

FROM THE EDITOR

WWW.JEWISHLIFE.CO.ZA



What if I told you that you were literally sitting on buried treasure – located closer than your backyard – and you didn't even know it?

Shavuot celebrates the singular historical event for which the entire world was created: the giving of the Torah to the children of Israel on Har Sinai. The gemara teaches¹ that when a baby is inside his mother, he is taught the entire Torah. But, as soon as he is born, a malach (angel) comes, slaps him on his mouth, and he forgets everything that he had learned. Our Sages ask an obvious question: If, from the moment that he is born, a baby immediately forgets all of the Torah that he previously learned when he was inside his mother's womb, as though he had

never learned it at all, then what was the point of him learning any of that Torah in the first place?

One suggested answer shows just how much each of us has the potential to contribute to the Jewish people.

In the short y'hi ratzon ("may it be Your will") prayer that we say after the Shemoneh Esrei, we beseech Hashem to speedily rebuild the Temple "...and give us our portion in Your Torah". What does it mean "our portion in Your Torah"?

Our Sages teach that, at the time the Torah was given, the soul of every Jew who would ever live stood at Har Sinai. Each of us witnessed this historic event and, accordingly, each of us received his very own portion of the Torah as an inheritance. When a baby is in his mother's womb, it's this portion of the Torah – his portion, the one that he received at Har Sinai – that he is taught. And, it's called "the entire Torah" because it's the portion of the Torah that is applicable to him and to his soul. When the baby is born, it's this Torah that he forgets.

The gemara teaches elsewhere² that, "If someone will tell you that he toiled [in the study of Torah], but did not find, don't believe him; that he did not toil, but he found, don't believe him; that he toiled and found, believe him." Why doesn't the gemara just say that the person laboured in the study of Torah and was successful? Why the emphasis on "finding"? Our Sages teach that the use of the term "found" here is very intentional and extremely precise – because, by using such a term, the gemara is implying that the object had previously belonged to that person and simply became lost from him. In other words, it's not something new that a person uncovers or discovers through his diligent study – what he finds in the end was already his from the very beginning, the portion that he had learned and been forced to forget!

When a baby is in the womb, before his soul has entered inside him and become bound and restricted by his body, before it has come into contact with the impurities inherent in the physical world and its power of illumination darkened, it is at that point that the baby can learn "the entire Torah". And, that Torah actually remains there, guarded and hidden away inside a person, within his very soul, until he searches after it, toiling and labouring in study. His success, or lack thereof, in finding it depends entirely on the amount of effort that he exerts and invests in the search for his lost object.

And this also helps us to understand the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (2:8) that teaches, "If you have learned a lot of Torah, don't take credit for it – because that's what you were created for." A man is taught in the womb of his mother all of the Torah that he will be able to learn throughout his life. A man can't take credit for the Torah that he learns, however, because he didn't produce any of those ideas; he merely recovered what had been previously given to him as a gift – his lost portion that he had been taught and forgotten. And this is precisely what he was created to do; his mission on this earth.

What we mustn't lose sight of is the fact that, when it comes to the Torah, each of us has something to contribute, a gift given to us long ago by Hashem. If we take the time to search for what we've lost and to recover it, each of us has something priceless to share with the entire Jewish people. Like puzzle pieces that interlock to form a larger picture, just imagine how much we all stand to lose when someone decides that he can't be bothered with learning Torah, with recovering that portion that was decreed especially for him and taught to him in the womb – and the big gap that his portion, forever lost, leaves for all of us in the larger picture formed by those puzzle pieces.

From everyone at JL, chag sameach!

ROBERT SUSSMAN,
EDITOR

Based on a sicha from the Sifsei Chaim

¹Niddah 30b

²Megillah 6b

Baruch dayan ha'emes

We pay great tribute to Linda Superfain who after a three month illness passed away just before this issue was due to go to press. Linda was an integral part of JL from the very beginning and helped us plan and create the magazine. She was such a vibrant person, dedicated, loyal and talented and will be greatly missed as a wonderful colleague and a dear friend. May Hashem comfort her family, Wayne, Steve, Josh, Neville, Thelma and Natalie.

Martyn and Liz Samuels and the JL team

CREDITS

PUBLISHER & MANAGING DIRECTOR

Martyn Samuels
martyn@jewishlife.co.za

EDITOR

Robert Sussman
robert@jewishlife.co.za

ART DIRECTOR

Rizelle Hartmeier
studio26@telkomsa.net

FEATURES WRITER

Chandrea Serebro

COPY EDITOR/PROOFREADER

Dovid Samuels

DIGITAL MANAGER

David Blumenau
david@jewishlife.co.za

CONTRIBUTORS

Rabbi Dr David Fox, Dean Furman, Bev Goldman,
Rabbi Yossy Goldman, Larry Hirschowitz, Wendy Kahn,
Serenne Kaplan, Richard Pearce, Ilan Preskovsky, Dovid
Samuels, Liz Samuels, Chandrea Serebro, Rabbi Ari
Shishler, Michelle Vinokur, Aron Ziegler

Printers Paarlmedia kzn

Distribution

Merle Jacobson
Marc Levitt

JEWISH LIFE is published by Total Publishing
(Pty) Ltd ©2008.

If you live within the boundaries of the
eruv, feel free to take this publication
home with you.

**THIS PUBLICATION CONTAINS WORDS
OF TORAH. PLEASE TREAT IT WITH
THE RESPECT IT DESERVES.**

ISSN 1994-8670

Total Publishing (Pty) Ltd
PO Box 52339, Saxonwold 2132

The views expressed in this issue of
Jewish Life are not necessarily those
of the Publisher or Editor.



Certified for the period
July - December 2017: 12 772



ON THE COVER:
SHAVUOT CELEBRATES
THE GIVING OF THE
TORAH TO THE JEWISH
PEOPLE. ON THE COVER, A
YOUNG BOY HOLDS A
SEFER TORAH, ITS MANTLE,
OR COVER, EMBLAZONED WITH THE
WORDS, "TORAH TZIVA LANU
MOSHE" ("THE TORAH WAS COMMANDED
TO US BY MOSHE") – THE VERY FIRST
WORDS THAT A CHILD SHOULD BE
TAUGHT TO SAY. (SEE SUCCAH 42A)