

NU!?

by Rabbi Label Lam

If He would have brought us to Mt. Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have been enough!
(Haggada-Dayanu)

We were galloping through the Pesach Seder and the delicious aromas of the Yom Tov meal were wafting in from the kitchen when one of my boys did what every Jewish parent hopes his child would do, especially on Pesach night, he had the moral audacity to interrupt the singing and ask a sincere question, "What's the good of coming to Mt. Sinai, Abba, if we would not have received the Torah?" I was stunned- answerless and proud. However, since he asked the question my ear was tuned in when within a week I heard two senior colleagues discussing that same point.

Here's the long way to the answer. A good many years ago when I was to leave the holy walls of the Yeshiva to venture out to New York City for work, I was confronted with a problem many in our community face. How was I to arrive at an early enough time having already prayed the morning prayers? Thankfully we have a solution to that challenge. It's called the "Davening Bus"! No the bus doesn't Daven for us. We Daven on the bus! It was my first time doing this so I mistakenly strategized that in order to get a little extra sleep I would meet the bus at the last stop before the highway rather than the main stop. I realized right away how wrong I was.

I was the last person to get on and there was one seat left. It was a window seat and the fellow in the aisle was a man two or three times my size. He stepped out so I could take my place. Immediately when I sat down it became clear to me why this seat was still available. There were no springs in the cushion and so I sank almost to the floor. Then I reached up to that little light that sends a laser like beam on your small travel Siddur only to discover it didn't work either. In that dark and cramped corner I struggled to put on my Talis and Tefillin. By the time I was as set as I could be the bus was on the highway and in high gear and so was the Minyan. I was saying some preliminary blessings and they were already deep into "Pesukei D'zimra". By the time I was up to that point they were already saying "SHEMA!" I was still trying to catch up.

When finally I reached "SHEMA!" and I was grasping and kissing the Tzitzis of my Talis with love and devotion something unexpected happened. The bus came to a grinding halt by the side of the highway so everyone could comfortably stand for the silent Amida. The giant of a fellow who had been pressing up against me stood up and I immediately felt great relief but then for some reason he turned to me and asked with an almost hostile urgency that two letter question that Jews ask

each other all over the planet, "NU!? NU!?" I looked up at him with wonder. I thought to myself, "What does he want from me? Have I been pressing him against the window for the past 25 minutes?" He persisted, "NU!? NU?!" Then it dawned on me that I was kissing his and my Tsitsis together."

Isn't that a beautiful true story? You can't make that stuff up! When Jews get together for the purpose of kissing a Mitzvah together it's already a tremendous accomplishment. We are told (Shemos 19:2- Rashi) that Israel encamped, in a singular and unified fashion, like one person with one heart by Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. How goodly and sweet it is? Even if the Torah had not been given, since everyone was united for the highest of purposes, it was already a worthwhile event.

A close friend from "Yeshiva days" told me that the Talmud says, "Keshet Elyon D'Oraisa"-meaning that "the top knot (of the Tsitsis) is a Torah requirement". Literally the same statement can be understood to mean that the top knot, the highest connection between people is when they have a Torah (learning) connection with each other." Ain't it the truth!?

I whimsically shared with a well-known Hebrew Language linguist a cute theory I have about that utterance, "NU?!" Words that express "us" tend to end with "nu" like the word for "us" "anachnu", (hashevaynu- return us). We usually use that nudging expression, "NU!?" when someone is acting like an "I" and there's a pressing need to remind him of others, "NU!? He liked my idea and said there was a great deal of truth to it. Now, we share that connection. NU?! DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.