



## PREPARING TO RECEIVE THE TORAH

Most of the days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* have now passed, and now is the time to prepare for receiving the Torah. Let us reflect about the day in which the Torah was given to *am Yisrael*.

The Torah is called the "*raishis*" (beginning), which means that the Torah is the beginning of all wisdom. This is the simple meaning of the concept of its "*raishis*", but on a deeper level, the concept of "*raishis*" is something which takes place in the present as well. Not only does Hashem constantly renew Creation, but there is a constant acceptance of the Torah, due to the fact that Torah is the *raishis* ("beginning") of the world.

## RAISHIS/BEGINNING IN SPACE, TIME AND SOUL

There is a concept of "World, Time, and Soul"<sup>1</sup> - everything that exists in space and time exists on a personal level in our own souls. Let us consider this concept of *raishis*/beginning that is contained in the Torah, and how it exists in all three of these dimensions.

In "World" (space), the "*raishis*" of Torah is the fact that "Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world"; the Torah preceded the world, and in this sense it is the *raishis*/beginning of the world. In "Time", the *raishis*/beginning of Torah was that it always existed.

In "Soul", the *raishis*/beginning of the soul is revealed through attaining a personal connection with the Torah. Every person, in the depths of his heart, as well as in his conscious intellect, is aware of what comes first, second, third, fourth, etc. In our own soul as well, there is a certain order of the soul's internal forces.

When the Torah was given to us, we received the power of "*raishis*", for the Torah is called "*raishis*".

## THE "RAISHIS" LEVEL OF TORAH IS ONLY FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The fact that we received the Torah that is "*raishis*" (the beginning) thus had ramifications in all of the three dimensions- space, time, and our soul.

As an example, the Torah was given only to the Jewish people; if a gentile studies it, he is liable to capital punishment, because it is considered as if he is violating a married woman. Although there are some parts of Torah which apply to gentiles as well, such as the Seven Noachide Laws which they are obligated to accept (the Gemara says that although they accepted this obligation, nowadays they do not even keep it<sup>2</sup>), and in addition, the Gemara states that Hashem originally offered the Torah to all of the nations in the world<sup>3</sup>, even so, the Torah which could apply to gentiles does not contain the power of *raishis*.

Only the Jewish people have the Torah that contains the power of *raishis*/beginning. Yisrael were "the first to "rise up in the thoughts of Hashem", and the nation of Yisrael is called "*raishis*" (as Chazal state, "*Beraishis* – *b'shvil Yisrael*" (for the sake of the Jewish people), who are called "*raishis*" (the first)).

Therefore, only the nation of Yisrael, who are called the "*raishis*", can receive the Torah, namely, the level of Torah which contains "*raishis*". The other nations of the world, however, are not called the "*raishis*"; therefore they cannot receive Torah on the level of "*raishis*".

Thus, the Torah is revealed to the Jewish people via the power of "*raishis*" in their souls.

<sup>2</sup> Bava Kamma 38a

<sup>3</sup> Avodah Zarah 3a

<sup>1</sup> Sefer Yetzirah 3:1

# PREPARING TO RECEIVE THE TORAH

## TORAH OF "RAISHIS" IS ATTAINABLE VIA THE POWER OF "RAISHIS" IN THE SOUL

Before the Torah was given, Hashem opened all the heavens [and showed them "*Ain Od Milvado*", that there is nothing besides Him]. The inner reason for this was so that they would first be shown Him, and then they could be shown the very first offshoot of Him, which is the Torah. Every year, the light of the giving of the Torah, as well as the light of receiving the Torah, renew and return.

The giving of the Torah is essentially Hashem giving us the power of "*raishis*" through the Torah, to the Jewish people, who are called the *raishis*/beginning.

There is much depth to the concept of receiving the Torah, but one of the fundamental aspects to it is that a person is receiving the power of *raishis*/beginning from the Torah. In order to receive it, one must give over the "*raishis*" of his own personal soul, for the Torah, and then he can reveal the Torah which is called "*raishis*"; and even more so, to reveal the One who gave the Torah: "*I am the First, and I am the Last, and besides for Me there is no other god.*"<sup>4</sup>

## THE AVODAH OF SEFIRAS HA'OMER: GETTING DEEPER INTO OUR SOUL

We count 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, and then we come to the 50<sup>th</sup> day, which we do not count. The 50<sup>th</sup> day is not part of the count, because it is above the count. It is referred to as "*echad*" (one) in the *Shir HaYichud*. The 50<sup>th</sup> day of the Omer [Shavuot], the day of the giving of the Torah, it is the day where "Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one" – it is the *echad* (oneness), or the *raishis*/beginning, of all reality.

The *avodah* of a person throughout the 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, in order to properly enter the day where the Torah was given, is to reach the *raishis*/beginning of one's soul.

There are garments upon garments in our soul, and if a person remains at the level of the garments of his soul and he does not penetrate past those garments, he lives life like a child, who lives superficially and who never experiences his own inner reality. When a

person gets older, sometimes he becomes even more superficial than when he was a child, and sometimes he becomes a bit more spiritual and inward, each person on his own level. Whatever a person's situation, one must have a goal to reach the inner layer of his own soul, which is the *raishis*/beginning in his soul.

Our Sages wrote that the 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* are days of clarifying our soul, getting deeper and deeper into the soul's layers, until we eventually reach the deepest and most hidden point in our soul, which is really the point of "*raishis*" (beginning) in the soul. It is in that deep place in ourselves where we can stand at Har Sinai and receive the Torah there.

But in order to reach it, one needs to keep penetrating further and further into the layers of the soul.

## STUDYING IN-DEPTH THE TOPIC OF "TORAH STUDY"

If we reflect a little, we can notice that our Sages have said thousands of sayings about the greatness of learning Torah, of how great it is to study it, of its great reward, etc. The *Nefesh HaChaim* (in *shaar daled*) explains much about this. These statements of Chazal are describing the truth about the Torah and of the inner essence of the Torah.

However – and I am placing a great stress here on "however" – that is all with regards to the One Who gave us the Torah, and what He gave to us. Shavuot is the day when the Torah was "given", and that is what Chazal are describing when praising the qualities of learning Torah.

But we, who receive it and who must prepare for it, and comprehend it – not only must we try to understand on an intellectual level what *Chazal* have said about the greatness of Torah learning – besides for this basic part, each person needs to wonder how much he has truly reached his own "portion" in Torah learning. This generally divides into three different aspects, as follows.

## INSPIRATION AND CLARIFICATION

When it came to learning *mussar*, Reb Yisrael Salanter

4 *Yeshayahu* 44:6

## PREPARING TO RECEIVE THE TORAH

said that there are three parts involved. The first aspect is to become passionate and inspired when learning *mussar*. The second aspect is to use intellectual understanding, to clarify and understand the matters being learned; when one acquires the necessary knowledge, his *avodah* after that is to internalize the knowledge in his heart. The first method, inspiration, works directly with the heart. One can accomplish it by speaking to his heart. The other method is to use the intellect, seeking to define and clarify the information that one learns.

When it comes to the particular aspect of awakening ourselves to appreciate the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, these two parts also play a role. When one wants to strengthen his exertion in Torah learning and to increase his connection to the Torah, just as learning *mussar* requires passion, so must a person passionately learn the sections of *mussar* that describe the greatness of Torah, so that he can be inspired and moved. Just as there is a general *mussar* session, so can a person have a specific *mussar* session, where he focuses his *mussar* learning just on the topic of learning Torah.

The second part is to clarify, with your mind, the greatness of Torah and learning Torah. Anyone who has grown up in an environment where Torah learning was the norm should not suffice with this level. He might have heard since he was a child about how important it is to learn Torah, both in his home and in his school, where he slowly absorbed the message that Torah learning is so important. But to remain at that level is *katnus mochin* (small-mindedness).

The more a person matures, the more he must deepen his appreciation for learning Torah. Just as hearing the *halachos* of washing your hands in the morning when you are a child is not the same as hearing these *halachos* when you get older, when you learn these *halachos* more in-depth and in much more detail, in the same way, we need to deepen our understanding of the importance of Torah learning, even if we already heard about it a lot when we were growing up. So it is not enough if a person knows many of the statements of Chazal about learning Torah. One

must now acquire this knowledge on a level of *da'as*<sup>5</sup>.

We can understand that a *gadol* (a leader of the generation) has a much more mature and deeper understanding of the greatness of the Torah, and that this awareness does not come on its own. It is an understanding which is gained through the power of *da'as*. A person cannot have a deep appreciation for the power of Torah learning just from what he has heard about it from his childhood years. The stage of childhood was certainly an impressionable stage, but that level of understanding is not on the level of *da'as*. A child cannot comprehend what it means to have true exertion in Torah and to understand the exaltedness of the Torah.

If that child has grown up and he is now an adult, and he has never yet deepened his understanding of the greatness of Torah learning, even if he remembers a lot of statements of Chazal about how important and great it is to learn Torah, he has never really clarified and understood what it means. A person needs to first find this information and study it. The many words of Chazal about Torah learning are spread out all over the Talmud, and they are not concentrated in any one place. The *Nefesh HaChaim* put many of these statements together in one place, but it doesn't nearly exhaust the topic.

One must know clearly that in order to understand the importance of Torah learning, he needs to acquire this knowledge on a level of *da'as*, just as a person can only acquire something if he is a *bar da'as* (capable of mature understanding). It is the most important "*sugya*" one can ever learn about, because the Torah is the root of every *sugya*, for every *sugya* is built upon the qualities, exaltedness, and exertion in Torah.

Without a doubt, there is a vast difference between a person who remains with his child understanding about Torah learning, with a person who has studied this topic in-depth, on a level of *da'as*, with the attitude that learning about this matter is a part of the Torah like any other part of Torah that we learn about. One

<sup>5</sup> *inner knowledge*

# PREPARING TO RECEIVE THE TORAH

can gain a whole new kind of understanding towards the topic of Torah study, undergoing a huge change of perspective, and as a result from this, he gains a much greater level of exertion, and connection to, the Torah.

This is an incredible insight when we reflect into it. One might remain throughout his life with a childish perspective towards Torah learning, and sadly, many people remain with an immature perspective towards it. A person might be a fully grown adult and he is learning the Torah with adult mental abilities, yet his actual appreciation for Torah learning is on the level of a child. For this reason, many people slacken off in their Torah learning. They are actively involved in Torah learning on an adult level, but are being motivated on a childish level.

Therefore, besides for the fact that a person should learn about the importance of Torah study in a way that inspires himself, which is surely important, even more so, a person must clarify and understand the “*sugya*” of Torah study. If anyone desires to be a true *ben Torah*, this is what he should do. There must be an ongoing clarification throughout his life of the “*sugya*” of Torah study.

The intention here is not that a person should learn about this topic for many months and devote all of his time to learning about it. We only mean that a *ben Torah* needs to also clarify this very important topic at some point in his life, and the earlier the better. From clarifying this very important *sugya*, one will gain a clearer, stronger picture of Torah study, which will make him feel more obligated to learn Torah, an appreciation of the Torah which is more uplifting. With this, his connection to Torah will strengthen. Understandably, a person also needs to have exertion in Torah along with this. That is clear and simple.

## PERSONAL CONNECTION TO THE TORAH

That’s all the first step. The second step, which was mentioned a bit before, is that after a person has inspired himself about the importance of Torah study, and after he has delved into the topic of Torah study

and he has clarified the details of this topic, the next part is to make an inner clarification, of how much connection to the Torah do I feel.

It is written, “*And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart.*” In all of life, we encounter knowledge contained in our brain, but we must then bring this knowledge into our heart. It is said that the distance between the brain and the heart is greater than the distance between the sky and the earth.<sup>6</sup> Our intellectual understanding about the importance of Torah learning, initially, is not on the level of a “heart understanding” of it, where the true connection to Torah lies. It is one thing to know about the importance of exertion in Torah study, on an intellectual level. That is the first step one needs to traverse, but the second step is for a person to clarify on what level he is really found on; to know where his personal portion in Torah is.

Each person has his own place in Torah learning. There is what you learn in Torah, how you learn Torah, which parts of Torah you learn, and this is one kind of personal share in Torah learning. We are not talking here about that kind of “share” in Torah learning. Here we are talking about something else: How much personal connection do you feel to the Torah?

The Torah is called *raishis*/beginning, and this should not remain as an intellectual definition to us, and it is not only a quality of the Torah; rather, it must become visualized by our own personal soul. One must come to truly feel that the Torah is the *raishis* of his soul, that it is the first and primary force in his soul. When one feels that this “*raishis*” is his soul’s primary force, he is connected to the Torah.

The subtle, inner clarification which one should make, deep in his heart, is for a person to wonder: “What am I truly connected to? What am I attached to? Where is my heart found?”

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6 *The Alter of Kelm*