

So now, write this song for yourselves. (31:19)

The last *mitzvah* in the Torah is the command to write a *Sefer Torah*. This *mitzvah* is incumbent upon everyone. If one cannot personally write a *Sefer Torah*, he should commission its writing. The *poskim* teach that any *sefer*, especially one which is a collection of his own *chiddushim*, original thoughts, has greater significance. Furthermore, one who is unable to write should designate a room in his house to serve as a study which houses his *seforim*. Indeed, the most important room in his home should be where his *seforim* are kept. We are the People of the Book. We should value its significance.

Why is the *mitzvah* of writing a *Sefer Torah* the last *mitzvah*? One would think that it would be the first *mitzvah*. After all, one who goes to school to study a profession would be expected to have his books before he commences the course of study. Why should the Torah be different? I think the Torah is teaching us that one must first study and be proficient in the Torah. Otherwise, he will not appreciate its value. One who does not value the Torah will hardly take the *mitzvah* of writing it seriously.

The dedication of a newly-written Torah scroll is traditionally celebrated amid great festivity. The source of this celebration heralds back to the Biblical account of David *HaMelech* welcoming the *Aron HaKodesh* back to Yerushalayim. David danced with all his might, as he enthusiastically gave honor to the Torah. The celebrations often vary from community to community and in how much one is prepared to extend himself. The one area that should not vary is concerning the quality of the parchment, the actual writing of the letters and the suitability of the *sofer*, scribe. One who writes a Torah has an enormous responsibility; thus, he must be of impeccable character and spiritual rectitude. The *Sefer Torah* symbolizes our relationship with Hashem. It goes without saying that its *kashrus* must be paramount.

A well-known *askan*, communal personality, who was involved in many organizations and reached out to assist those in need, regardless of their affiliation with a specific brand of Orthodoxy, took upon himself to commission the writing of a *Sefer Torah*. It had always been his dream to do something personally for the Torah. He went out of his way to arrange to have the Torah written by one of the finest, most credible *sofrim* on parchment that was flawless. It took some time and ultimately ended up costing more than he had initially expected, but the finished product was an absolute, unblemished beauty. Indeed, it was so perfect that it was hard to believe it was the work of a human being. On the day of the culmination of the writing, the last few letters were to be filled in by dignitaries and close family friends. Among them was *Horav Mordechai Zukerman, zl* (*Mashgiach*, Yeshivas Chevron), and another *Rav* from Yerushalayim. When it came the turn for the *Rav* to fill in his letter, his sleeve caught on the bottle of wine which had been prepared for the *l'chaim* and the unthinkable happened: some wine spilled on the white border of the last *yeriah*, sheet of parchment. Not only was the parchment now stained, the odor of wine that emanated from the parchment was clearly evident.

One can only begin to imagine the feelings of disconcertment that overwhelmed the *Rav*. He was acutely aware of the effort and expense that the host had expended in order to produce such a fine *Sefer Torah*, and he had spilled wine on the last sheet. Incidentally, the host said nothing concerning the occurrence. He understood and accepted the fact that the last sheet would need to be replaced. After the incident, the *Rav* accompanied *Rav Zuckerman* home. The *Mashgiach* noticed the pain written all over his friend's face and remarked, "I have a tradition (which he had heard from earlier *gedolim*, Torah giants. He had been the student of both the *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, and *Horav Avraham Grodzenski, zl*). When one acts in good faith, with noble intentions, no *takalah*, mishap, will result from it. Do you hear me? Nothing adverse will arise from it. Everything is guided from Heaven Above. You will see that (the spilling of the wine) whatever occurred was for a reason. Everything is only for the good!"

The next morning, a festive celebration took place in honor of the new Torah scroll. It was a large gathering that included distinguished

personages, friends and family. Indeed, people from all walks of life joined in this *seudas mitzvah*, celebratory meal, following the fulfillment of a *mitzvah*. The *Rav* and *Rav Zuckerman* were among the invitees. The *Rav* just sat pensively, reviewing what had occurred the previous night. As in all grand dinners, there were speakers and speakers. One of the last men to speak was a cousin who had come in from America especially for the occasion. He said, "I am a Holocaust survivor, and, as such, I have lost my faith in Hashem (*chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid). I went through much and witnessed atrocities that defy human rationale. Nonetheless, out of respect and admiration for my relative, I came to join in his celebration (although it means nothing to me). I even wrote a letter in the Torah!"

As soon as the man said this, *Rav Zuckerman* looked at the *Rav* and said, "See, I told you that the wine was spilled for a reason! This man has just declared publicly that he is a nonbeliever. Hence, he is an *apikores*, guilty of heresy. As such, the letter that he filled in is *pasul*, invalid. That last *yeriah* would have had to be changed. Who knows when his lack of beliefs would have been discovered? Hashem protected His Torah, and He used you as His vehicle. If Hashem causes a *takalah* to happen to a person, it is for a good reason and serves a noble purpose."