminary, primary love in Jewish studies then, and to this day, remains Bible. I think my mind latched on to the nature of the Hebrew three-letter root and how, from such a small unit, mountains, castles, multi-colored tapestries could be made. Figuring out specific meanings in context was, as is, for me much like a detective picking up clues from everywhere

and anywhere and solving a mystery. The feeling I got was nothing like that when I studied romance or Germanic languages in high school. (Word building in German did, and does, virtually nothing for me, though I joke to my Scrabble-loving friends that the road to victory is laying down the word *Überlieferungsgeschichte* on the board, which is probably worth 572 points.) Nor, even though I had been a straight-A student in math, is there any comparison to solving a quadratic question or figuring out the relationship between sides and angles in an isosceles triangle. Geometry and algebra pale significantly to the wonders of the three-letter Hebrew root.

I had Bible many professors, but always spoken of with awe by students and his colleagues, was Professor Ginsberg, Zivhrono Livracha. Not the least of his accomplishments was laying the groundwork for deciphering the meaning of the 1929-discovered Ugaritic (Canaanite) texts. But no area of Bible scholarship was beyond him, and this vast knowledge was combined with an incredible “feel” for what the text was saying. The gist of his unsurpassed grasp of the words could be stated in the following way: He could hold a fluent conversation with Abraham, Moses, David, or Jeremiah, and, if necessary, even correct their grammar.” We spoke sometimes of his feats in Bible in legendary terms. I remember taking as many courses with him as I did with Professor Halivni.

G. Professor Moshe Held: After Professor Ginsberg, I think the greatest number of Bible courses I took was with Professor Moshe Held, Zichrono Livracha. Besides Bible courses, I also took two semesters of Ugaritic and a semester of Phoenician and Punic with him. To take up the analogy to detective work, it was Professor Held who was like Sherlock Holmes to me. How he could look at a Biblical Hebrew root and make it’s meaning come through to us, even though two thousand years and more of the language separated us as students in the 20th century! It was magic.

H. Elie Wiesel: When I was in my last or next-to-last year at the Seminary, I sat in on two or three of Professor Lieberman’s classes. I sat in the back row, next to Elie Wiesel. At one point, about six years after my first book of poems had been published, and just recently returned from Jerusalem with a good-sized packet of new ones, I asked if he would read them. I wanted him to tell me if it was worthwhile to continue writing. His encouragement back then, and to this day when I sent him my most recent book has been of crucial importance throughout my writing career. I have stayed in touch over the years, always referring to him as “Rebbi Eliezer”.

I am not placing Rebbi Eliezer in the same class as a Professor Lieberman or Halivni. Nor would he, though for 17 years after class, he would go to Professor Lieberman’s office for private Talmud study. From such an experience you could safely say his grasp of Talmudic material was very great. This was clearly demonstrated by his four annual lectures at New York’s 92nd Street Y. One talk was about a Talmudic figure, another on a Biblical personality, and a third was about a Chassidic Rebbi. The fourth was reading from some new book he was working on. The auditorium was filled with a few hundred people, including up front Professors Lieberman and Heschel and other most significant individuals in the world of Jewish scholarship.

That he is not in the same “category” of the others I am writing about, I think it is obvious why I have included him among The Giants.

I. Professor Emil Fackenheim: I first met Professor Fackenheim, Zichrono Livracha, considered by some the leading Jewish philosopher of his day, when I was visiting my friends Allan and Merle Gould in Toronto. I was looking out the window of their home when a man with a prophetic-looking beard rode up on a bicycle. The Goulds, long-time friends of the

philosopher, told me that this was “Facky” as they referred to him. When Professor Fackenheim and his wife Rose were on a trip, the children would stay with the Goulds, and they became like second parents to them. (In turn, the Gould children referred to him as “Uncle Emil”.)

I had met him several times in Toronto, and then when he moved to Jerusalem, I would go, often with friends, on Shabbat afternoon to spend hours with him as he held forth. For many years he had studied the Shoah from the standpoint of a philosophical mind, posing many questions and searching for answers that others had not dared to touch. He, himself, as a younger man in Germany had been imprisoned in Sachsenhausen for a terrifying period of time. Sitting with him on those occasions, you could readily sense how much and how deeply he was *thinking*. I had never had an experience like that before – or since.

II. What to make of all these experiences in the presence of a true genius: My conclusions, many taking shape as I was writing, roamed over many areas, none in any logical order.

A. What this wasn't: This was no mere nostalgic trip down memory lane for two reasons: (1) Encountering the Giants was not always a pleasant experience, though usually it was, and (2) I have by no means ceased my search for and contact with others in this category of human being. Neither was this meant as some psychological or anthropological study on “the nature of genius”. If it were, I could have begin with the Manhattan Project — that top secret gathering of physicists, J. Robert Oppenheimer, Niels Bohr, Enrico Fermi, and the others — gathered in New Mexico to develop the atomic bomb. Whatever an individual's personal opinion may be about The Bomb, this was surely one of the greatest group of physicists in one place in history. Furthermore, for the past 37 years I have been fortunate to have met many of The Giants in the field of Tikkun Olam, individuals, some true geniuses in world-repair — and continue to do so.

Nor was this a mere review of “The Awesomeness of Human Beings”, or “IQ at Its Greatest”. Nor even their enormous quantity of knowledge combined with their talent for insight and creativity with what they knew.

Nor was it a psychological craving to brush up against people who were the best of the best, as some do seeking autographs of great baseball players or movie actors. It wasn't at all like I had been in 48 states and for some reason just had to get to Idaho and Alaska, otherwise I would somehow not be a complete human being. And certainly not like a drug-addicted person going from high to high, needing ever more of the substance to reach the previous one. Now that I think of it, it was also not meant as a sign of arrogance, lording it over others who have not had these opportunities, generating jealousy on their part.

I am not even excited by the idea of superlatives. While I do find Olympic athletic achievements exciting, and I remember distinctly when Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile when I was nine years old, it is only that — exciting. Even on occasion awesome. My old friend Allan Gould deflates this idea when he speaks of a salad he has enjoyed as, “epic” or “one of the great salads of our generation”.

B. What this was: I have long been a non-fan of the intellect *per se* as the supreme criterion of a person's worth. During my high school and college years I had many opportunities to study with professors who were “second-tier brilliant”, beside The Giants I have described. Particularly in college, many of us — I among them — fall under the sway of this idea, astonished as we are by the vast knowledge of our professors. The truth of the matter is that these teachers ran the gamut of personality. Some were arrogant (and a few intentionally or unwittingly abusive of their students), poor classroom instructors, and considered teaching a

necessary burden to make a living so they could get on with their personal research. Others were, despite their incredible brilliance, humble, respected our opinions, patient with beginners even though they would have preferred to teach Advanced Talmud or Bible, caring enough that their students should share in the excitement of their chosen field of study, and most of all, kindly — even gracious — and caring for the student as a person. As instructors, they ranged from low-key (boring) to intense and inspirational. The atmosphere in some of their classrooms was relaxed and welcoming, and in others, we sat in fear, looking down at our books, hoping the teacher would not call on us. Some were admirable, and others were not. Several of them had their idiosyncrasies (haven't we all?), and some played them out in our presence to the hilt, more often than not it was not done with any malice toward the students.

From our standpoint, looking back, at times we were awed, humbled, scared, frustrated, and discouraged by the enormous gap between them and us. In fact, just recently I had the fleeting thought, “What’s the use of continuing to study one more chapter of Psalms or another page of Talmud? I’ll never know what they knew when they were 20, 15, even 10 years old.” This, even though when I was at the Seminary my old friend Rabbi Jonathan Porath and I read through the entire Bible. (Truth be told, he talks and reads at a very fast pace — 13 chapters and hour, The Book of Proverbs in a little over two and a third hours, Isaiah in 5 hours and four minutes, The Big One, Psalms in about 11½ hours.)

And looking back, I believe that when we were college-aged, we were much too young to have a perspective on how very much they knew and how to differentiate between The Giants and the second-tier professors. That came with age, experience, and further study of their subject matter.

Furthermore, my friend Arnie Draiman enlightened me, I think very insightfully, concerning the “gap” between my intellectual capabilities and theirs. I had mentioned to him that I simply could not imagine how The Giants memorized and retained so much material. Even taking into account the oft-mentioned term “photographic memory”. Somehow that didn't seem a fitting comparison since a every inch of a classic photograph must be examined with the utmost care. Arnie changed the term “memorized” to “absorbed”. In some fashion, obviously well beyond my knowledge of brain geography and electrical currents, the words on the page soak permanently into their minds, perhaps instantaneously, there to be recalled at will in any combination of parts needed at any given moment. How else account for this remarkable, nearly-incalculable amount of knowledge?

I would add that my interest in writing this topic was the sheer immensity of their knowledge. Whether or not they could put this knowledge into coherent form either in or in oral teaching is another topic for another time. One need only consider Dylan Thomas sweating over every word in a line, revising time and yet again. On the other end of the scale is blind John Milton, rising in the morning and reciting dozens of lines that he had composed in his mind to a scribe.

C. Privilege, good fortune, gift: Writing this piece brought to the forefront of my mind how fortunate I had been, and continue to be, to have known, to have known and know these people, and in several cases to study and have studied under them. It does not take much of a stretch to know that his most definitely spills over into other areas of my life, allowing me to appreciate so many other things as being something out of the ordinary, or — as much as I hate the overused word — “special”. I now can see so many, as it were, common things as important encounters and moments in my life. It could well be just a pleasant Shabbat meal with good friends, a walk by the seashore on a warm spring day, or the ability to take a lazy afternoon at a

ball game whether or not our team won. It doesn't have to be a most magnificent moonrise and moonset that I once witnessed on vacation on Maui to realize that these moments and opportunities are everywhere and available at any time. Indeed, this sense frequently transforms the Most apparently commonplace moments and happenings into once-in-a-lifetime event. There are more frequent occasions now that fit well into Professor Heschel's term "radical amazement".

I think Professor Arthur Green stated this most eloquently in his book These are the Words, A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life, in the chapter titled "Anavah" - Humility: *Anavah (humility)...is a quality of the heart. Its practice flows naturally from a constant awareness that we are "too small for" all the kindness and truth" (Genesis 32:11 that are given us every day. We are unworthy of the constantly renewed gift of life, not because we are particularly bad or sinful, but simply because the gift is so overwhelmingly great.*

Our response to this unearned gift and the many that accompany it should be to live simply and without pretense." (quoted with permission from the author.)

Privilege, gift — indeed, I have always been attracted to the Hebrew term describing a gifted teacher, "*BeChessed Elyon-By Divine Grace*". This directs the review of thinking about my relationship to the greats into a distinctly Jewish and theological realm.

D. Theology: Halachah-Jewish Law prescribes that, when you meet one of The Torah Giants, you should recite the following blessing, "Who has imparted wisdom to those who are in awe of You." It is one of those often-neglected or rarely-occasioned blessings. Somehow, we forget to say them — when seeing a rainbow, or hearing thunder, seeing lightning, awesome mountains, the Mediterranean Sea, or the place where Lot's wife turned to a pillar of salt, or tasting a food such as Israeli loquats for the first time (or even if an item is the first time in a year), or seeing the first blooming of trees in the springtime. It should be a matter of wonder and amazement that these teachers exist and are offered to us as a source of blessing.

E. Two additional derivatives from the experience of meeting The Giants: (1)

Despite being awe-struck by their enormous knowledge, and consequently to recognize the gap between them and us, it should not be a source of discouragement or envy in our own Torah study. This is not high school, comparing grades, who got an A and who got an A+. Competition and competitiveness are not part of this equation. For this understanding, we need to go back to theology as expressed in a Midrash (Exodus Rabbah, Deuteronomy 5:22): What you should understand is that when The Holy One gave the Torah to Israel, if The Holy One had given it with full divine force, they would not be able to survive (handle) the experience, as the verse states, "Let us not die, then, for this fearsome fire will consume us if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, we shall die." Rather God's voice came to them ...*according to every individual's ability* [to absorb the words]. When it comes to Divine gifts, we should rather become more greatly aware of our own, and not in jealous comparison to others. What the Midrash seems to tell us is that what we absorb of Torah is what we were *meant* to learn, and that's the way the Holy One wants it to be.

We are to study at our own pace and according to our own abilities if we are to understand that Torah is a *Torat Chaim*, a Torah of Life, enriching and guiding the student. I believe the most powerful statement of this lesson is found in the Talmud (Ketubot 17a): A funeral procession makes way for a wedding procession. This refers to a physical route where the two processions might meet, but in a later text (Semachot chapter 12), there is this interpretation: If one has to choose to go to a house of mourning or to a wedding, you should go to the wedding.

And, of course, we ought to study Torah however well we can because it is a Mitzvah.

(2) In the time of the Talmud, a student was expected to serve his teacher (*Shimmush Talmiday Chachamim*), beyond studying formally with that Rebbi. This included among many other things, even carrying his towel to the steam baths and leading with teacher with a torch through the dark. In our own day, I understand this to mean we are to instructed to contact those people who made such a difference in our lives — even those on the “third tier” or “fourth tier” of apparent influence — by e-mail, “love letters”, phone calls, and whenever possible personal visits. We are to tell them explicitly what and how very much they did for us. We should say, “I am who I am today because of what you did and who you are.” I think this may be the greatest lesson of all from those experiences I have had, and fortunately still have, and hopefully will continue to have, with The Giants.