

And by all the strong hand and for all the awesome power that Moshe T performed before the eyes of all Yisrael. (34:12)

The Torah records every significant moment of Moshe Rabbeinu's life that impacted his nation for all time to come. His activities — whether in the area of leadership or social justice, his relationship with the Almighty, or his character traits — are all presented either overtly or in the context of a subtle lesson. If we were to sum up his life's endeavor and search for the crowning lesson — that action for which he is to be remembered for posterity — it would be found in the closing words of the Torah. The words that seemingly serve as our quintessential teacher's epitaph are: And by all the strong hand and for all the awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of Yisrael. Moshe is to be remembered for his yad chazakah, strong hand. What does this mean, and what message does it convey to us?

The Midrash at the end of the parsha cites a fascinating dialogue that took place between Moshe and Hashem. Moshe asked Hashem, "The Torah which I received from Your Right Hand, perhaps when I leave this world, it will be called by another name?" (a name attributing it to another individual). Hashem replied, "Heaven forbid! It will always be called with your name." Hence the pasuk, Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant (Malachi 3:22).

Horav Nissan Alpert, z.l., suggests that Chazal here underscore the overriding significance of limud haTorah, the absolute study of Torah. Veritably, we have 613 mitzvos and specific principles of belief, together with a host of exhortations concerning our interpersonal relationships and how we must act in every aspect of our daily lives. What is the briach ha'tichon, middle bar, that sustains and supports our lives? What is the most important aspect of Judaism? It is limud haTorah. Moshe was acutely aware that during his tenure as leader the focal point would be Torah study. What about after his death? What would be the agenda of his successors? Would the ensuing leadership underscore the primacy of other mitzvos and transform them into the cardinal principles of Judaism? Would they say that the most significant way to serve Hashem is through action, through endeavor, but not necessarily through Torah study? True, study is important — but not all-important.

Moshe feared that people would relegate those who spend their lives immersed in Torah study to a distant second place. Action! Doers! That is what Klal Yisrael needs — not “bank kvetchers,” bench warmers. They would not understand that Torah study is what maintains us. For forty years in the wilderness, they did nothing else but study Torah. Moshe taught them nothing else. They did not need anything else. In fact, the last mitzvah in the Torah, the one that he “squeezed in” shortly before his final farewell, was the mitzvah of writing a Sefer Torah. That was it: Torah, Torah — and more Torah! Everything else was secondary.

Now, as Moshe stood at the threshold of his grave, he asked Hashem, “Was it all for naught? Will Torah study be forgotten?” Hashem assured him that our people will never forget the significance of Torah study. It will always have primary status within the framework of Judaism.

This is the meaning of U'Ichlal ha'yad ha'chazakah, “and by all the strong hand.” Moshe accepted the Luchos representing the Torah in his two hands, seeing to it that the study of this Torah would be imbued into the hearts and minds of Klal Yisrael, so that it would be their yad ha'chazakah.

Our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, have exemplified this quality to the fullest. While many were gifted with exceptional minds, the common denominator has been their unparalleled and uncompromising love of Torah. Their diligence in studying Torah under the most brutal conditions has been the foundation of their greatness. Horav Yisrael Gustman, zl, one of the most brilliant Roshei Yeshivah of the past generation, was well known for his consummate love for Torah. During the Nazi destruction of Europe, Rav Gustman displayed his great love for the Torah that he so diligently studied. Rabbi Yechiel Spero in *Touched By A Story 2*, relates that when the Nazis invaded his village, Rav Gustman was forced to flee for his life. He ran deep into the forest on the outskirts of town. There, he was able to create a makeshift hideaway for himself and his family in a small alcove of a pigsty. He remained in this “hole” for six months. One can only imagine what such an experience can do to the mind and nerves of a person — but Rav Gustman was different. Despite the deplorable conditions, he was able to recite and review the Talmud Zevachim by memory over thirty times! Is it any wonder that we considered the novellae which he composed during that period as some of his most treasured?

