

All of Har Sinai was smoking, because Hashem had descended upon it in the fire. (19:18)

The most awesome, momentous moment in the history of mankind was the Revelation, during which Hashem descended upon *Har Sinai* amid an unprecedented display of thunder, smoke, lightning and fire. The background “music” was the accompaniment of *shofar* blasts. In *Derech Eitz Chaim*, the *Ramchal* addresses the idea that the essence of Torah is *eish*, fire: “Behold! With great precision, it (the Torah) was compared to fire. When one uses an ember which does not flame (not noticeable), but the energy of the flame is concealed inside, until that moment when one blows (stokes) on it. Then the flame will spread out and go forth. That flame is visible in many colors – which had previously not been visible and are now revealed. (In other words, an ember is a coal that on the outside appears to have no flame, but, deep within it, there is a small flame waiting to be stoked. It will produce a powerful fire/flame that will manifest a number of colors). So, too, is the Torah which is before us: all of its words and letters are like embers which when ignited (initially) all appear the same. One sees before him only embers which are almost dim. When he exerts himself and expends effort and toil to work on the ember/words of the Torah, every letter produces/reveals a mighty multi-colored flame which comprises the knowledge which is concealed within each letter.”

Studying Torah is unlike any other discipline. Torah study is transformative. It requires intense effort to plumb its depths, to extract its profundities. It is multifaceted, thus able to penetrate and reach different people on different levels. The more one stokes the ember, the greater the flame and the greater the number of colors that emanate from it.

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, relates an incident that took place concerning the *Chasam Sofer*, which demonstrates his amazing insight and perspective on Torah. Undisputedly, the *Chasam Sofer* possessed *Ruach HaKodesh*. He was the recipient of Divine Inspiration, allowing him to see beyond and deeper than the average person. The *Maskillim*, members of the Enlightenment, sought every venue to undermine and ultimately destroy traditional Judaism. They sought every opportunity to denigrate and humiliate Torah leadership, conjecturing that if they succeed in belittling the Torah leaders, the people will lose their respect for and faith in them. They took it upon themselves to prove to the Orthodox followers of the *Chasam Sofer* that he was not imbued with Divine Inspiration.

The *Chasam Sofer* had the practice of testing the young students in *yeshivah* every few weeks. Prior to the next scheduled *bechinah*, test, they took a young, gentile boy, shaved his head, left over *payos*, and placed a large black *yarmulke* on his head. Next, they taught him a few *Mishnayos*, until he had memorized them perfectly. To the unsuspecting, he looked and sounded like just any other Jewish *cheder* student.

Judgment day arrived, and the boys entered the room to be tested by the saintly *Chasam Sofer*.

When the turn for the gentile student came, the boy began to recite the *Mishnah* perfectly – until the *Chasam Sofer* told him to stop and asked that the little *goy*, gentile, be removed from the room. All who were present stood dumbfounded. How could the *Chasam Sofer* have known? The boy appeared no different than any Jewish boy. They asked the *Chasam Sofer* how he knew. He said, “Did you see the difference between the *goy* and the other children? When asked to read the *Mishnah*, every other child accompanied his recital with back and forth movement. He *shuckled* when he recited words of Torah. That is how a Jew learns. He gets “all into it.” His entire body is one with the Torah. The gentile knew nothing about Torah. To him, it was just another test. When Torah enters a person, he becomes enflamed. Is it any wonder that he *shuckles*? He is all fired up.”