

From His right hand He presented a fiery Torah to them. (33:2)

Rashi explains that Hashem presented the *Torah* to *Klal Yisrael* accompanied by a display of fire and lightning. The *Sifri* infers from this *pasuk* that *Torah* is analogous to fire. The nature of fire is such that if a man draws too close to it, he will be burnt. If he moves too far away, he will be cold. Similarly, a man can warm himself against the fire which emanates from *talmidei chachamim*. We live in a cold, uncaring world. To exist, we need the warmth of the *Torah* as our spiritual leaders teach it to us. In order to warm oneself, one must be careful not to stand too close, but to permit the warmth to reach out and encompass him. If, in a careless fit of misplaced zeal, we grab hold of a glowing ember, we might be seriously burnt.

The parallel is clear and simple. One must maintain a respectful distance from our *Torah* leaders. We are taught what to do, what is right and what is wrong. Our task is to stand at a distance and bask in the warm glow of their *Torah*. Only the fool would take the timeless teachings, the sacred, illuminating words of the *Torah* and treat them as something mundane and ordinary. Some individuals attempt to denigrate *Chazal*, lowering them to their own level. These people audaciously attempt to delve into *Chazal's* thoughts and intentions, suggesting that *Chazal* were responding to the economic pressures of the day. They may render arbitrary interpretations of the *Torah* solely to fit their own interests. We have come to expect this behavior from those so-called Bible scholars and other alienated intellectuals who have approached the source of Rabbinic wisdom from "up close." They make unfounded assumptions and draw baseless conclusions about our *Torah* luminaries, their motivations, historic needs, and personal circumstances. They do this to draw inferences for contemporary times, so that they can continue distorting the *Torah* and the way of life it expounds.

In the *Talmud Shabbos 118a*, *Chazal* say, "If the early sages were angels then we are men; but if the early sages were men, then we are donkeys--and not even intelligent donkeys." **Reb Yitzchak Bunim, zl**, explains that we must have enough common sense to revere our *Chazal* and view them in the proper perspective as angelic, Divine teachers, transmitting the word of Hashem in its entirety, unembellished and without assimilating personal opinions. If we are able to do so, we will cherish their word, striving to uphold and live up to them. As a result of such an attitude, we will be men, human beings, endowed with dignity, refinement, decency and *menschlichkeit*. Our lives will then have meaning and value.

If we view our great *Torah* leaders as ordinary people who had no control over their emotions, who have followed their every whim and fancy, then we obviously are not obliged to heed their teaching as representing Divine dictate. If we have no leadership to respect and from whom to accept direction, we will soon be reduced to donkeys. We will function as animals: eating, sleeping, working and braying -- with nothing of Divine direction to enhance or give insight to our lives.

“van ubk vum vru,,” *“The Torah that Moshe commanded us.”* This *pasuk* is more than a historical perspective on the origin of *Torah*. It is the standard for the manner in which we should perceive and study *Torah*. It is transmitted from generation to generation by the “Moshes,” *Torah* leaders of each generation. They are the guardians of the *Torah* who see to it that it is transmitted in its pristine context as it was given to us at *Har Sinai*.