

this story was a tradition in their family, heralding back to *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, primary disciple of the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*. Apparently, the *Rebbetzin* of the *Gaon* would go soliciting for the poor, together with another woman. On a daily basis, they would walk all over the cobblestone streets of Vilna, knocking on doors, asking for whatever charity they could receive in order to ease the plight of the city's poor. These two holy women were very close friends, and they made up with one another that whoever left this world first would appear to the other one and relate about her experience in the *Olam HaEmes, World of Truth*.

The *Rebbetzin's* friend was summoned first to her rightful reward. Understandably, the *Rebbetzin* waited longingly to hear how her good friend was faring in *Olam Habba*. It took a while, but she appeared to her, saying that she was not permitted to reveal anything about her experience in Heaven. Since she had given her word, however, and in Heaven a word is also respected, she was permitted to reveal one thing.

The *Rebbetzin* was waiting with bated breath to hear what her friend had to say. "Do you remember the time (a while ago) that we visited the home of a certain woman, for the purpose of soliciting her for a charitable endeavor? Unfortunately, she was not home at the time. We left the home and began to walk down the street, when we saw her walking across the street. You raised your hand and pointed with your finger to show that she was walking on the opposite side of the street. We then both crossed the street and spoke with her.

The woman was quite generous in her contribution toward our cause. Concerning the actual donation, we both received Heavenly credit for the steps that we took to go to her house and when we continued along the street: all of this is shared equally by both of us. The fact that you raised your hand, however, and pointed with your finger in her direction – that, too, is recorded in Heaven to your individual merit!"

The lesson is clear: Nothing – absolutely nothing – is overlooked by Heaven. Every action, every endeavor, every bit of labor, travail, pain – it is all recorded in our behalf. Hashem takes everything into consideration. No one receives one iota of punishment more than he deserves. Indeed, as *Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl*, observes, Hashem delayed the *Mabul*, Flood, which was to destroy the entire world humanity for seven days, out of respect for Mesushelach, so that the seven days of mourning could be properly observed. The greatest tragedy in the history of mankind was held up, so that Mesushelach could receive his due honor. In other words, in factoring the decision concerning the collective punishment for the whole world, Hashem considered the honor of one person.

I do not think many of us are prepared to declare our gratitude to Hashem for the many *yesurim*, troubles/pain, that we suffer (although we should), but, if we would think about it, our *yesurim* are rarely isolated cases. They usually arrive in tandem with honors, rewards,

nachas. This prevents the honor from going to our heads or makes sure that the honor comes to us in a "balanced" manner. Honor is a good thing, but, if we only receive honor, it will not be good for long.

Va'ani Tefillah

וּגְאֵלוֹ מְהֵרָה לְמַעַן שְׂמֹךְ שְׁמֵחָךְ. – *U'ge'aleinu meheirah l'maan Shemecha. And redeem us speedily for the sake of Your Name.*

The *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, derives from the *lashon*, text, an important principle concerning the manner that we should pray, and how we should present our request for the end of our bitter exile, for the Final Redemption. Several times a day we reiterate our request for the Final Redemption. Do we beg? Do we plead? Do we beseech?

The *Chafetz Chaim* teaches that the "pleading" approach is insufficient. We must demand! We must say to Hashem – *Shoin genuck*, "It is enough!" Just as a hired worker has the right to demand his wages, so should we. The law states that, if the hired worker does not demand his wages at the end of the day, the employer is not obliged to pay him at the proper time: within the day following his completion of the task for which he was hired. Likewise, we must demand our Redemption, for, if we fail to insist on it, the problem will not have a sense of urgency in the Heavenly realm. In other words, if we do not seem to care, if it is not presented as our overriding top priority, Heaven will not have a compelling interest in executing our request.

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In memory of Mr. David Salamon



Parashas Bamidbar

תשע"ז

פרשת במדבר

וידבר ד' אל משה במדבר סיני

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)

The Torah was given to us in the *Midbar*, Wilderness – by design: *Mah midbar hefker, af divrei Torah miskaymim b'mi she'mafkir atzmo*, "Just as the Wilderness is ownerless, likewise, the words of Torah endure only in he who is *mafkir*, renders himself ownerless (abrogates himself, divests himself of himself; I am nothing!)." When a person feels himself to be insignificant, then that with which he comes in contact has greater value than himself. Thus, he values and respects it. Unless one values Torah, it will do nothing for him. One can own the most expensive piece of jewelry, but, if he does not appreciate its value, it will do nothing for him.

Torah is like that. Many people study Torah; yet, for some, it is nothing more than mental gymnastics. These people may appreciate the intellectual challenge presented by the Torah. If they do not acknowledge that they are learning *Toras Hashem*, the Divinely authored Torah which was given to *Klal Yisrael* by the Almighty Himself, however, then Torah has no effect on them. They do not appreciate its value. The Jew of old would refer to the Torah as the *Heilige* Torah, Holy Torah; he never forgot Who its Author was and Who gave it to his forebears.

Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, quotes an illuminating exposition from the *Izbitzer Rebbe, zl*, which underscores this idea. *Chazal (Meseches Nedarim)* quote a *pasuk* from *Yirmiyahu* in which the *Navi* says that the *churban*, destruction, of the *Bais Hamikdash* happened because *azvu Torasi*, "they abandoned My Torah." Abandoning the Torah is a strong term. It is not as bad as "rejection," but it indicates a sense of neglect. In other words, they could very well have been learning, but Torah did not constitute their lives. They did not reject the Torah; they neglected to care for (and) about it.

In order to understand this concept, we quote the *Izbitzer*, who cites the *Hagahos Ashri* in his commentary to the *Rosh, Meseches Bava Metzia*. The case in question concerns Reuven, who purchased a piece of metal, believing it was lead. He later sold this piece of metal, which he thought was lead, to Shimon, who paid the fair market price for a piece of lead. Shimon later discovered that, in fact, the piece of "lead" was actually a piece of silver, thus worth much more than what he had paid for it. Word spread, and Reuven heard that he had undercharged Shimon for the piece of metal. He now sought the fair market price for silver – not lead.

The *Hagahos Ashri* rules that Shimon paid the correct price for the piece of metal, since Reuven, being

unaware of the true value of his piece of metal, did not really own the "silver," but rather, the "lead." The bottom line is: If one does not really know the value of an object, he does not really own it. Thus, Reuven owned a piece of lead – which he sold, and for which he was reimbursed. The fact that he was unaware of its true value is held against him.

The *Izbitzer* applies this reasoning towards explaining *Chazal's* statement concerning the abandonment of the Torah. People may think that they have the Torah; they even learn the Torah, and it may even be in their possession, but, as long as they do not appreciate the Torah's intrinsic value – what it does for them, due to its Author; how it changes their lives – they do not have the Torah! Life without Torah is a façade. It is not true living. All one has to do is look around himself and ask: Are these people really living? I agree that someone who has not lived a Torah life might take umbrage with this statement. My response: Try living a Torah life and then ask the question. Better yet: Once you have lived a Torah life, ask yourself how you have survived until this point.

I would like to take this idea one step further. Life without Torah is not living; this is the position we have taken. This applies to Jews – only. Let me explain. In the *Pesach Haggadah*, we recite the *Dayeinu* song which details fifteen wonderful gifts that Hashem granted us – each one more compelling than the previous one. Thus, we say, "Had Hashem only brought us to *Har Sinai*, and not given us the Torah – *Dayeinu*. That would have been sufficient." How can we make such a statement? What purpose is served in coming to *Har Sinai* if we had not received the Torah? What would we be without the Torah?

Horav Levi Yitzchak Berditchiver, zl, suggests a deeper meaning to this statement. When *Klal Yisrael* arrived at *Har Sinai*, they began preparing for the big day. Every Jew sincerely and profoundly opened himself to Hashem and His Torah in such a manner that he was able to discover that the Torah, which represents the *ratzon*, will, of Hashem, was already implanted within his heart and mind. The *Berditchiver* explains that each and every Jew contains the Torah within himself/herself. The problem is that we are often so preoccupied with life's superficialities that we are prevented (often we prevent ourselves) from turning inward and discovering what is truly meaningful and right. In other words, every Jew is "programmed" with the Torah within him. It was necessary for us to go to *Sinai* in order to cast aside all external impediments, all materialism, so that we could hear the *dvar*, word, of Hashem; unimpeded, unembellished, with complete clarity. This experience was sufficient to evoke within us the notion that a predisposition towards – and inner awareness of – G-d's Will existed within us, even before we experienced the

Revelation. Thus, had we only been brought to *Har Sinai*, we would have been Torah-ready, because, after all, it was already within us.

Having said this, we realize that, for a Jew, Torah observance is natural. It is part of his DNA, an essential component of his psyche. When we renege the Torah, we are actually fighting against ourselves. This, I believe, is the reason that one who is unobservant is actually miserable. He is acting out of character, out of balance with himself.

Perhaps this is why *Shavuos*, unlike the other Festivals, does not have a clearly defined date for its celebration. The Torah simply designated the fiftieth day after *Pesach* to be *Shavuos*. One would think that the day upon which we received the Torah, the day that was the culmination of the liberation from Egypt, would be delineated by its date – just like the other *Moadim*, Festivals. Now, however, we have a different take on *Kabbolas HaTorah*, the receiving of the Torah. The Torah is actually part of each of us. We discovered this at *Har Sinai* when Hashem gave us the Torah.

We might suggest another reason for the elusive date. I think the Torah is playing down the actual Revelation, since it was the precursor for something even greater: daily Torah study and living. I came across a beautiful analogy. A young man and woman married. Their marriage was the culmination of an “engaging” engagement, where from day one, the wedding, which was to be the pinnacle of their lives, was awaited and prepared for with bated breath. Their wedding was to be the greatest wedding that was ever held. Both sets of parents were people of means, and neither couple was prepared to hold back material outlay for the big day. For months, they obsessed in planning for the wedding. Day and night were devoted to addressing every detail. They chose a hall which was large and elegant. They selected the finest caterer. Decorations had no spending limit; neither did the photographer. Likewise, there was no ceiling to how much they would spend for an orchestra. Every detail, every innovation, indeed, everything and anything that would enhance their children’s special day was given their priority. Even the guest list was peppered with distinguished personages from all over the country. To them, this was to be the epic event of their lives.

The day for which they had all been waiting had arrived, and, true to their dreams and planning, no disappointments happened. Everything went off without incident. It was truly the nicest, finest, most inspiring and meaningful wedding that anyone had ever attended. From the hall to the caterer; the food and music; the pictures and guests; the dancing and singing were all the epitome of perfection. Everyone left the hall upbeat, happy to have had the opportunity to share in such a seminal experience – one which would remain etched in their minds for a long time. This was truly an event to remember.

Then something very strange happened. Once the very last guest had left, the respective parents gave a sigh of relief. They expressed their profound gratitude to Hashem for allowing everything to go off without any hindrance, for granting them the opportunity to have the wedding of their dreams for their children. Months of tension had culminated in unabashed joy. They looked around toward the door and saw the *chossan*, groom, standing there with his suitcase, and, at the other door, was the *kallah*, bride, with her suitcase, each about to leave – to go their separate ways!

Their parents looked at them in shock. The rabbi who had performed the ceremony went over and asked, “Exactly what are you doing? Where are you going?”

They explained that they had successfully achieved their dream, the wedding for which they had both aspired. Now, it was time to go back to their individual, regular lives feeling satisfied and content! The rabbi explained to them that what they were saying was ridiculous. The wedding is only a preparation, the precursor to married life. A *chossan/kallah* unite to become husband and wife with the goal to build a *bayis ne’eman b’Yisrael*, a true Jewish home. Once the wedding is over, they begin their new life. It is no longer business as usual. The wedding ushers in a new life.

Har Sinai was *Klal Yisrael’s* wedding, at which we received the Torah. We could no longer go back to business as usual. The purpose of receiving the Torah is not to have it stored in a museum. We must learn it constantly. It is our life, without which we are unable to survive. The Revelation was a seminal experience – but it was only the beginning. It is our daily learning that carries the most significance. Thus, there is no date for *Shavuos*. “Married” life is not over at the wedding. That is when it begins!

ואלה הולדות אהרן ומשה... נדב ואביהו אלעזר ואיהמר

These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe... Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Isamar. (3:2)

Interestingly, the *pasuk* indicates that it will detail the offspring of Aharon and Moshe, but only mentions the sons of Aharon *HaKohen*. *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 19b) infer from this *pasuk* (which mentions the offspring of Aharon) that one who teaches Torah to someone else’s children is considered as if he had fathered him. Moshe *Rabbeinu* taught Torah to his brother Aharon’s sons and, as a result, he was regarded to be their spiritual father. Moshe guided Aharon’s sons by example and by deed. His mentoring gave life to them in a manner similar to that of their biological father. Teaching Torah to someone is tantamount to giving them life.

Marahal m’Prague questions this. Was Moshe’s teaching exclusive to Aharon’s sons? He taught everyone. The entire *Klal Yisrael* were his students – and thus, his offspring. Why did he single out Aharon’s sons? He explains that, while Moshe certainly taught all of the *Klal Yisrael*, he apparently expended greater effort in teaching Aharon’s sons. Thus, they are considered his spiritual offspring. These words provide us with a powerful lesson. In order to acquire one’s students to the point that they are considered his children, he must go that extra mile, exert greater effort, spend more time. A *rebbe* that punches the clock might succeed in transmitting knowledge. In order to transform his students into his children, he must act like a father. Parents do not punch a clock. They never give up. They never slow down. They are parents.

I think we might add some clarity to *Chazal’s* statement. They say *Kol ha’melamed es ben chaveiro Torah*, “He who teaches Torah to his friend’s son.” Why add *ben chaveiro* – friend’s son – and, if the student does not happen to be the son of my friend, does that decrease his status in my eyes? Will I be less successful in transmitting the lesson to him?

I think *Chazal* are teaching us an important principle concerning *Torah chinuch*: Every student must be viewed as *ben chaveiro*, my friend’s son. The *masirus*,

devotion, that one manifests for his student should be similar to that which he manifests towards a good friend’s son. There must be a relationship, care, love. Cold, dispassionate teaching does not transform students into children. It begins with the *rebbe* and grows commensurate with how much of himself he contributes to the relationship. In order for a student to become a son, the *rebbe* must love and teach as a father. This attitude is manifest in the words, *ben chaveiro*. Every student should be considered to be a *ben chaveiro*. Every Jewish child should have equal *protectzia* when it comes to Jewish education.

הקרב את מטף לוי והעמדת אתו לפני אהרן הכהן ושרתו אתו
Bring near the tribe of Levi and have it stand before Aharon HaKohen, and they shall serve him. (3:6)

Shevet Levi was consecrated to a life of service, *avodas ha’kodesh*, holy service, both in the Sanctuary and as Torah teachers. The Levi set the standard for Jews to acknowledge and put to action: one does not live solely for himself. We are here to live a life of service – to Hashem and to the Jewish community. Concerning this *pasuk* (*Hakreiv es mateh Levi*), the *Midrash* quotes the *pasuk* in *Sefer Tehillim* (92:13): *Tzaddik katamar yifrach k’erez ba’levanon yisgeh*, “A righteous man will flourish like a date palm, like a cedar in the Lebanon he will grow tall.” The *Baal Shem Tov Hakadosh* says: there are two types of *tzaddikim*: one is compared to a date palm; the other to a tall cedar.

Every waking moment of one type of *tzaddik* is taken up with serving Hashem. Regrettably, he is so involved with his personal growth that he is unable to “spread the wealth,” to reach out and inspire others. He is likened to the tall cedar tree, strong and erect, but sadly non-fruit bearing. A *tzaddik* whose righteousness does not produce fruit, who does not inspire those around him, is still a *tzaddik*, and, by virtue of his presence in a community, he elevates its spiritual level. Nonetheless, he does not directly influence other Jews who are in dire need of his inspiration.

The second type of *tzaddik* is compared to a date palm, which flourishes and provides shade and luscious fruit. The *tamar* blooms and flourishes, appellations which serve the environment, while the cedar grows tall, implying its self-serve nature.

I would like to address another aspect of the *tamar*. *Horav Shimshon Pincus*, *zl*, observes a unique quality which is endemic only to the date palm: the height it achieves above ground coincides with the depth of its roots! In other words, the roots of a palm tree that is twenty feet high, are commensurately twenty feet deep into the ground. *Rav Shimshon* suggests that this characteristic is likewise delineated in the unique difference between men and women with regard to their individual achievements and greatness.

Man’s greatness is achieved “above ground,” externally manifesting his personality and erudition. Women are just as great, only they have mastered the built-in proclivity toward *tznius*, privacy/modesty. They do not require the public forum as do men. Thus, I think when we see a great, (spiritually) tall, *tzaddik*, we can be certain that there is an equally great and tall *tzadeikes*, righteous wife, who serves as his foundation, the roots that nurture and give him the strength and ability to maintain his height.

With this idea in mind, we might add to the

distinction between *tamar* and *erez*: their wives, their foundation, rooted deep in the ground. It is most difficult to reach out, to challenge the strong winds of anti-Torah challenges that prevail. To help others, one must be firmly entrenched in his spiritual ground. He requires the constant support and encouragement of an *eizer k’negdo*, the helpmate who accompanies him throughout his life’s journey. Otherwise, he might just grow tall – but there is always the danger that without a rock-solid, deep foundation, the tree/he could topple in a strong wind.

ביום הכותי כל בכור בארץ מצרים הקדשתי לי כל בכור בישראל
On the day I struck down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified every firstborn in Yisrael for Myself. (3:13)

The Torah teaches that, on that fateful *Pesach* night when the Egyptian firstborn were slain by Hashem, the Jewish firstborn were consecrated to Hashem, to serve Him in the Temple. Should Jewish firstborns be singled out for a life of consecrated service just because their Egyptian counterparts were designated for death? The *Alter*, *zl*, *m’Slabodka*, *Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel*, explains that the night of *makkas bechoros* – when the Egyptian firstborn died during the tenth plague to strike Egypt – it was a night of severe anxiety and tension for the Jewish firstborn. Wherever they went, they saw the bodies of Egyptian firstborns either dead or dying. Can one imagine the screams that were heard throughout the land? These screams stuck a personal note in the hearts and minds of the Jewish firstborn. “There, if not for the grace of G-d – go I” must have coursed through their minds. The image, pain, screams, anxiety, remained with the Jewish firstborn all of that night until the light of day, when all was quiet and it was clear that the Jewish firstborn had been spared. All of this anxiety was taken into account and added to the merits of *b’chorei Yisrael*, the Jewish firstborn.

One pressing question, however, must be addressed. Why were the *bechorim* anxious? Had not Hashem promised them that nary a hair on their heads would be touched; that they would not be harmed in any way? Why were they so filled with anxiety? Was Hashem’s assurance insufficient? Human nature hears screams; human nature knows firstborn are dying: human nature naturally reacts negatively, regardless of its awareness that it will not happen to them. Human beings believe and have complete faith, but, when the quiet night is pierced with screams of pain and death, human beings become anxious.

Hashem took all of this into account and rewarded the firstborn with consecrated status. The Almighty wants nothing but good to be experienced by His creations. Thus, when the balance of good is impugned due to troubles, then the stakes must be altered and the human being who suffered will be reimbursed for his trouble. No pain goes unrequited.

It is all part of a system of balances. The life of the fellow who must work very hard for a livelihood will be balanced in other ways, while the one for whom money is not a problem might have to “pay” for this convenience somehow.

The *Brisker Rav*, *zl*, quoted a well-known story, which he heard from his father. His father emphasized that