

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

The Torah belongs to the Jewish People. It is our inalienable possession, having been transmitted throughout time from generation to generation, heralding back to the Revelation at *Sinai* and continuing on until the advent of *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*. How profound is this statement! Yet, it is the first sentence that a father teaches his child as soon as the child is able to speak. The child understands very little at this tender age. Nonetheless, *Chazal* (*Succah* 42a) felt it important to convey this message to the child, so that it would become ingrained in his mind via the constant oral repetition. The Torah belongs to everyone; it is the lifeblood of our nation. Thus, we are enjoined to involve ourselves in its study and practice at every possible moment. One who does not study Torah in this manner does not believe (at least, this is manifest by his actions) in the critical significance of the Torah for the Jewish People. Learning Torah is a lifetime endeavor. Its concepts do not change, but our depth of understanding does. Therefore, what we studied “yesterday” has deeper meaning “today.”

*Targum Onkeles* interprets *morashah*, heritage, to be a derivative of *yerushah*, inheritance. An inheritance implies something that is bequeathed to us, regardless of our desire or willingness to accept it. A *yerushah* is something which we receive without participation in its acquisition. The Torah is ours to keep. It is incumbent upon us to do something about it. This is where the words, *tzivah lanu*, “has commanded us,” fit in. Hashem bequeathed us the Torah. He also commands us to study and practice it. Furthermore, because the Torah is Hashem’s bequest which is transmitted throughout the generations, it becomes our obligation to see to it that it continues its journey to the next generation in the same pristine condition in which we received it. This is the meaning of the *Tanna’s* statement (first *Mishnah* of *Pirkei Avos*): “Moshe received the Torah from *Sinai* and transmitted it to Yehoshua, who further transmitted it to the Elders, etc.” We are only one link in the chain that heralds back to *Sinai*. We must see to it that this link is firm and unbreakable, so that the next generation can assume its position as links, until *Moshiach* arrives.

*Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl* (in a lecture to students of Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim), explained the *yerushah*, inheritance, aspect of *morashah*, with regard to the Torah in a novel, but practical, manner. An inheritance is an item which carries an element of sentimental value. For example: a young *kallah*, bride, who receives a gold bracelet as a gift will certainly

have a special place in her heart for it due to its beauty and value. Can such a bracelet, however, be compared to a gold bracelet that once belonged to, and was cherished by, her grandmother with whom she had a special, loving relationship? Clearly not. The Torah from which we study today is the very same Torah that Moshe *Rabbeinu* gave to us at *Sinai*. It has been in the “family” as its heirloom for thousands of years.

In a well-known exposition, *Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, distinguishes between *nachalah*,

inheritance, and *morashah*, heritage. An inheritance becomes the property of the inheritor to do with it as he pleases. A heritage, however, is the property of the generations that preceded him and those that will follow him. Thus, it is incumbent upon him to preserve it intact, just as he received it. The Torah is ours for the purpose of study and practice – and then, we have a solemn obligation to transmit it to the next generation. It is the family jewel that is passed on from one generation to the next.

I would like to take the liberty of expanding upon the words of the *Rosh Yeshivah*. The *Potiker Rav*, *zl*, *Horav Shlomo Zalmen Horowitz*, was very close with *Rav Moshe Feinstein*. In his preface to his *sefer*, *Bais Aharon*, he writes what it was that motivated him to record his thoughts on paper and ultimately print them as a *sefer*, volume of his Torah thought. He writes that his good friend, *Horav Yitzchak Aizik Tendler, zl* (who was a *mechutan* of *Rav Moshe Feinstein*), was a *rav* in the Lower East Side of New York. When his *shul* closed down, the *Potiker Rav* invited *Rav Tendler* to give his usual *Shabbos shiur*, lecture, at his *shul*. He designated a room specifically for this purpose. As a result, *Rav Tendler* remained for *Minchah* and *seudah shlishis*, availing himself of the opportunity to listen to the *Potiker Rav's* novel Torah thoughts, which he expounded at the meal. Following the *motzei Shabbos* service, *Rav Tendler* would go home. On the way, he would stop by his *mechutan*, *Rav Moshe*, and relate to him the Torah thought he had just heard from the *Potiker Rav*. *Rav Moshe* enjoyed listening to novellae, especially the ones that were *Chassidic* oriented.

*Rav Moshe* asked the *Potiker Rav* whether he had recorded his novellae on paper. The *Rav* replied, “Who am I to write down my Torah thoughts?” *Rav Moshe* countered (I paraphrase because I feel strongly, having had the privilege of writing for many years, that everyone who has *chiddushim*, original Torah thoughts, or even anthologies which he collects, and puts them together in his own unique style has a holy mandate to do so), “You will one day be asked to give a *din v'cheshbon*, judgment and accounting, if you do not record your Torah thoughts. I have heard your thoughts, and they are *l'amitah shel Torah*, absolute truth. You should know that these Torah thoughts, which are given to you from Heaven Above, are not your possession. They belong to *Klal Yisrael!*”

*Rav Moshe* was underscoring the concept that Torah is our heritage. As such, we have no right to deprive any member of *Klal Yisrael* from learning Torah. I may add that this is especially true in our technology savvy society, in which, with the push of a button, a *dvar Torah* can reach all corners of the globe, and be read by Jews of all backgrounds, stripes and religious persuasions. Therefore, if we have the ability, we should make every effort to disseminate our Torah. It does not belong to us, and, if we have merited to develop a *chiddush*, what right do we have to deprive others of it?

The *Sfas Emes* interprets *morashah* as applying not only to the Torah, but equally, to *Moshe Rabbeinu*. This means, “*Moshe Rabbeinu* is the essential Torah, and he bequeathed his *koach*, power, to *Klal Yisrael*.” From the moment that *Moshe* received the Torah from Hashem, he ceased to be an individual Jew, and, instead, he became part of the Torah. Thus, as each and every Jew has a portion in, and a relationship with, the essence of Torah, so, too, is he bound up with *Moshe*

*Rabbeinu*. Every Jew has a spark of Moshe in him, an ability to spread and grow his spirituality to untold heights – as did Moshe.

We find that the *Tanna* in *Pirkei Avos* (2:12) gives us a wholly different impression of Torah. “Rabbi Yosi says, ‘Apply yourself to study Torah, for it is not yours by inheritance.’” In other words, one cannot attain scholarship on the merits of his father’s studies. Personal effort and diligence are required. This is understandable, but the *Tanna* clearly states that the Torah is not a *yerushah*, inheritance. What is the dichotomy between *yerushah*, inheritance, and *morashah*, heritage? The *Baal HaTurim* explains that a *yerushah* passes from father to son – seamlessly and without stipulations or conditions. Not so a *morashah*, which passes from generation to generation. Only if we remain a *Kehillas Yaakov*, Congregation of *Yaakov* – observant, committed, living in harmony – in short, worthy of this heritage. The Torah is our heritage. It is up to the individual Jew to make his personal effort to acquire it as his *yerushah*, inheritance.

Furthermore, as explained by *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl* (*Ruach Chaim/Avos*), the Torah is a *morashah* to *Kehillas Yaakov*. Never will the Torah cease belonging to the collective congregation of the Jewish People. The Torah will always be a part of us; it will never, ever, be forgotten. This is with regard to the *kehillah*, congregation. The individual Jew is another thing altogether. If he does not put forth the effort, he will remain devoid of Torah. His father’s position, distinction, sacrifice, will not provide him with his Torah. This he must do for himself, exerting his own effort and manifesting his own commitment.

*Chazal* (*Pesachim* 49b) expound homiletically that the word *morashah* can be read as if it were spelled *me’orasah* (same letters), which would imply that the Torah and the Jewish People are betrothed to one another; we are (so to speak) like bride and groom. The Torah is wed to all Jews, explains *Maharal*, without making distinction between rich and poor, young and old, exalted lineage or simple background. If we do not provide equal opportunity education for all Jews, the Torah will cry out! It is being torn away from its mate! Thus, says *Maharal*, an enormous responsibility is placed upon the shoulders of the community leaders to see to it that no Jew is left behind from learning Torah.

*Horav Tuvia Goldstein, zl* (preface to *Emek Halachah*), writes that the relationship to the Torah of one who studies it should be as a *chassan*, groom, is to his *kallah*, bride. It is a binding relationship, whereby, just as one does not say to his wife, “Today you are my wife – tomorrow, you are not,” likewise, the bond with Torah is without stipulations or contingencies. It is an unequivocal bond. *Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl*, was wont to say that the *yeridas ha’doros*, digression of the generations (in the *yeshivah* world), was noticeable in the lack of commitment that students had to learning Torah. No longer was their study abiding, without interruption, with no vacation breaks. It should be their lives. As one does not take a break from breathing – neither does he relax from Torah study, unless, of course, this break will enhance his study.