

The Real KABBALAH

Torah is about what we do – and nothing says more to our children than our actions | BY ROBERT SUSSMAN



THIS YEAR, JUST LAST MONTH, WE MARKED the 3,266th anniversary of the day that Hashem first started transmitting His Torah to us from a small mountain in the middle of nowhere. The Torah was given to all of us, to the entire Jewish people. And, although the Torah is referred to as our inheritance² – our heritage – like any gift that is given to us, we still have to choose to accept it, to receive this most precious gift.

As *Pirkei Avos*³ illustrates with its very first mishna: Moshe kibeil Torah mi'sinai (Moshe received the Torah

from Sinai). And our sages famously tell us⁴ that, although Hashem wanted to share His Torah with the entire world, the other nations of the world simply would not accept His gift:

When Hashem revealed His Torah and gave it to the nation of Israel, not to Israel alone did he reveal it, but to all of the nations. First He went to the children of Eisav and asked them: "Do you wish to accept (m'kabalim) the Torah?" And they said to Him: "What's written in it?" Hashem answered: "Do not murder." They said to Him: "Master of the

Universe, the essence of our father was to murder, as it's written, '...the hands are the hands of Eisav,'⁵ and he was promised⁶ by his father, Yitzchak, 'By your sword will you live!'" [So they would not accept the Torah.]

Hashem then went to the children of Ammon and Moav. He said to them: "Do you wish to accept the Torah?" They too asked: "What's written in it?" Hashem answered: "Do not commit sexual immorality." They responded: "Master of the Universe, our very existence is because of incestuous relations!"

These two nations, who are descended from the daughters of Lot, also happened to have been fathered by Lot himself⁷. [So they also would not accept the Torah.]

Hashem then went to the children of Yishmael. He said to them: "Do you wish to accept the Torah?" They too asked: "What's written in it?" Hashem answered: "Do not steal." They responded: "Master of the Universe, the essence of our father was to be a bandit⁸, as it's written⁹, 'And he will be a man of the wild; his hand will be in everything...'. [So they also would not accept the Torah.]

I think the reactions that are brought in this midrash are genuine – and I'll tell you why. As I learned through this midrash, it was hard not to be reminded of my own father's immediate reaction when I sat my parents down and told them that I had decided to become Torah observant and to spend some time studying in yeshiva. The very first thing that came out of my father's mouth was: "You'll never have Carson's ribs again!" [Carson's is a restaurant in Chicago that's famous for its non-kosher food – specifically: pork ribs (...incredibly tasty pork ribs).] But what my father had in mind was no different from what these nations were saying: "Do you know what's written¹⁰ in the Torah? 'You shall not eat...pig.' Are you ready to give that up? Are you ready to live by such laws?"

The midrash concludes:

There was not a single nation on whose door Hashem did not knock to ask if they were willing to receive His Torah!

And each of those nations found a reason not to accept it. What was Israel's response? Famously: Na'aseh v'nishma¹¹ – we will do and we will listen. We accepted the Torah wholeheartedly. When the Creator of the Universe comes knocking on your door and tells you that He has a gift for you, do you need to make inquiries as to what it is before deciding to accept it; to consider whether it's good?

So Hashem wanted to share His Torah with the world – and we were the only nation willing to accept it. But ac-

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cepting the Torah isn't enough. We need to transmit it as well. Moshe kibeil Torah mi'sinai, u'mesorah li'hoshua.¹² Moshe received the Torah from Sinai... and he transmitted it to his student, Yehoshua (Joshua). And the entire first chapter of *Pirkei Avos* continues with detailing the transmission of Torah from Rebbe to Talmid (teacher to student) over the course of many generations. So important is the transmission of Torah that the Rambam (Maimonides) begins his monumental work, the *Mishneh Torah*, by detailing the chain of transmission from Moshe Rabbeinu (our teacher) all the way through to Rav Ashi and Ravina, who were from the last generation of those who composed the Talmud.

So we see that the Torah is about kabbalah and mesorah – it is about receiving and transmitting. In other words, it's not enough for any of us to just accept this gift only for ourselves; we have to also pass it on to our children and encourage them to accept it as well – to show by our example what makes this gift something worth receiving... and preserving. The fact is that, like it or not, when it comes to Jewish life, our children will almost certainly do less than we do. If we take a minute and think about our own grandparents – and then think about our own parents – and, finally, we think about ourselves – this simple truth will become very obvious indeed. We need to be constantly striving to do more if only so that our children and grandchildren will wind up doing something, rather than nothing. We all want to

give our children everything that we didn't have. But as Rabbi Azriel Chaim Goldfein, z"l, founder and Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshivah Gedolah of Johannesburg, used to say, we must not forget to give our children what we did have. Just as we have fond memories of going to shul, of lighting the menorah, of being at a Pesach Seder – of living a Jewish life – so too we must be sure to create such memories for our own children and grandchildren. Torah is about what we do – and nothing says more to our children than our actions.

Please G-d, may we all merit to be included on the great list of mesorah (transmission) that Hashem Himself keeps. May it read out that each of us in our generation – and in all of the generations to follow – was m'kabeil (received) the Torah from those who came before us, and in turn transmitted it to those who came after us – to our children and to our grandchildren and so on and so on. And may we each form a mighty link in the never-ending chain of transmission that continues to stretch all the way back to Sinai. **■**

¹The Torah was given in the year 2448

²See Devarim 33:4

³Pirkei Avos 1:1

⁴Sifre on Devarim 33:2; see also Avodah Zorah 2b

⁵Bereishis 27:22

⁶Bereishis 27:40

⁷See Bereishis 19:37-8

⁸See Rashi on Bereishis 16:12 d"h yado vakol

⁹Bereishis 16:12

¹⁰Devarim 14:7

¹¹Shemos 24:7

¹²Pirkei Avos 1:1