

## **Jewish Continuity: The Torah as an Inheritance**

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The Talmud (Sukkah 42a) tells us that one of the very first verses from the Torah that a child should learn is that of ‘*Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morasha kehilas Yaakov*’. Indeed in Jewish pre-schools around the world, this sweet melody is heard in their morning davening (prayers) each day. The second half of the verse tells us that Torah is ‘an inheritance for the congregation of Jacob’. What message does this verse bring which is so fundamental to the educational process?

This verse raises a question regarding a Mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:12). R’ Yose tells us that we must approach the study of Torah as a task which requires preparation. His reasoning is that Torah is not an inheritance. The question is clear. Our parsha speaks clearly that the Torah is in fact an inheritance; what does R’ Yose mean? Clearly the Torah has some aspects of an inheritance and lacks other aspects. An inheritance is something valuable, imbued with meaning which spans across generations. However, an inheritance is also something which is received passively without any work on the part of the recipient. It is accepted, not earned.

The Torah is certainly rich with meaning and importance. It bridges the gap of time and connects us with all previous generations. In this way Torah is clearly an inheritance. However, the Torah is not received without effort. Even in Rabbinic families with strong traditions of intense Torah study, a true understanding of Torah comes only with tremendous work. The Gemara (Bava Metzia 85 & Bava Basra 59a) speaks of Torah being more easily acquired when it had been in the family for a number of generations. However, although the Torah may be more accessible to a person who grows up among Torah scholars, it needs no less effort<sup>1</sup>.

A story is told of the Maggid of Mezritch whose house burned down when he was a young child. He saw his mother weeping over the ashes and asked her why she was so upset. She told him that the family had documentation which traced their lineage back to R’ Yochanan Sandaler, the great Tannah, which had been burned in the fire. The Maggid comforted his mother by telling her that he would create a new family tree, and so it was. True greatness in Torah is never simply an inheritance.

R’ Meir Simcha of Dvinsk relates this pasuk to Mitzva observance as well as Torah study. He quotes the Gemara (Shabbos 88a) which tells us that Hashem coerced the Jewish people into accepting the Torah and because of this there was always a flaw in our acceptance of the Torah. This flaw existed until the time of Purim when we accepted the Torah willingly. R’ Meir Simcha explains this Gemara in a very compelling way. What forced the Jewish people to

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<sup>1</sup> The Gemara in BavaBasra (59a) says that once there are 3 generations of Torah scholars then the bond of Torah is ‘*lo B’Meheirah yinatek*’ – ‘it does not break easily.’ The idea that it still requires work is actually meduyak in the words, ‘*lo B’Meheirah yinatek*’ since it can break, just not easily. See also Tosfos there who limits the Gemara to a situation where all three generations are alive at the same time.

accept the Torah was the clarity with which they understood the Torah. When they were at the high level of understanding which they reached at Mt. Sinai, they absolute need to keep every Mitzva was crystal clear to them. However, the flaw was they only accepted the Torah in a modality where they fully comprehended its wisdom. How would they be able to keep all the laws in their regular lives when they had no such understanding? This was rectified when they re-accepted the Torah in the time of Mordechai and Esther. At that time they involved themselves in keeping the Miztvot at great personal sacrifice (*mesiras nefesh*). The story of Purim is one where the Torah was brought into the every day lives of the Jewish people. There was a willingness to put great effort into keeping the commandments despite the fact that we were not at the high level of Mt. Sinai. R' Meir Simcha explains that this is the way that the Torah becomes a morasha, an inheritance. When we show ourselves and our children how meaningful the Torah is to us, by sacrificing in order to keep it, it truly becomes an inheritance. May we be privileged to see this in our day.