

The Torah that Moshe commanded to us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov. (33:4)

The Torah does not belong to a select few, to a spiritual elite who acknowledge, appreciate and value everything that it has to offer. The Torah belongs to *Kehillas Yaakov*, the entire congregation of Yaakov. All Jews have a portion in this inheritance. What are we doing about it? The story is told that one *Simchas Torah*, the venerable sage, founder of the *mussar*, ethical/character refinement, movement, **Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl**, was engrossed in lively dancing with his students. The mood was electrifying. Suddenly, for what seemed to be no reason, *Rav* Yisrael stopped dancing, and his mood turned pensive and somber. This transformation in their revered *rebbe* brought his students to extreme incredulity. One of them, not given to being shy, came forward and asked *Rav* Yisrael what was wrong.

Rav Yisrael replied, "As I was dancing with the Torah, I realized that in this town alone there are many Jewish boys who will not go to a Torah school. They have no chance of tasting its sweetness, of dancing with the Torah as we do. They neither have a clue that today is *Simchas Torah*, nor do they have any idea what this means. How can we rejoice with the Torah while being fully aware that there are so many Jews who are deprived of their rightful heritage?"

Rav Yisrael's anguish was expressed over a century ago. Since then the situation has far from improved. He was witnessing the early effects of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment movement, and the way it tore young people away from their Jewish roots, creating animosity between their generation and that of their parents and grandparents. What should we say when we see the products of generations of Jews severed from a life of Torah, alienated from their heritage, who have embraced the gentile way of life with its perversions and moral/spiritual bankruptcy? Yet, we tout the success of the Torah world, which is truly mind-boggling. Veritably, we have come so far. Just to have witnessed the recent *Siyum HaShas* is testament to the incredible growth of Torah. What does one say, however, to a father who has a sick child, a child that, *lo aleinu*, is hovering between life and death? Do we tell him to forget about this one, because, after all, look how well the others are? Certainly, such a statement would be not only insensitive – it would be ludicrous. Well, what do we say to our Father in Heaven Above: "There were almost 100,000 of your children at the *Siyum HaShas*." What about the majority of His children who have no idea what a *Talmud* is – let alone a *Siyum HaShas*. How can we not empathize with the *Ribono Shel Olam* when so many of His children have deviated – and in many cases not due to their own fault – from the rich path of Torah?

So, as we read these words on *Simchas Torah*, let us think about Our Father in Heaven and make every attempt to see to it that next year more of His children will experience the meaning of *v'chayei olam nota b'socheinu*.