

## **The Torah that Moshe commands us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov. (33:4)**

Ramban interprets this well-known pasuk to be a declaration of our inherent right to the Torah – as our unassailable possession – to be transmitted from one generation to the next. The word *morashah* can also be read as *me'orasah*, married, inspiring Chazal in the Talmud Pesachim 49b to expound that the relationship between the Jewish People and the Torah is similar to that of a *chassan* and *kallah*, a groom and his bride. We are wed to the Torah. In his *derashos*, the Maharal comments that this refers to the entire nation. Every Jew, rich or poor, pedigreed or not, has an equal share in the Torah. The Torah is not the exclusive property of any individual or group. As a result of this relationship, each Jew has a moral responsibility to see to it that no Jew is left behind. The wealthy may not say, “Let the poor fend for themselves.” They must provide for their spiritual development and enable those who have not learned, or who are unable to learn as a result of their financial problems.

Regrettably, some still feel that Torah erudition is the heritage of only a select few: the wealthy, the pedigreed, the powerful movers and shakers. It might be easier to teach and study Torah in those communities that serve as home to large populations of Jews, but eschew doing so in a small community, which does not possess a large, “feel-good” population of observant Jews. Then there are those who refuse to teach or reach out to Jews in “restricted” environments, whose lives are not perfect, who have made poor choices and are paying for it. It is almost as if they fear being sullied by exposure to anything other than a spiritually pristine climate. Perhaps the following parable from the Chafetz Chaim will enlighten them:

A young boy stands in the courtyard of a large shul in Vilna and, with bitter tears streaming down his cheeks, he searches for his lost money pouch. As the worshippers leave the building following the service, they see the sad, young boy and take pity on him. They also join in the search, to no avail. The money pouch seems to elude all of the searchers. As the search continues, the boy once again begins to weep. It does not appear that his search will be fruitful.

One of the men asked the boy, “Tell me, my child, do you remember the last place that you had the pouch? This way, we might be able to narrow down our search.” The boy replied, “Yes, I remember where I lost the pouch. It was on the street where the glass shops are located.” “If that is the case, why are you searching for the pouch in the courtyard of the shul? You lost the pouch on the other side of town!” “I will tell you the truth,” the boy explained. “The street of the glaziers is full of mud. I did not want to dirty my clothes searching through the mud. Therefore, I came here, where it is clean. This seems to be a good place to conduct my search.”

The Chafetz Chaim utilizes this parable to interpret the pasuk in Shiras Haazinu, Ki chelek Hashem amo, “For Hashem’s portion is His People” (Devarim 32:9). We are very dear to Hashem. His love for us is like Him: boundless. Hashem’s affection for His children – exceeds any “feeling” He might have for any other nation in the world. This is the reason that we wonder why He has placed us in this world, a world that is morally bankrupt, spiritually flawed, a world where base desire is out of control and character refinement does not exist. Why did He not allow us to bask in His glory, to remain in the Heavenly kingdom, to suffuse ourselves with spiritual pleasure? Why would He want us to live in the mud and muck of this world, when we could do quite well in the “courtyard of the shul”?

We forget that we are charged with a lofty mission, a unique goal that we must achieve: to study His Torah and observe His commandments. To accomplish our goal, we must overcome various challenges associated with life, trials that only apply in this world. Spiritual refinement can only occur in a world filled with desire, immorality and flawed character, where the yetzer hara, evil-inclination, can have a field day enticing us to fall for its crafty pitfalls. This is a world in which mitzvah observance is the way to acquire eternal life, and distancing ourselves from sin is the path toward maintaining our spiritual achievements. This is why we must be here. We cannot opt for the young boy’s approach of removing ourselves from the muddy street. Our place is here in this world. It is here that we will succeed in reaching our goal and carrying out the mission which we have been sent to achieve.

In the world of outreach, some areas of the spiritual climate leave much to be desired. There are individuals who are so far removed from a Torah way of life that it takes a “specialist” to reach them – or so it seems. It really does not take a professional. Anyone who is sincere and whose desire to help others emanates from the heart will succeed. The problem is that we all want to search for the money pouch in the “courtyard of the shul.” Heaven forbid that we sully ourselves in an environment – or with individuals – that we have deemed inferior. The Torah is the heritage of the entire Jewish people, regardless of where they are located, whatever their religious affiliation or spiritual character. It is a morashah for Kehillas Yaakov. As long as one is included in Yaakov’s Kehillah, it remains his morashah.