

## **This is the Torah/teaching that Moshe placed before Bnei Yisrael. (4:44)**

*V'nasan lanu es Toraso*, "And Hashem gave us His Torah" is the motif that should accompany each Torah learning session. When we study Torah, we are hearing the words of Hashem and carrying out His will. He gave us His Torah, so that we should learn it, learn from it, observe its precepts and lessons. It is from the Torah that we, as Jews, receive and accept our guidance concerning our *derech ha'chaim*, way of life.

The Jew that lives his life with the Torah as his lodestar has the ability to navigate the murky, stormy waters of life, to battle the winds that can throw his ship off course, to move forward despite the strong changing currents that smash against his ship. He can ride the towering waves that come crashing down. Yes, as long as he keeps his eyes trained on that guiding light, he is assured that his ship will stay its course.

Torah is Hashem's directive to His People through which He speaks to us. We have only to listen. For those who have difficulty hearing its message at first, we have erudite, G-d-fearing Torah scholars who are available to provide us with its interpretation. Their teachings are *daas Torah*, the wisdom of the Torah, lessons and sage advice from a mind honed only on Torah. The Torah is referred to as *Toras emes*, the Torah of truth, since it is Hashem's words, His communication; it is *emes l'amito*, Absolute unembellished truth.

The World *Agudas Yisrael* was established in 1912 at a conference held in Katowice, Poland. The goal of the conference and the crux of *Agudas Yisrael's* purpose was the strengthening of Orthodoxy and its institutions and to infuse its adherents with a sense of global unity. To this end, the organizers felt it prudent to headline the conference with a premier Torah personality, a leader whose erudition was without peer and whose commitment to Torah was incontestable. They turned to *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, of Brisk to address the conference as its primary speaker. The presence of the illustrious *Rosh Yeshivah* would send a powerful message concerning the significance of this auspicious convocation. *Rav* Chaim demurred, claiming that he did not involve himself in public forums. He was a *Rosh Yeshivah/Rav* to whom Torah study was sacrosanct and his only area of endeavor. He was *kulo Torah*, wholly devoted to Torah study, throughout every fiber of his essence.

When the organizers heard *Rav* Chaim's negative response, they turned to the *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, who was one of the prime motivators of this event. He felt that a strong, unified *Agudah* would fortify *Klal Yisrael* against the winds of assimilation and secularism that were blowing very strongly, unabated by any bulwark to prevent them from penetrating the Orthodox perimeter. The *Chafetz Chaim* sent a personal messenger to petition *Rav* Chaim to attend and speak. Understandably, when the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest of world Jewry, asks, one responds affirmatively. *Rav* Chaim agreed to attend and address the assemblage.

On the appointed day, Orthodox Jews from all walks of life converged on Katowice. *Roshei Yeshivah, Rabbanim, Admorim*, Polish, Hungarian, Lithuanian and German Jews of all stripes sat together as what they were: family. The conference began with a recitation of *Tehillim*, followed by the opening address, rendered by *Horav David Hoffman, zl*, author of *Melamaid L'hoil, Rosh Yeshivah* of the Hildeshaimer Seminary in Berlin and premier German and European *posek, halachic* arbiter. The next speaker, who would define the purpose and motif of the conference, was the *Brisker Rav, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik*.

*Rav Chaim* began with the following words, “*Morai v'Rabbosai*, my friends, I would like to share with you a story from which we can deduce the approach we are to take to living as committed Jews. A Jew who lived in a small village earned his livelihood by traveling from town to town selling his wares. He would leave his home on Sunday morning and return for *Shabbos*. One day, he arrived in a village and entered the grocery store with the intention of purchasing something to eat. He asked the man who was working behind the register the price of certain cookies; the response was, ‘*Drei*’ (three ruble). He pointed to another item and inquired about its price, ‘*Drei*.’ A third item was presented to the young man and the price had not changed: ‘*Drei*.’ Something was not right. He asked to meet the owner of the establishment. The young man pointed to the back of the store.

The man entered the owner’s “office” and said, “It is not my custom to mix in business that is not mine; I feel that when one can prevent a Jew from losing money, however, he must intervene. You are about to lose your grocery business. That young manager is selling everything for ‘three’ ruble. He is even selling normally expensive, valuable items for the low price of three ruble. Why are you doing this?”

The storekeeper smiled and explained, “The young man who manages my grocery store was born mute. After years of programs and private tutors, they were able to teach him one word: *Drei*. That is all he knows and, thus, all he will ever be able to vocalize. The young man spent some time searching for work, anything that would provide him with some livelihood. He was unsuccessful in finding work. I owed his father a debt of gratitude, however, that went back twenty years. I, too, was without work and unable to support myself. I ended up in prison for stealing a few ruble so that I could buy food. This young man’s father, at great expense to himself, was able to procure my release. The least I could do was provide an avenue for his son to find meaningful work. Knowing fully well that this young man can articulate only one word, *Drei*. I arranged everything in the store in bags, with each bag priced at three ruble. Obviously, the more valuable the item, the smaller the bag. Thus, if for instance, one pound of grapes was 6 ruble, I prepared bags that were only half a pound, and so on and so forth. Indeed, every bag in the store is three ruble. All bags are not the same size.”

*Rav Chaim* concluded his story, stopped for a moment, and looked at the thousands of Jews who sat before him: “I was born a ‘mute,’ and, throughout the years, I have been educated to learn only one word: Torah. That is all I know. Thousands have converged here on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*. Everyone is prepared with worthy ideas, programs, etc. to elevate and intensify our personal and

collective commitment to *Yiddishkeit*. This is all wonderful and meaningful. I ask only one thing: Every decision, agreement, mandate, petition that arises from this gathering should all be individually placed in a 'bag' in such a manner that when 'I' (who can say only one word) am asked, 'What is this?' I will be able to say, 'Torah.' This is the only word that I know, because this is the only criterion that matters. It is either Torah – or it is insignificant." With that, *Rav Chaim* concluded his address and returned to his seat. The conference's motif had been defined and launched. The leadership was now empowered to follow through on the criterion set forth by *Rav Chaim*.