



Thirst for Torah

“*Bachodesh hashelishi letzeit Benei Yisrael mei-eretz Mitzrayim, bayom hazeh ba’ru mid-bar Sinai* – In the third month after the Jewish people left Egypt, **on this day**, they came to the desert of Sinai.” (*Shemot 19:1*) Rashi is bothered by the Torah’s use of the word “*hazeh*,” to describe which day they arrived at the Sinai desert. It seems that “*bayom hahu* – on that day,” would have been a sufficient expression. Thus, Rashi concludes that the text is conveying a present tense, i.e. that the words of Torah should always have the quality of something new, “*ke’ilu hayom hazeh nitnu* - as if they were given this very day.” How can we achieve this lofty level? After all, we received the Torah thousands of years ago, moreover, we have learned and reviewed parts of the Torah so many times. Is it even possible to encounter a Torah thought we are familiar with as if it is new?

The students of Slabodka offer an interesting comparison. Consider food. It is true that one wouldn’t be able to tolerate eating the same meal repeatedly every day, or even day after day. However, if one is very hungry, he will eat the same meal again and again with no qualms. If he is starving, he will feel the pleasure of having his appetite filled even if he just ate the same meal earlier. We can approach Torah with a ‘big appetite,’ devouring each lesson or verse as if it were the first time we came upon it.

Rav Gifter zt”l offers a fascinating insight into a famous passage in the Talmud that deepens this idea. “*Al mah avdah ha’aretz? ... shelo barchu baTorah.*” Why was the land destroyed? Since they did not say the blessing on the Torah before learning it. (*Bava Metzia 85b*) Our sages teach that Torah is compared to water, “all who thirst, go to water...” (*Yeshaya 55:1*) Just as one only says a brachah on water if he is thirsty and the water will quench that thirst, so too, since the Jews at that time did not have a ‘thirst’ for Torah, they could never say the *birkat haTorah* with genuine feeling!

Indeed, *Chovot Halevavot* teaches that one must always approach Torah learning with fresh eyes. This is particularly imperative when learning the stories from Tanach that we learned as children. As we grow and learn more, we need to look at events and phenomena with new perspectives and depth. Rav Pincus zt”l recommended trying to have the attitude of one who is learning a story for the first time, with curiosity and

Condolences to the family of **Rabbi Raymond Apple z”l** on his passing

Rabbi Apple was the senior
Rabbi of the Great Synagogue
of Sydney from 1972 to 2005 and
a former writer for Torah Tidbits

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

wonder. Because we have learned the story of creation so many times, for example, we take it for granted that the world was created. Yet, we ought to look at every aspect of creation with freshness and amazement. Rav Pincus quotes the Chofetz Chayim zt"l who would remark that there are no less than 15 descriptions of Hashem in the last brachah of *birkat hamazon*, do we even take notice?

Birkat HaTorah begins in the past tense, "Asher **bachar** banu mikol ha'amim ve'natan lanu et torato - [Hashem] who **chose** us from all nations and **gave** us His Torah." However, it concludes in the present tense, "**Noten** haTorah – Who **gives** the Torah." When we say this brachah, let us pause to appreciate the gift of the present and the newness. May this lead us to approach our Torah learning and mitzvah observance with a hunger and thirst that can't be satiated. ■

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