

UNDERSTAND IT VERY WELL

by Rabbi Label Lam

These are the statutes and the judgments and the teachings (Toros- plural of Torah) that HASHEM gave between Himself and the Children of Israel at Sinai through the hand of Moshe. (Vayikra 26:46)

Toros: One (Torah) Written and one (Torah) Oral. This informs that both were given to Moshe at Sinai. (Rashi)

This is a critical and oft underappreciated nugget of information. Not one Mitzvah in the entire Torah is capable of being carried into action given only the parameters provided in the text. There are almost 30,000 details that comprise phylacteries and 5,000 in the ubiquitous mezuzah with little information to guide to their uniform completion. What's called "killing"? When does life begin? When does it end? What one person calls "family planning" another may legitimately define as "murder!"

The Torah cries out for explanation. There must, by definition, have been a concomitant corpus of information that accompanied the giving of the laws and that is what we call the "Oral Torah". Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch uses the analogy that the Written Torah is like the notes to a scientific lecture. Every jot and squiggle has significance. If properly understood it can awaken the actual lecture. The notes remain useless to someone who has not heard the lecture from the Master. Therefore in the Oral Torah is the sum of the lecture while the Written Torah is merely a shorthand record. Without an Oral Torah that book the whole world holds in such high esteem, the Bible is rendered in-actionable. It becomes a frozen document that cannot be lived. Unfortunately, so many over the ages have become lost due to a failure to appreciate this single point and its significance for our very survival as a people.

When my wife and I were engaged, at the party there was a cousin of hers that has written voluminously about the holocaust. He himself survived, somehow, seven concentration camps. One of the Rabbis encouraged him to speak. He claimed to be unprepared and not a good English speaker. He spoke amazingly well.

First he looked out at a room filled with newly observant Jews and wondered aloud, "Where do you people come from?" He then quoted the Talmudic principle, "Torah returns to those who have hosted it." He explained, "If you are sitting here today then it's probably because you have some great ancestors who were willing to and did give blood to keep this Torah alive." He went on to talk about my wife's and his illustrious family tree.

Then he said that had he known he was going to speak he would have brought with him a document he held in his hands that morning that answered a question that had been nagging him for almost four decades. "We all know Hitler's "final solution" for European Jewry. What was his global scheme? Where was his plan to eliminate the rest of world Jewry?" He then paraphrased what he had learned from that document. Here is a printed transcript with a partial English translation:

"This document transmits a memorandum dispatched by I.A Eckhardt from the chief of the German Occupation Power. It is an order dated October 25, 1940 from das Reichssicherheitshauptamt-the central office of the German Security Forces to the Nazi district governors in occupied Poland, instructing them not to grant exit visas to Ostjuden- Jews from Eastern Europe. The reason behind this order is clearly spelled out: the fear that because of their "Othodoxen einstellung" their orthodoxy, these Ostjuden would provide "die Rabbiner und Talmudleher" - the Rabbis and the teachers of the Talmud, who would create "die geistige Erneuerung" the spiritual regeneration of the Jews in America and throughout the world."

The Oral Torah is essential for our existence as a people. It is our most vital organ and instrument for survival. Without it we are immediately lost. It makes sense that those who plan our demise understand it very well! DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.