

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

This *pasuk*, which claims that the Torah is our *morashah*, heritage, seems to contradict Rabbi Yossi’s statement in *Pirkei Avos* 2:12, “And prepare yourself to study the Torah, for it does not come to you by inheritance.” Is it a *yerushah* – or not? *Horav Meir Lehmann, zl, Rav* of Mainz, Germany, (1850’s-1890) explains that indeed, the Torah is the heritage of the **community** of Yaakov – but not an inheritance of the **individual** Jew. The Torah belonging to the Jewish community-at-large will never be lost. There will always be men who will see to it that it is transmitted to the next generation – intact, unaltered, in its pristine state. They will do this regardless of their own personal sacrifice – physical or material. The individual, however, must fight to obtain it and to maintain it.

Let us further this thought. Rabbi Yossi is teaching us that, regardless of family pedigree – even if one’s father, grandfather and all of his ancestors have possessed the greatest storehouses of knowledge and infinite wisdom – one must himself make the effort and exert toil to acquire the Torah on his own. His pedigree will not help him. He must act on his own. Torah-study has been compared to a war. As one prepares himself for war, so, too, should he gird himself in preparation for the emotionally-charged, difficult battle he must wage while learning Torah. This is due to “enemies” who lay what seem to be insurmountable obstacles in our path.

*Rav Lehmann* aptly describes these obstacles. As a young child, growing up in a home with loving parents, the first issue that arises is: “Should my child attend religious studies classes? What use will it be to him in the future? Is it not more important that he acquire knowledge that will enable him to earn a living later in life?” We may assume that this issue is one with which only the non-observant grapple – or is it? Even today, in a country in which religious freedom reigns, and the Jew is accepted and often admired, issues still arise concerning the value and significance of a Torah education. For some, the issue materializes at the post-high school level; for others, it occurs earlier, post-elementary. A minority even exists who views a Torah education as insubstantial and purposeless. Thus, they are prepared to ruin their children’s future by robbing them of their greatest treasure, their Torah heritage.

If the child is fortunate enough to have intelligent parents who are eager for him to study Torah, the struggle can begin later, as he matures. He will see other children devoting their leisure time to “fun” pursuits – such as sports, music, arts – while he is “stuck” devoting all of his time to difficult and serious study. He may have to contend with his personal lack of ability. To succeed in Torah-study demands unflinching determination and untiring toil in order to overcome insufficient talent and to strengthen and temper the power of the mind. On the other hand, the individual who has been blessed with better than average acuity will have greater expectations placed upon him. In other words, regardless of one’s starting point or his abilities, the climb is steep, gradual and difficult. However, when one reaches the summit, the feeling of success is unparalleled.

*Rav* Lehmann relates that in his community of Mainz, Germany, there were two brothers: the elder was Loeb, and the younger was Nathan. Nathan was blessed with a sharp mind. As a gifted child, he made splendid progress in his studies. His older brother, Loeb, lagged behind and found the studies extremely difficult. One day, their mother overheard her seven-year-old son's prayer, entreating the Almighty, "All-Merciful G-d, please give me the strength and courage to persevere in my learning, even if I cannot be as smart as Nathan!" From that day on, she noticed her older son's progress begin to change. His understanding of the subject matter came rapidly, and his depth was much more profound. Both brothers became distinguished rabbinic leaders: *Rav* Loeb Ellinger became Chief Rabbi of Mainz; and his brother, *Rav* Nathan, the Chief Rabbi of Bingen.

As one ages, the challenges to his Torah-learning seldom decrease. He must struggle to earn a livelihood, while increased social responsibilities take their toll on his time. The individual whose vocation allows for more devotion to Torah study rarely uses it as such. He always has excuses. Last, in order for the Torah to be distilled within the individual, he must become a vessel of such pristine nature that Torah will reside within him. This is why Rabbi Yossi underscores the need for each and every individual to work on acquiring Torah for himself. If he does not do it – no one else will.

*Rav* Lehmann cites another *Chazal* which appears to contrast Rabbi Yossi's dictum. *Va'ani zos Brisi osam*, "As for Me, this is My covenant with them, said Hashem, My spirit which is upon you and My words that I have placed in your mouth, will not be withdrawn from your mouth nor from the mouth of your offspring nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring, said Hashem, from now and forever" (*Yeshayahu* 59:21). In the *Talmud Bava Metzia* 85a, *Chazal* cite this *pasuk* and declare, "From then onward, the Torah always returns to the same inn." Once the Torah has been the property of a family for three generations, it will belong to it for all eternity.

What a wonderful and heartening feeling. If we have retained the Torah in our family for three generations, we have acquired it. Yet, Rabbi Yossi says one must acquire Torah **himself** because it is not his inheritance. How do we understand this? Furthermore, we see more than one family in which the Torah has been a welcome "member" and "participant" for three generations, and now, alas, it is not to be found in the home of the fourth generation. What has happened?

*Rav* Lehmann applies a simple parable to give us a practical and timely explanation – one which we should all consider: A man visits a certain town from time to time and always lodges in the same hotel. On one such visit, however, the innkeeper tells him that regrettably, the hotel is fully booked. There is no room for him. What should he do? What can he do? He must look for another inn. The Torah is no different. It always stays in the same inn. For generations, the family has been host to the Torah, providing it with a warm welcome. The Torah seeks to return to its accustomed place, but, alas, there is no room. Ostensibly, its present host no longer wants to receive it. The house of the great-grandson of the scholar who first hosted the Torah is filled with "other" guests, so that the Torah cannot stay there.

The analogy is quite clear: Torah does not go where it does not fit in. A house replete with items antithetical to Torah dictate, which undermine the very principles explicated by the Torah, is a house in which Torah is not welcome. It is as simple as that. If the Torah is not allowed past the front door, one can hardly blame the fact that Torah has no place in his life on anyone – but himself.