

# WHOSE TORAH?

*by Shlomo Katz*

## **Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz**

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Today's Learning:

Ketubot 8:6-7

Orach Chaim 377:1-378:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Gittin 10

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sanhedrin 1

Chazal record that when Hashem prepared to give the Torah to the Jewish People, several mountains came forth and claimed that the Torah should be given on their summits. One of these was Har Tavor and another was Har Carmel. However, both mountains were rejected in favor of humble Har Sinai.

R' Yechezkel Abramsky z"l (died 1976) explains: Har Tavor represents Yisrael's military might (as described in last week's haftarah). Har Carmel represents Yisrael's ability to persuade, as reflected in the successful challenge that Eliyahu Hanavi made on Har Carmel to the prophets of the idol Ba'al (see Melachim I ch.18). Each of these mountains argued that through the strength which it represents, the Jewish people would spread the Torah to the whole world.

What these mountains failed to understand was that the Torah was not meant to be imposed on other nations either by military might or by persuasion. "I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out of

Egypt." The Torah is intended only for the nation that was taken out of Egypt. Only that nation said, "na'aseh ve'nishmah" / "we will do it even before we understand it," which is a prerequisite to receiving the Torah.

In fact, "na'aseh ve'nishmah" conveys two important ideas. One is the recognition that feelings follow, and are the result of, deeds. (One must act like a "spiritual" being before he can feel like one, not vice-versa.) The other is that the depth of feeling that one attains is commensurate with the level of his service and toil. The Torah states regarding the mitzvot (Vayikra 18:5), "That a person shall do them and live through them." To the extent that a person does the mitzvot, to that extent will his soul attain life. (Chazon Yechezkel: Pesachim, Introduction)

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*"And her two sons, of whom the name of one was Gershom, for [Moshe] had said, 'I was a ger / sojourner in a strange land.' And the name of the other was Eliezer, for 'the G-d of my father came to my aid / ezri, and He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh'." (18:2-3)*

R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (the "Klausenberger Rebbe"; died 1994) lost his wife and eleven children in the Holocaust and later established a large chassidic community in Netanya, Israel. He asked: Why did Moshe name his first son after the fact that he was a ger / sojourner in a foreign land and only with his second son, commemorate the fact that Hashem saved him from Pharaoh? Also, why only regarding the first son does the verse say, "for he had said"?

R' Halberstam explained: After the Holocaust, numerous Jews left Eastern Europe and settled in the "civilized" countries of the West, such as the United States. However, the midrash teaches that true security can be attained in only one place - Eretz Yisrael. If we simply move from one exile to another exile, we will eventually end up no better than we started. In that case, there will have been no purpose in our being saved, and no reason to thank Hashem for saving us.

Moshe escaped from Pharaoh only to enter another exile in the land of Midian. He even took a wife in Midian, something which placed him in danger of settling comfortably in that land. Moshe therefore named his first son "Gershom" and he declared - "he said" - that he was an exile in a strange land. Only then could he name his second son "Eliezer" to commemorate his salvation. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

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*"The entire people saw the thunder and the flames, the sound of the shofar and the smoking mountain . . ." (20:15)*

What was the purpose of this spectacle? R' Moshe Sternbuch shlita explains with the following parable:

A certain wealthy man once betrothed his daughter to a distinguished young man. They agreed that

the wedding would take place in the young man's town on a certain date, and that the young couple would settle in that town.

When the wedding date approached, the bride and her family set out in a golden carriage. In every town through which they passed, the bride's father spent money lavishly, and the newspapers reported on the fabulous wealth of the bride's family. In the groom's town, the bride's family was greeted as royalty.

Yet the bride's father saw that the groom himself looked depressed. Asking why, he was told, "Even with your daughter's dowry, how will I ever maintain the lifestyle she is used to?"

"Don't worry," said the bride's father. "My daughter and I both know that she will live a simpler life from now on. I merely arrived here in this way so that you would appreciate where she came from and always do your best to give her everything that you can."

Similarly, says R' Sternbuch, the Torah is the daughter of the King of Kings, who betrothed her to common man. In order to remind us of the Torah's glorious origins, G-d gave her away amidst a spectacular show of fire and sound. (Ta'am Vada'at)

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*"They said to Moshe, 'You speak to us and we shall hear, and let not G-d speak to us, lest we die'."*  
(20:16)

R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of Enayim La'mishpat) writes: In response to this statement by Bnei Yisrael, Hashem said (Devarim 5:25): "Haiteevu / They did well in all that they spoke." The midrash offers two interpretations of Hashem's use of the word "Haiteevu / They did well." According to one sage, Hashem was alluding to "Hatavat Ha'nerot" / "cleaning the oil lamps of the Temple menorah," while according to a second sage, Hashem was alluding to "Hatavat Ha'ketoret" / "preparation of the incense."

What does this mean? R' Arieli explains:

Our verse has two parts: (1) "You speak to us and we shall hear," and (2) "let not G-d speak to us, lest we die." The latter part of the verse expresses the Jewish People's yirah / fear or awe of G-d, a feeling traditionally associated with the negative commandments, with the motto (Tehilim 34:15) "Sur mai'ra" / "Distance yourself from evil." This motto is represented in the Temple service by the cleaning of the oil lamps, in which waste products -- symbolic of evil -- are cleaned away and removed.

On the other hand, the first part of our verse represents ahavah / love of G-d, for one who loves G-d longs to hear the words of His prophets. This longing to hear the prophet's voice is connected to the preparation of the ketoret because the Gemara (Keritot 6b) teaches that any sounds that are made while the incense is being ground somehow improve the incense. In addition, important disputes

between the Sages and the heretics who denied the validity of the Oral Law centered on the ketoret; thus, this offering can be seen as a symbol of the Oral Law, which comes specifically from the mouth (rather than the pen) of the prophet, Moshe. (Midrash Ariel)

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## **Introductions . . .**

In this feature, we present excerpts from the introductions to famous (and not so famous) works. This week, we present the fifth and final installment of Rambam's introduction to his halachic code, Mishneh Torah.

Anything which is in the Talmud Bavli, every Jew must follow. We compel every city and every province to act in accordance with the customs of the sages of the Gemara, their decrees and their enactments, because whatever is in the Gemara was agreed to by all of Israel. . .

The sages that arose after the Gemara was written and built upon it, and whose names spread throughout the world because of their wisdom, are called the "Geonim." All of the Geonim who arose -- in Eretz Yisrael, in Shinar [Iraq], in Spain or in France -- learned the way of the Gemara, revealed its secrets, and explained its content, for its way is extremely deep. Moreover, the Gemara was written in Aramaic combined with other languages, which is what was understood by the people of Shinar at the time the Gemara was written. However, in other places, and also in Shinar in the time of the Geonim, no one understood that language unless it was taught to him. Many questions were asked by the people of each city to each of the Geonim requesting that they explain the words of the Gemara, and the Geonim would answer them according to their wisdom. Those who asked the questions would then gather the answers and make books to learn from.

The Geonim of each generation also wrote books to explain the Gemara. Some of these books explained specific laws, some explained specific chapters about which he was asked during his lifetime, some explained specific tractates or orders (groups of tractates), and some wrote compilations of halachic decisions...

In the present time [i.e., approx. 1170 C.E.], troubles have overpowered us, the wisdom of our wise men is destroyed, and the understanding of our understanding ones is ruined. Therefore, those explanations, halachot and letters which the Geonim wrote and which they saw as providing clear explanations have become difficult in our days, and only a few people understand them properly. It goes without saying [that few people understand] the Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, Sifra, Sifrei and Tosefta, all of which require intellect, a wise soul and a great deal of time. Therefore, I, Moshe the son of Maimon the Sepharadi, girded my loins and relied upon the Rock, Blessed is He, and I looked in all of these works and saw fit to compose those things which become clear from all of these works regarding what is forbidden, permitted, tamei, and tahor, together with the other laws of the Torah. All of these are in a clear language such that the Oral Torah may be fluent on everyone's lips without questions and answers -- not, "This one says thusly and this one says thusly," rather

clear words which are correct according to the laws which are derived from all the works which have come into being from the days of Rabbenu Hakadosh

until today. . .

*Sponsored by Elaine and Jerry Taragin on the yahrzeits of Mrs. Shirley Taragin a"h and Mr. Irving Rivkin a"h*

Avi Vogel, on the occasion of his aufruf and in honor of his kallah, Aviva Klein

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

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