

TORAH THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

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Sponsored by

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on the yahrzeit of his father

Milton Klein (Meir ben Kalman a"h)

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in memory of

Jules' mother Anne Meisler a"h

and sister Gladys Citrino a"h

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on the yahrzeits of

Mrs. Shirley Taragin a"h,

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The Katz family

on the yahrzeit of uncle

Avraham Abba ben Avigdor Moshe Hakohen a"h

We typically think of Sivan as the month when the Torah was given. However, the month of Adar, which begins this coming Monday, also is associated with the Giving of the Torah. Most notably, the Gemara (Shabbat 88a) teaches that the Jewish People did not make a complete, heartfelt acceptance of the Torah until after the Purim miracle. [More about this inside this issue.] Also, Adar is the month in which Moshe Rabbeinu, the Giver of the Torah, was born--a fact which, according to the Gemara (Megillah 13b), contributed to the Purim miracle.

R' Raphael Moshe Luria z"l (Rosh Yeshiva in several chassidic yeshivot in Israel; died 2009) explains: We read in our Parashah (24:12), "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Ascend to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I shall give you the stone Tablets and the teaching and the commandment that I have

written, L'horotam / to teach them'." Chassidic works teach that the word "L'horotam" also has a connotation of "pregnancy," because Torah study done with proper love and devotion causes the Torah's teachings to "multiply." This, explains the Ba'al Shem Tov z"l, is why the Mishnah (Avot ch.6) requires a person to honor anyone who taught him even one letter of the Aleph-Bet--because Torah taught by a dedicated, loving teacher will "multiply" into something much greater.

R' Luria continues: The zodiacal signs of Sivan and Adar are Gemini (twins) and Pisces (fish), respectively. Both of these are signs of fertility, reflecting that these are months suited to the Giving of the Torah, which has a tendency to "multiply" when studied and taught lovingly. (Orah V'simchah: Purim p.18)

"To Moshe He said, 'Go up to Hashem, you . . .'" (24:1)

Midrash Vayikra Rabbah (1:5) teaches: We read in Mishlei (25:6), "It is better that you be told, 'Come up here,' than that you be demoted . . ." When Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe at the Burning Bush, says the Midrash, Moshe hid his face (Shmot 3:6). Hashem said to him, "Lechah / Go, and I will send you to Pharaoh." The word "Lechah" ends with the letter "heh" [which replaces the word, "Atah" / "You"]. Hashem was telling Moshe, "If you do not redeem them, no one else will redeem them."

At the Yam Suf, the Midrash continues, Moshe again stood to the side. Hashem told him (Shmot 14:16), "And you -- lift up your staff and stretch out your arm over the sea and split it." Hashem was telling Moshe, "If you do not split the sea, no one else will split it."

At Har Sinai, Moshe yet again stood to the side. Hashem said to him (in our verse), "Go up to Hashem, you . . ." Hashem was telling Moshe, "If you do not go up, no one else will go up."

Lastly, when the Ohel Mo'ed was completed, Moshe stood to the side. Hashem said to him, "For how long will you demean yourself? This occasion has been awaiting no one but you!" Says the Midrash: Know that this is so, for of all the people, He called only Moshe, as we read (Vayikra 1:1), "He called to Moshe." [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Chanoch Zundel z"l (Poland; died 1867) explains: The verse cited at the beginning of this Midrash is the reason for what is written at the end. Why was the occasion of the dedication of the Mishkan awaiting the participation of Moshe in particular? Because of his humility, which caused him to wait until he was called, not to go where he might not be wanted. Likewise, because Moshe stood to the side on each of the cited occasions, Hashem told him that he was the one uniquely fit for the task in question. (Etz Yosef)

How did Moshe Rabbeinu become, and remain, so humble, to the point that he believed that everyone in the world was more qualified than he to redeem Bnei Yisrael from Egypt (see Ramban to Shmot 4:13)?

R' Yosef Yoizel Horowitz z"l (1847-1919; the Alter of Novardok) explains: The lesson we find in Kohelet (7:20), "For there is no man on earth so wholly righteous that he always does good and never sins," made such an impression on Moshe Rabbeinu that he was unable to be impressed by any of his good character traits. Rather, he was, at all times, conscious of his own imperfection and thinking about how to improve himself. As a result, he was unaware of his own praises. At the same time, he saw only good in others, for seeing bad in others is itself a failure of character. (Madregat Ha'adam: Tikkun Ha'middot ch.4)

"[Moshe] took the Book of the Covenant and read it in ears of the People, and they said, 'Everything that Hashem has said, na'aseh ve'nishmah / we will do and we will hear!'" (24:7)

We read in last week's Parashah (19:17), "Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward Elokim, and they stood at the bottom of the mountain." Rashi z"l (commenting on Devarim 33:3) describes this standing--indeed, crowding--at the foot of the mountain as a meritorious act deserving of Hashem's blessing. This is consistent with Bnei Yisrael's proclamation in our verse, "Na'aseh ve'nishmah" / "We will do and we will hear!"

Yet, the well-known Gemara (Shabbat 88a) interprets the quoted verse in last week's Parashah in exactly the opposite way: "'They stood at the bottom of the mountain'--This teaches that Hashem held the mountain over their heads and threatened, 'If you accept the Torah, good! If not, right here will be your burial place!'" This implies that Bnei Yisrael were less than enthusiastic about accepting the Torah!

R' Leib Mintzberg shlita (rabbi in Bet Shemesh, Israel and Rosh Ha'yeshiva of Yeshivat Ha'masmidim) explains that the resolution to this seeming contradiction lies in the difference between Peshat and Drush. Peshat describes the revealed aspect of an event. Had we been at Har Sinai, we would have seen a nation enthusiastic to receive the Torah. Drush reveals a deeper, hidden aspect of the same event. Here, our Sages are teaching that Bnei Yisrael's apparent enthusiasm was not heartfelt; thus, they had to be forced to receive the Torah. In the words of King David (Tehilim 78:36-37), regarding the proclamation "Na'aseh ve'nishmah": "They sought to beguile Him with their mouth, and they deceived Him with their tongue. Their heart was not constant with Him, and they were not steadfast in His covenant."

Of course, Hashem cannot be fooled, and He gave Bnei Yisrael the Torah because He knew that, through practicing the Mitzvot, they eventually would develop a strong feeling for the Torah. In the words of the 13th century Sefer Ha'chinuch, "A person is influenced by his actions." Indeed, the Gemara (Shabbat 88a) teaches that Bnei Yisrael re-accepted the Torah completely voluntarily almost 1,000 years later, following the Purim miracle.

R' Mintzberg adds: Bnei Yisrael's reluctance to accept the Torah originally was only on the level of

their conscious thought. Subconsciously, our Sages teach, every Jew wants to live by the Torah. This is why Halachah permits Bet Din to force a person to bring a korban, even though sacrificial offerings must be brought voluntarily: subconsciously, every Jew wants to do what is right, but the Yetzer Ha'ra interferes. When Bet Din applies force, the Yetzer Ha'ra is subdued so that man's subconscious will can prevail. In this light, the proclamation, "Na'aseh ve'nishmah," was entirely consistent with Bnei Yisrael's subconscious will--another reason why Hashem ignored their conscious doubts. (Ben Melech: Chochmah U'mussar p.38)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them." (21:1)

Rashi z"l writes: Why is this Parashah, which deals with the civil laws, placed immediately after the instructions for making an altar [at the end of last week's Parashah]? To tell you that you should seat the Sanhedrin / High Court next to the Bet Hamikdash. [Until here from Rashi]

Where did the Sanhedrin sit? The Mishnah (Middot 5:4) relates that there were three chambers adjoining the Temple Courtyard on the north, and one of them was the Lishkat Ha'gazit / Chamber of Hewn Stone, where the Sanhedrin sat.

Why was the meeting place of the Sanhedrin called the "Chamber of Hewn Stone"? R' Yehoshua Yosef Hakohen Feinberg z"l (19th century rabbi of Mard, Poland) cites the commentary Tosafot Yom Tov which states that it was to show honor to the Sanhedrin. R' Feinberg elaborates: No other chamber in the Temple is described as being made of hewn stone. From this we can infer that this chamber was described by the high quality of its construction materials to give honor to those who used it--the members of the Sanhedrin. This highlights, continues R' Feinberg, that Torah study is more important than even the Korban Tamid / Daily Offering, because the chamber where Kohanim slept so they would be ready to bring the Korban Tamid first thing in the morning is not described in such terms. Although, notes R' Feinberg, the Gemara (Megillah 3b) debates whether Torah study or the Daily Offering is greater, it is undisputed that public Torah study, which is what the Sanhedrin engaged in, is greater.

Also, writes R' Feinberg, having the Sanhedrin sit in a chamber made of high quality materials would enhance its honor in the people's eyes and instill awe in those who came there to litigate or to seek Halachic rulings.

Alternatively, "Lishkat Ha'gazit" can mean "Chamber of Cut Things," because there the law was "cut" [a play on Hebrew words, similar to saying in English that the Sanhedrin's Halachic rulings were "cut and dried"]. (Ezrat Kohanim)