

Move Toward the Light

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

There is a story I heard some time ago about a man named Rabbi Akiva, who lived in Palestine. He was considered an extremely good person and also a sage. He became the greatest scholar of his time (he lived in the second century) through his consistency. He attended school later in life, at age 40, and it was at this same age that he became a ba'al teshuba (a Jew who returned to traditional Judaism). Prior to that time, it is said he actually hated the Jewish sages.

Following the Bar Kochba rebellion against the Romans, the then rulers of Palestine, in about 82 A.D., it was ordered that Rabbi Akiva be executed publicly. When the day for Akiva's execution came, all of his students were in shock that such a great man could be executed. They could not believe that such a good man could be unfairly and wrongly executed. However, the Rabbi did not care who was responsible for the injustice against him, and he was very calm and content. He was not concerned with blaming anyone else for what had happened to him, and he chose not to be angry, fearful, or sad. He was being executed because he had violated the Roman decree of not teaching Torah in public. He had been warned but had disobeyed, because in his opinion Jews without Torah are like fish out of water--they will soon die. Several other sages had been executed for exactly the same reason prior to Rabbi Akiva's execution.

What is so powerful about this portion of the story is that most of us in this situation would be concerned about being a victim. Many of us are always looking for one reason or another to label ourselves a victim. Someone else is responsible for an injustice against us or whatever else may have happened to us. It seems we have never possibly brought misfortune upon ourselves. Even those of us who have done something wrong never feel as if punishment is deserved. A great many people out there spend their entire lives blaming others for the circumstances that they face.

As Rabbi Akiva was being executed, the students standing near him were very upset about the tragedy and injustice occurring before their eyes. They asked him how he could appear so serene while he was about to be burned to death. He answered them that it was because he previously wasn't sure if he would ever have had the chance to do a *Kiddish Hashem* (public sanctification of God's name) before he died, and now he had that opportunity--by saying the *Shema* (a common Jewish prayer) as he was dying. In reality, this would be the best moment of his life on earth.

When I first heard this story, I wondered to myself how this particular episode could be the best moment in his life. How could a man, about to be executed for a crime that should have never been classified as a crime in the first place, believe that what was about to happen to him was going to be the best moment in his life? What good can possibly come out of accusing and killing an innocent man?

The reason that I believe Rabbi Akiva approached this the way he did is that he had been given the opportunity to come face to face with evil. He chose to see the worst thing that could possibly happen to him as an opportunity to confront and to rise above evil. He chose to see this act against him as a service to God and an opportunity to resist becoming angry, blameful, and negative. Instead, he confronted his execution with calmness and conviction, choosing to be a force for good in the world.

One of the most damaging things we can do is leave our minds open to others' negative influences. When most of us come face to face with negative influences, thoughts, and ideas, we too turn negative. There is a lot of noise out there in the world, and most people become one with this noise instead of resisting it. For example, in facing an unjust execution, most ordinary men would be led kicking and screaming to their death. Here, however, Rabbi Akiva faced his execution with calmness and conviction, despite being wrongfully sentenced to death.

Life is about dealing with positively and negatively charged poles--light and darkness. Every situation and every emotion has its opposite, just as life itself has its opposite. We are continually facing either positive people and circumstances, or negative people and circumstances. We are facing the opportunity to move to the side of negativity or the opportunity to move to the side of positivity. Life is a struggle between bringing the light into our lives and bringing the darkness into our lives.

- When we see a child smile at us, it brings light into our lives.
- When we meet someone and have a connection with him or her, it brings light into our lives.
- When we get our dream job, it brings light into our lives.
- When we get a promotion, or a raise, it brings light into our lives.

The best moments in our lives are when we allow the light to overcome us, and the worst moments are when we allow the darkness to overcome us. Darkness is represented by many things:

- When someone attacks us, or accuses us unjustly of something, it brings darkness into our lives.
- When we are in a situation wherein we and/or others are gossiping about someone, it brings darkness into our lives.
- When we cheat, lie, or steal, it brings darkness into our lives.
- When we try to hurt others, it brings darkness into our lives.

The way you think on a day-to-day basis, the people you associate with, the places you go, the things you do, what you read, what you watch on television, and the things you say are all an expression of either darkness or light, the positive or the negative.

What does any of this have to do with your career and life? I believe that what I have described above is among the most powerful of lessons that you can ever learn. When you are overcome by *the light*, the light cannot help but be part of who you are, a part of your entire world. The more time you spend around the light and what is positive, the more your life is likely to

be positive as well. If you spend all of your time hanging around drug dealers, it would probably be very difficult for you to remain part of the light. Similarly, if you spend all of your time hanging out in a bar in a bad neighborhood with a bunch of drunks and strippers, it would also be very difficult for you to remain part of the light.

The light is everything that is positive and good in the world. The power of the light is something that transforms all those who are around it. You should do everything within your power to remain connected to the light. The more you are around the light, the more you become like the light. Your goal should be to become like the light and maintain contact with what is good, positive, happy, spiritual, and uplifting. Similarly, you should be doing everything within your power to avoid darkness.

- You can move toward the light by--rather than looking for what is wrong, looking for what is right about your life and the people in it.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than trying to get revenge, offering forgiveness.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than worrying, taking charge of your situation.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than fearing something, becoming courageous.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than associating with bad people, associating with good people.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than raising your voice and getting angry, approaching the situation calmly and in a friendly manner.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than talking bad about others, refusing to participate in such discussions.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than complaining about your life and the people in it, appreciating all of it.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than doing something destructive, doing something constructive.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than not working and being unproductive, working and being productive.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than being a victim, deciding to be the one in control.
- You can move toward the light by--rather than taking from others, giving to others.

The best piece of career advice I can give you is to do everything within your power to always move toward the light--and never away from it. The more you truly live going toward the light, the happier, more fulfilled, and better off you will be. The more you are going away from the light, the more pain and suffering you will encounter in your life.

THE LESSON

Life is all about the opposite extremes of light and darkness, and your likelihood of success directly correlates to the time you spend focused on the light and the positive. Every situation and emotion has its corresponding opposite. Do everything in your power to stay connected to the light, positive side of life, the more you do so, the more you become like the light. Maintain contact with the things that are good, positive, and uplifting in your life, and do everything in your power to avoid the dark.

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