

"Moshe commanded us the Torah, an inheritance of the community of Yaakov." (33:4)

This *pasuk*, which is so prominent in Jewish life, is the first *pasuk* which a Jew utters upon rising in the morning and also the first *pasuk* we teach to our children. Its simplicity is noteworthy; its message is all encompassing. The word *varun* is linked with the verb *arh*, to inherit. This implies that *Torah* is our inheritance, a legacy which is bequeathed from generation to generation. From the first generation which stood at Har Sinai, who experienced the giving of the *Torah* through Divine Revelation, it is an inheritance. Each generation has the obligation to transmit the *Torah* to the ensuing generation and to uphold and maintain its precepts. Thus, the *Torah* is accurately described as *Klal Yisrael's* Heritage.

Chazal suggest another meaning to this word, "Do not read it *varun* - an inheritance, read it *varutn* - "betrothed." This reading teaches that the *Torah* should be perceived as betrothed to *Klal Yisrael*. It seems that *Chazal* add a new interpretation in order to communicate a distinct message regarding our relationship with the *Torah*.

Reb Yitzchak Bunim Z"l differentiates between "inheritance" and "betrothal" in regard to the individual's relationship to the *Torah*. One who receives an inheritance does not necessarily sense a feeling of attachment to it. A gift which one accrues by any means other than his own hard work does not necessarily propagate a strong attachment to it. As the popular dictum maintains, "easy come, easy go." Only after appropriate devotion to a given endeavor does one experience the intimacy of a relationship with the gift. As the *Talmud* in *Bava Metzia 38a* says, "A man would rather have one *kav* (measurement) of his own (production) than nine *kabim* of his friend's."

In this sense, the *Torah* is not an inheritance. If one is born into a pious and morally upstanding family of *Torah* scholars, he is not a priori assured of attaining similar heights in *Torah* erudition and moral piety. He is required to expend much effort on his own in order to merit such heights. He may be born with lofty attributes, a gifted mind and a natural aptitude for *Torah* study; under the guidance of his family and teachers, he will shine and develop into a brilliant *Torah* scholar. On the other hand, he may squander his inheritance and grow up morally corrupt, dissipating his talents and natural ability. Indeed, the *Talmud* in *Nedarim 81a* suggests that it is not unusual for the sons of *Torah* scholars not to carry on in their fathers' legacy, due to a lackadaisical attitude towards *Torah* study. By viewing the *Torah* as their personal inheritance, they may feel that they have no obligation to study it.

The *Torah* is not merely an inheritance, state *Chazal*; it represents a betrothed. Marriage demands

a lifelong commitment, an unwavering responsibility to one's mate. marriage is a metaphor for our commitment to the *Torah*: to maintain it with dignity, to study it and obey its precepts, and to be supportive of those whose very lives are dedicated to its scholarship. In marriage, the two partners must maintain a vibrant relationship founded in mutual respect and admiration. So, too, we are responsible to make sure that the *Torah* remains an indispensable and energetic force in our lives - and not be relegated to an archaic treatise.

We may suggest that the difference between "inheritance" and "betrothal" lies in one's attitude towards *Torah* study. IF one considers the *Torah* to be an inheritance, undoubtedly, one will be aware of his duty to carry on the legacy which has been transmitted to him. To study *Torah* exclusively, however, merely because it is one's heritage, without reflecting excitement and vitality, is to degrade the act. One's approach to *Torah* study can be likened to a *chasson* towards his *kallah*. Every time he speaks to his betrothed he feels ecstasy. He is prepared to do anything in order to please her. This same attitude must be inherent in our *Torah* study and *mitzvah* performance. As we become more proficient in the vast storehouse of *Torah* knowledge, our admiration for the *Torah* will increase. In this way, we will realize the life sustaining powers of the *Torah*, and it will always be an intimate part of our spiritual well-being.