

Parshas Yisro 5772

THE GREATEST GIFT

“I have not authored this work in order to inform people of things they did not know, but rather, to remind them of those ideas of which they did know previously and were actually quite familiar... But in the same measure by which these ideas are common knowledge... so, too is there a tendency to forget about them entirely...” So does the Ramchal begin his magnum opus, *Mesilas Yesharim*.

These words could apply here, as well. We are all well familiar with the fact that אֲשֶׁרֵינוּ מָה טוֹב חֶלְקֵינוּ וּמָה נְעִים – “we are fortunate, how great is our portion, and how sweet is our lot” (*shacharis, L’olam yehei odom*). Yet, as familiar as the idea is, so, too is the tendency for it to slip our consciousness. In theory, at least, if we would truly internalize just how blessed we are as Hashem’s children and as members of the Torah nation, we would walk around with irrepressible smiles on our faces at all times. As the Ohr Hachaim famously mentions (*Devarim 26:11*), if people were to be truly cognizant of the inherent sweetness of Torah, they would go absolutely crazy in frenzied pursuit of Torah knowledge. And so, on the occasion of this week’s *parshah*, which speaks of the granting of the Torah, let us momentarily pause to reflect on what is inherently a truly blissful situation and renew and “remind ourselves” of the אֲשֶׁרֵינוּ sentiment.

A STEAL!

Remarking on B’nei Yisrael’s great fortune upon receiving the Torah, the Mishnah in Avos (3:14) states:

חֲבִיבֵינוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁנִּתְּנָה לָהֶם כָּלֵי חֻמְדָּה... שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר, כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נִתְּתִי לָכֶם, תּוֹרַתִי אֵל תַּעֲזוּבוּ.

In memory of my departed father on his yahrtzeit

אברהם משה בן יעקב ע"ה

by Mr. Mark Scherer, Bellmore, NY

“Beloved are Yisrael, for they were given a precious implement... as it says (*Mishlei 4:2*), ‘For I have given you a good acquisition; do not forsake My Torah.’”

There appears to be a contradiction in this verse quoted by the Mishnah. Two common forms of acquisitions are מְקָח (a purchase) and מַתָּנָה (a gift). The main difference between the two, obviously, is that one entails paying a price, while the other is free. Regarding the presentation of the Torah, the verse seems to speak of *both* forms, referring to the acquisition as a לָקַח (from the same root as מְקָח), but stating that it was *given* (נִתְּתִי) as opposed to *sold*. Was the Torah given as a מְקָח or a מַתָּנָה?

R’ Chaim Volozhiner (*Ru’ach Chaim, Avos, ibid.*) explains that the verse’s intent is to highlight Yisrael’s good fortune. Being such a wonderful entity, the Torah really should have been acquired through purchase and for a price befitting such a valuable object. Nevertheless, Hashem “waived the fee,” so to speak, and granted it to the Jewish people for “free.”

But the beneficence manifest in Hashem’s granting us the Torah does not end there. Consider the aspect of reward. The engagement in Torah study has no real parallel when it comes to the promised recompense. “These are the *mitzvos* for which a person receives dividends in this world, while the principle is retained for the World to Come... and the study of Torah is equivalent to them all” (*Peah 1:1*). The Chofetz Chaim points out that, technically speaking, one has fulfilled the mitzvah of studying Torah, even through the recitation of a single word of Torah. Consequently, one who “learns,” say, ten words, has fulfilled this mitzvah ten times over. Given that this mitzvah is the equivalent of a conglomeration of all

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of אהרן בן חיים ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his neshamah.

of the 613 *mitzvos*, this means that, in effect, the learner of ten words has actually fulfilled the equivalent of 6,130 *mitzvos*. The average person, speaking at regular speed, utters 200 words per minute (as per the Chofetz Chaim's personal calculations). This means that one who learns Torah for one minute has fulfilled 200 X 613 *mitzvos* – a total of 122,600 *mitzvos* in one minute's time. One hour's worth of Torah study yields 7,356,000 *mitzvos*. Imagine if one learns for many hours. Imagine if one learns many hours every day for many years! Imagine what one can "earn" over the course of a lifetime (cf. *Mishnas Chayim, parshas Shemini, 5768*)!

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS


In short, the reward opportunity alone is astronomical. "All of the great prophecies (concerning the wondrous reward for dedication to Torah) were speaking about one who is associated with and supports Torah scholars. But Torah scholars themselves (immersed in actual learning) – concerning their reward, it is written (*Yeshayah 64:3*): "No eye has been able to behold... what shall be repaid to those who have invested in Him" (*Berachos 34b*).

For the promise of such boundless bliss, one would have been prepared to commit to almost any task, no matter how grueling or un-enjoyable. In the world today, there are countless people who engage in menial tasks under extreme conditions in exchange for meager payment; for the right price, any sane person would be only too willing to perform the most difficult and unpleasant of tasks. Certainly, for the incomparable reward offered for Torah study, one should jump at the opportunity. Even if – hypothetically – equivalent reward were to be offered for the task of banging one's head continuously against the wall, we would be only too thrilled to oblige. Even if, Heaven forefend, the study of Torah was considered a tedious, unsatisfying endeavor, we should attack the job with gusto in anticipation of the extraordinary wages.

Yet this is not the case at all! Far from an empty experience, the pure enjoyment of Torah study is likewise without equal. As David Hamelech expresses: "Hashem's Torah

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is perfect; it restores the soul... (and) gladdens the heart.. They (words of Torah) are more precious than gold and much platinum... (They are) sweeter than honey and the yield of the comb..." (*Tehillim 19:8-11*).

"If not for Your Torah – which served as my delight – I would have been lost through my afflictions" (*ibid. 119:92*). Accounts of the indescribable joy experienced throughout the ages by those dedicated to its study are too numerous to recount. It is quite conceivable that – for the opportunity to attain such bliss – one would have been more than satisfied to engage in Torah study even had no reward been offered.

How fortunate we are, then, that we can attain Torah knowledge at no cost; we can delight in its teachings; and for all of this, we are lavished with boundless reward! These are just a few of the ideas for which we may wholeheartedly declare: אֲשֶׁר יָנוּ מֵה טוֹב חֻלְקֵינוּ!