

# WHOSE TORAH?

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This coming week, we observe Shavuot, the time of the Giving of the Torah. Regarding that event, the Midrash Rabbah comments on the verse (Mishlei 4:2), "For I have given you a good teaching; do not forsake My Torah," as follows: Is an item's seller usually sold with the item? Hashem says to Yisrael, "I sold you the Torah, and I, so-to-speak, was sold with it." The situation may be compared to that of a king who married off his only daughter to the king of a distant land. When the groom wanted to go back to his kingdom, his father-in-law said, "I cannot part from my only daughter, nor I can I tell you not to take her to your home, for she is your wife. Therefore, do me this favor: build me an apartment so that I can live near you." Similarly, Hashem says, "I cannot separate from the Torah, nor can I tell you not to take it. Therefore, build Me a place where I can dwell amongst you." [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Shmuel Shmelke Güntzler z"l (1834-1911; rabbi of Oyber Visheve, Hungary) explains: We read (Devarim 30:12), "It [the Torah] is not in heaven." Hashem gave us the Torah to interpret and to apply to the Halachic questions that arise in our lives. Whatever rulings we make become the Torah, provided that they are consistent with tradition and with the rules of interpretation handed down from Sinai. Like the king who cannot prevent the groom from taking his bride to his home, Hashem "cannot" keep the Torah after He has given it to us. At the same time, the king is not willing to part entirely from his daughter. Similarly, Hashem demands that we make a "home" for Him where we study Torah. (Meishiv Nefesh)

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***"The Levi'im shall encamp around the Mishkan . . ." (1:53)***

R' Amram Zvi Gruenwald z"l (dayan / rabbinical court judge in Oyber Visheve; later rabbi in the Fernwald Displaced Persons camp; died in Brooklyn, N.Y. in 1951) writes: The center of the camp, where the Levi'im camped, represents the heart within the human body. Although a person has 248 organs, he can live without many of them. But, one cannot live without a heart. Thus, in a case where a young girl was cutting up a chicken and did not find a heart, the Chacham Zvi (R' Zvi Ashkenazi z"l; 1656-1718) ruled that the chicken was kosher; it was not considered to be missing a major organ, because it is impossible that it did not have a heart.

R' Gruenwald continues: The name Levi comes from the root meaning "to accompany" or "to attach." Thus, the fact that the Levi'im camped in the "heart" of the camp is a reminder of the importance of attaching one's heart to Hashem and the Torah [ -- the Luchot were in the center of the Levi'im's encampment --] at all times. Notably, the picture on the flag of the tribe of Levi was the Urim Ve'tumim, which sat over Aharon's heart. (Zichron Amram Zvi)

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***"They shall place upon it a tachash-hide covering, and spread a cloth entirely of techeilet wool over it . . ." (4:6)***

R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; rabbi and rosh yeshiva of Oyber Visheve and other Hungarian towns) notes that the Aron Ha'kodesh was covered first with a hide; then, a covering made from techeilet / blue or turquoise-colored wool was placed on top. In contrast, the other furnishings of the Mishkan were covered first with techeilet or scarlet-colored wool, then a hide was placed on top. (See verses 7-14). Why?

R' Gruenwald explains: The Gemara (Shabbat 145b) asks, "Why do Torah scholars in Bavel / Babylon wear fancy clothes?" The Gemara answers: "When a person is at home, he does not need to dress up to be recognized. Only when he is away does he need to dress up." [Rashi z"l explains that Torah scholars are at home in Eretz Yisrael, so they need no additional recognition. However, those who were exiled to Bavel need to dress up to be recognized as Torah scholars.] Likewise, concludes R' Gruenwald, when the Aron Kodesh is traveling, it needs a special covering as a sign of its distinction. (Keren Le'David)

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## Shavuot

***"Had He brought us before Har Sinai, but not given us the Torah, dayenu / it would have sufficed for us." (From the Pesach Haggadah)***

What would we have gained by coming to Har Sinai but not receiving the Torah? R' Menachem Mendel Hager z"l (1886-1941; rabbi, rosh yeshiva and chassidic rebbe of Oyber Visheve, Hungary; the Visheve Rebbe) explains:

When Moshe Rabbeinu first ascended Har Sinai and then descended to speak to the nation, the nation declared (Shmot 19:8), "Everything that Hashem has spoken na'aseh / we shall do!" That verse concludes, "Moshe brought back the words of the people to Hashem." The Targum Yerushalmi--an Aramaic translation and commentary of the Torah dating to the Sages of the Mishnah--comments: "Moshe brought back the words of the people to Hashem with a prayer." What was that prayer?

The Visheve Rebbe answers: The Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (1698-1760; founder of the chassidic movement) would frequently cite the verse (Tehilim 121:5), "Hashem is your shadow." He would explain: Like a shadow that mimics everything a person does, Hashem's interaction with each Jew is a reflection of that person's own behavior. Thus, when Bnei Yisrael said, "We will do," without even asking what was involved, it was only right that Hashem act toward them in kind. That was Moshe's prayer: May You always respond to the Jewish People before they call to You. And, Hashem agreed, as we read (Yeshayah 65:24), "It will be that before they call, I will answer."

That relationship is what we gained just by coming to Har Sinai. The Visheve Rebbe concludes: We read (Devarim 4:9-10), "Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, [rather] make them known to your children and your children's children, the day that you stood before Hashem, your Elokim, at Chorev [i.e., Har Sinai] . . ." Merely standing before Har Sinai was momentous. Why? The Gemara (Berachot 26b) teaches (in a different context) that "standing" is a reference to prayer. What happened at Har Sinai, apart from receiving the Torah, was that Moshe's prayer was answered, such that we have a relationship with Hashem in which He may answer our prayers even before we utter them. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Sh'eirit Menachem)

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***"According to everyone, the Torah was given on Shabbat." (Shabbat 86b)***

R' Feish Moskovits z"l (1887-1981; communal leader on three continents; son-in-law of the communal leader of Oyber Visheve, Hungary) quotes an unnamed scholar who commented: Torah scholars study the Torah on Shabbat and all week long. For "everyone," i.e., for the ordinary working man, at least they should "receive" the Torah on Shabbat. (Yitzchak Yeranen p.60)

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***"So shall you say to Beit / the House of Yaakov and relate to Bnei Yisrael." (Shmot 19:3 - Torah reading for Shavuot)***

Our Sages say that "Beit Yaakov" refers to the women. R' Chaim Yaakov Mordechai Gottlieb z"l (1899-1973; rabbi in Oyber-Visheve, Hungary) explains that Moshe was commanded to speak to the women first because, on the one hand, a woman (Chava) caused mankind's first downfall and, on the other hand, women were major participants in the miracles that are the reasons for most of our holidays. Our Sages teach, for example, that the Exodus occurred in the merit of righteous women.

Chanukah and Purim, as well, resulted in large part from the initiatives of women. (Yagel Yaakov p.4)

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## Megillat Rut

***"Then all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, 'We are witnesses! May Hashem make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel'." (4:11)***

R' Chaim Yehuda Meir Hager z"l (the Visheve Rebbe in Tel Aviv; died 1968) asks: What was meant by the people's reference to Rachel and Leah?

He explains: Megillat Rut opens with Elimelech relocating to the fields of Moav because of the famine in Eretz Yisrael. Elimelech thought only of himself and failed to consider the suffering of the masses, and for that he was punished. From this, we should learn a lesson about the importance of looking out for the klal / the people in general.

Later in Megillat Rut, we read that Naomi instructed Rut to attach herself to Boaz so that he would marry her. While Boaz's marriage to Rut was not technically Yibum -- Boaz and Rut's late husband were first-cousins, not brothers -- it was reminiscent of that Mitzvah. Yibum is a Mitzvah that teaches us about the importance of every individual, for it is meant to ensure that no person is forgotten. Thus, Megillat Rut teaches us both about the importance of the klal and the importance of the individual.

Rachel and Leah, through their children, embody these two perspectives. Rachel's firstborn, Yosef, was the one who devoted his energies to feed masses of people during a famine. Leah's firstborn, Reuven, was the one who emphasized the importance of every individual by rescuing Yosef from his brothers, saving the individual from the klal.

Being able to see the needs of the klal but also those of the individual is crucial in order for society to flourish. The correct balance between them is the "Shevil Ha'zahav" [literally, "golden path," loosely, "the happy medium"]. The blessing that the people gave Boaz when he married Rut is that she succeed in that balancing act. (Zecher Chaim)