

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)

The Torah was given to us in the *Midbar*, Wilderness – by design: *Mah midbar hefker, af divrei Torah miskaymim b'mi she'mafkir atzmo*, “Just as the Wilderness is ownerless, likewise, the words of Torah endure only in he who is *mafkir*, renders himself ownerless (abrogates himself, divests himself of himself; I am nothing!).” When a person feels himself to be insignificant, then that with which he comes in contact has greater value than himself. Thus, he values and respects it. Unless one values Torah, it will do nothing for him. One can own the most expensive piece of jewelry, but, if he does not appreciate its value, it will do nothing for him.

Torah is like that. Many people study Torah; yet, for some, it is nothing more than mental gymnastics. These people may appreciate the intellectual challenge presented by the Torah. If they do not acknowledge that they are learning *Toras Hashem*, the Divinely authored Torah which was given to *Klal Yisrael* by the Almighty Himself, however, then Torah has no effect on them. They do not appreciate its value. The Jew of old would refer to the Torah as the *Heilige* Torah, Holy Torah; he never forgot Who its Author was and Who gave it to his forebears.

Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, quotes an illuminating exposition from the *Izbitzer Rebbe, zl*, which underscores this idea. *Chazal (Meseches Nedarim)* quote a *pasuk* from *Yirmiyahu* in which the *Navi* says that the *churban*, destruction, of the *Bais Hamikdash* happened because *azvu Torasi*, “they abandoned My Torah.” Abandoning the Torah is a strong term. It is not as bad as “rejection,” but it indicates a sense of neglect. In other words, they could very well have been learning, but Torah did not constitute their lives. They did not reject the Torah; they neglected to care for (and) about it.

In order to understand this concept, we quote the *Izbitzer*, who cites the *Hagahos Ashri* in his commentary to the *Rosh, Meseches Bava Metzia*. The case in question concerns Reuven, who purchased a piece of metal, believing it was lead. He later sold this piece of metal, which he thought was lead, to Shimon, who paid the fair market price for a piece of lead. Shimon later discovered that, in fact, the piece of “lead” was actually a piece of silver, thus worth much more than what he had paid for it. Word spread, and Reuven heard that he had undercharged Shimon for the piece of metal. He now sought the fair market price for silver – not lead.

The *Hagahos Ashri* rules that Shimon paid the correct price for the piece of metal, since Reuven, being unaware of the true value of his piece of metal, did not really own the “silver,” but rather, the “lead.” The bottom line is: If one does not really know the value of an object, he does not really own it. Thus, Reuven owned a piece of lead – which he sold, and for which he was reimbursed. The fact that he was unaware of its true value is held against him.

The *Izbitzer* applies this reasoning towards explaining *Chazal's* statement concerning the abandonment of the Torah. People may think that they have the Torah; they even learn the Torah, and it may even be in their possession, but, as long as they do not appreciate the Torah's intrinsic

value – what it does for them, due to its Author; how it changes their lives – they do not have the Torah! Life without Torah is a façade. It is not true living. All one has to do is look around himself and ask: Are these people really living? I agree that someone who has not lived a Torah life might take umbrage with this statement. My response: Try living a Torah life and then ask the question. Better yet: Once you have lived a Torah life, ask yourself how you have survived until this point.

I would like to take this idea one step further. Life without Torah is not living; this is the position we have taken. This applies to Jews – only. Let me explain. In the *Pesach Haggadah*, we recite the *Dayeinu* song which details fifteen wonderful gifts that Hashem granted us – each one more compelling than the previous one. Thus, we say, “Had Hashem only brought us to *Har Sinai*, and not given us the Torah – *Dayeinu*. That would have been sufficient.” How can we make such a statement? What purpose is served in coming to *Har Sinai* if we had not received the Torah? What would we be without the Torah?

Horav Levi Yitzchak Berditchiver, zl, suggests a deeper meaning to this statement. When *Klal Yisrael* arrived at *Har Sinai*, they began preparing for the big day. Every Jew sincerely and profoundly opened himself to Hashem and His Torah in such a manner that he was able to discover that the Torah, which represents the *ratzon*, will, of Hashem, was already implanted within his heart and mind. The *Berditchiver* explains that each and every Jew contains the Torah within himself/herself. The problem is that we are often so preoccupied with life’s superficialities that we are prevented (often we prevent ourselves) from turning inward and discovering what is truly meaningful and right. In other words, every Jew is “programmed” with the Torah within him. It was necessary for us to go to *Sinai* in order to cast aside all external impediments, all materialism, so that we could hear the *dvar*, word, of Hashem; unimpeded, unembellished, with complete clarity. This experience was sufficient to evoke within us the notion that a predisposition towards – and inner awareness of – G-d’s Will existed within us, even before we experienced the Revelation. Thus, had we only been brought to *Har Sinai*, we would have been Torah-ready, because, after all, it was already within us.

Having said this, we realize that, for a Jew, Torah observance is natural. It is part of his DNA, an essential component of his psyche. When we renege the Torah, we are actually fighting against ourselves. This, I believe, is the reason that one who is unobservant is actually miserable. He is acting out of character, out of balance with himself.

Perhaps this is why *Shavuos*, unlike the other Festivals, does not have a clearly defined date for its celebration. The Torah simply designated the fiftieth day after *Pesach* to be *Shavuos*. One would think that the day upon which we received the Torah, the day that was the culmination of the liberation from Egypt, would be delineated by its date – just like the other *Moadim*, Festivals. Now, however, we have a different take on *Kabbolas HaTorah*, the receiving of the Torah. The Torah is actually part of each of us. We discovered this at *Har Sinai* when Hashem gave us the Torah.

We might suggest another reason for the elusive date. I think the Torah is playing down the actual

Revelation, since it was the precursor for something even greater: daily Torah study and living. I came across a beautiful analogy. A young man and woman married. Their marriage was the culmination of an “engaging” engagement, where from day one, the wedding, which was to be the pinnacle of their lives, was awaited and prepared for with bated breath. Their wedding was to be the greatest wedding that was ever held. Both sets of parents were people of means, and neither couple was prepared to hold back material outlay for the big day. For months, they obsessed in planning for the wedding. Day and night were devoted to addressing every detail. They chose a hall which was large and elegant. They selected the finest caterer. Decorations had no spending limit; neither did the photographer. Likewise, there was no ceiling to how much they would spend for an orchestra. Every detail, every innovation, indeed, everything and anything that would enhance their children’s special day was given their priority. Even the guest list was peppered with distinguished personages from all over the country. To them, this was to be the epic event of their lives.

The day for which they had all been waiting had arrived, and, true to their dreams and planning, no disappointments happened. Everything went off without incident. It was truly the nicest, finest, most inspiring and meaningful wedding that anyone had ever attended. From the hall to the caterer; the food and music; the pictures and guests; the dancing and singing were all the epitome of perfection. Everyone left the hall upbeat, happy to have had the opportunity to share in such a seminal experience – one which would remain etched in their minds for a long time. This was truly an event to remember.

Then something very strange happened. Once the very last guest had left, the respective parents gave a sigh of relief. They expressed their profound gratitude to Hashem for allowing everything to go off without any hindrance, for granting them the opportunity to have the wedding of their dreams for their children. Months of tension had culminated in unabashed joy. They looked around toward the door and saw the *chosson*, groom, standing there with his suitcase, and, at the other door, was the *kallah*, bride, with her suitcase, each about to leave – to go their separate ways! Their parents looked at them in shock. The rabbi who had performed the ceremony went over and asked, “Exactly what are you doing? Where are you going?”

They explained that they had successfully achieved their dream, the wedding for which they had both aspired. Now, it was time to go back to their individual, regular lives feeling satisfied and content! The rabbi explained to them that what they were saying was ridiculous. The wedding is only a preparation, the precursor to married life. A *chosson/kallah* unite to become husband and wife with the goal to build a *bayis ne’eman b’Yisrael*, a true Jewish home. Once the wedding is over, they begin their new life. It is no longer business as usual. The wedding ushers in a new life.

Har Sinai was *Klal Yisrael’s* wedding, at which we received the Torah. We could no longer go back to business as usual. The purpose of receiving the Torah is not to have it stored in a museum. We must learn it constantly. It is our life, without which we are unable to survive. The Revelation was a seminal experience – but it was only the beginning. It is our daily learning that carries the most

significance. Thus, there is no date for *Shavuous*. “Married” life is not over at the wedding. That is when it begins!