



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Carl Levitt

Struggle

Everyone struggles, whether it's in Yeshiva or in "the real world". Different struggles take different forms, and everyone's struggle is different. For example, someone in Yeshiva may struggle whether to stay up really late on his laptop, while some one else (on a whole other level) may struggle whether to stay in the *Bet Midrash* an extra hour. In the real world, one may struggle to make enough time for his or her kids, or struggle to make a weekly *chevruta* (Have I made anyone guilty yet?). No matter what kind of struggles we face, we must all work through our struggles to be a better person and lead a better life.



I am learning Strive for Truth, in a *chevruta* with Ari Abramowitz, Josh Feigenbaum and Jon Roth. In vol. 2, Rav Dessler writes about the "נקודת בחירה", the point of free will, of choice. Rav Dessler proposes that there is a battle line between good and evil, and only on that line is there free will. The line is drawn based on upbringing, education and past choices. When we exercise our free will we are only working along certain drawn lines, and other than on this line we work on our conditioning. We may have some mixed feelings from our Yeshiva high school experiences, or by a lack of Jewish education in public schools. Personally I think that Orayta is moving our "point of choice" to a higher level.

In a different *chevruta* with my fellow Benny Rofeh, I am learning about the story of the 4 Rabbis that entered the *Pardes*, the "orchard" (the world of mysticism and esoteric studies), in Tractate *Chagiga*. After entering the *Pardes*, one dies; one goes insane; one "cuts down the plantings"; and one exits peacefully. The description of the "*Pardes*" is deliberately vague and is open to many interpretations. *Gemara* is interactive, and requires us to find the truths within it.

The *Gemara* proceeds to talk about "*Acher*", "the other one", who became a heretic. *Acher* became a heretic when he experiences a crisis that shakes him. One of the reasons stated for this, is that he saw an angel that was

permitted to count the merits of the Jewish people. *Acher* was troubled by the apparent 2 powers in heaven – God and an angel, an idea that is directly contrary to Judaism's view of *Hashem*. He then sees the angel whipped with 60 lashes of fire, whereupon a voice calls out, saying that everyone can return except *Acher*. He then returns to normal life, but doesn't follow any *Halacha*. *Acher* avoids dealing with his crisis of faith, and refuses to return to *halacha*, despite the urging of Rabbi Meir.

Acher should have gone to Orayta, because Orayta is a place of education. Rather than hide behind the shifting lines of choice, *Acher* should have listened to the education that was available to him and learn; instead he doesn't even struggle. As I learned from my friend Levi Morrow, even the struggle has an element of caring. *Acher*, instead of struggling and caring, just ignores all attempts to return to *Halacha*. Even if you are grappling with faith - it still shows that you care. Here at Orayta we grapple with many issues; but it's because we care.