

“The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov.” (33:4)

The Midrash in Sefer Vayikra cites the following story: An illiterate Jew approached Rabbi Yanai with a complaint, “Why are you holding on to my rightful inheritance?” Rabbi Yanai immediately countered, “What are you talking about? I am not aware of anything of yours that is in my possession.” The man did not budge. “You have something of mine!” he screamed. The Tanna had no idea who this man was, let alone that he had anything in his possession that belonged to him.

“Do you think that simply because I am illiterate you can take advantage of me?” the man asked. “Please tell me why you feel I have something of yours,” Rabbi Yanai pleaded.

“Well, yesterday I passed by the cheder for young boys, and I heard them reciting a pasuk from the Torah. Since I did not understand its meaning, I asked one of the boys to translate it for me. The pasuk was, ‘The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov.’ This means that the Torah belongs as much to me as it does to you. Why, then, do you know so much more than I do? Why are you so bright, while I have limited intelligence? Why have you been blessed with a lofty soul and an ability to grasp spiritual profundities, while I simply cannot compete in any way? Obviously, there can only be one explanation. You have been entrusted with a very large bequest, and it is your responsibility to see to it that it is made available to all of the inheritors.

“Furthermore, had I been consigned a large sum of money to be shared with a number of people, I would have searched everywhere to locate the rightful owners. Why do you deprive me of my deserved share in the Torah? You should have seen to it that I study and become knowledgeable in the Torah!”

A powerful and legitimate complaint. Indeed, this is a large scale condemnation of all those who have the opportunity to reach out to others and ignore their responsibility. In the preface to his *Nefesh HaChaim*, Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, writes that man is created for one purpose: *l’ho’il l’achrinei*, “to assist others.” *Ki adam l’amal yulad*, “For man is born to weariness” (*Iyov* 5:7).

In a departure from the common translation, the *Meshech Chochmah* writes in *Sefer Devarim*

Peninim on the Torah

Hebrew Academy of Cleveland

<http://peninim.org>

28:61, that the word l'amal – lamed, ayin, mem, lamed, is a mnemonic for lilmod al menas l'lamed, “to learn for the purpose of teaching.” The Torah is an inheritance for all Jews. Those of us in the “know” should see to it that the ranks of knowledgeable Torah Jews begin to grow.