

TORAH - WHAT WE SEE IS WHAT WE GET

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

In the last post, we mentioned that Shavuot commemorates the day on which G-d gave the Torah in its entirety to the nation of Israel. Our relationship with the Torah should not be one where we treat it as merely a relic of the past, a curious piece of the nation's history. Rather, we should be engaged in the study of Torah, a body in which our sages have told us that each time we study it we can learn something new, so vast are its contents. In fact, if we do not actively remember that the Torah contains a wide breadth of knowledge, we will be shortchanging ourselves of the pearls of wisdom contained within.

The Gemora in the tractate of Nedarim (81a) relates to us a lesson that Rav Yehudah said from Rav. There is a verse in Yirmiya (9:11) *"Who is the wise man who comprehends this . . . for what was the land destroyed?"* Rav explains that this question, why was the land destroyed, was asked to the wise men and prophets of the generation, yet none of them could answer it. The answer eluded all until G-d presented the answer (9:12): *"Beacuse of their forsaking My Torah that I placed before them."* What does it mean that they forsook the Torah? If it were true that the nation at the time did not study the Torah and did not follow its precepts, wouldn't the sages and prophets have realized what the problem was? Therefore, Rav Yehudah explains that it means the people did not recite the blessing upon studying the Torah as they were (and we are) supposed to.

What was so terrible about the fact that they did not recite the blessing? A fault was not found with how the nation was studying. They were engrossed in Torah study, and they did stick to the Torah's precepts. However, the R"an explains, it was how they went about Torah study which was the problem. Torah study is not a leisurely pursuit, nor is it to be studied by rote. The Torah is alive and breathing, and its study is to be greeted with zeal and vigor. We should be excited when we have the opportunity to delve into the teachings contained in the Torah. If the nation had truly been excited about learning the Torah, they most certainly would have made the blessing beforehand. The blessing in essence is our expression of thanks and praise to G-d for giving us the Torah. If one feels no need to recite the blessing, one is showing that the appreciation for Torah he has is lacking. The fact that the nation did not make the blessing said that they inwardly did not recognize the importance of Torah, and for this they were taken to task.

What we gain from the Torah depends on us. In the Hagahos Ashri (Bava Metzia on R"osh 2:9), a commentary on the Gemora, a true incident is recorded. Reuven bought a piece of metal, which he assumed was tin, from a blacksmith to use for his roof. Afterwards, Reuven went and sold this piece

of tin to Shimon. Shimon began scraping the tin, and to his surprise he discovered that it was actually a piece of silver coated with tin. When Reuven discovered this, he insisted that Shimon pay him for the true value of the piece of metal. When they brought this for adjudication, the Rabbi rendered the decision in favor of Shimon: Since Reuven bought this thinking it was tin, Reuven only had ownership in this piece as if it were tin. Reuven is only entitled to compensation for what he knew he had and for what he knew he owned. That was a piece of tin, and Shimon did not have to pay anything more. By means of analogy, The Bais Yaakov of Izbitza-Radzhin said that this is true for Torah as well. G-d gave the Torah to the entire nation of Israel. We "own" it. However, our ownership of the Torah only extends to that which we know about it. If we recognize the breadth and width of the Torah, then that is what we acquire in the Torah. If we treat the Torah as just another text book, we acquire little of the Torah, if any at all. We can study the Torah all day and all night. However, if we don't attribute the proper value to the Torah, we, as those who did not make the blessing on the Torah, have a diminished part in the Torah.

This Shavuos, we should all take the time to study the Torah, to try to appreciate the vast storehouse of wisdom properly that G-d gave to us. We should all be sure to solidify our "ownership" of the Torah, and make the most out of this special time when we commemorate the giving of this truly valuable gift. What we get out of Torah depends on what we see in Torah, and therefore we should keep our eyes wide open on Shavuos, and year round as well.

(From Hegyonai Halacha)