



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Venutra

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ד Shavuot

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

The sight of a bride and groom standing under the marriage canopy always moves us to feelings of hope and success for the new couple. We look on with anticipation for the special moment when the groom places the ring on the bride's finger and recites the magic words, "Behold, you are sanctified unto me with this ring according to the law of Moshe and Israel" (הרי את מקודשת לי בטבעת זו כדת משה וישראל). With this statement they are bound together as husband and wife forever. In our hearts we wish them a long life of love and happiness together.

The Sages teach us that when Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish nation at Mount Sinai, Hashem was like the groom and the Jewish nation was like the bride. The Tablets were the wedding ring that connected us as lifelong partners to Hashem.

The verse in Shir HaShirim (3:11) says:

(יא) צְאִינָה וּרְאִינָה בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן בְּמֶלֶךְ שְׁלָמָה בְּעֵטָרָה שְׁעֵטָרָה לּוֹ אִמּוֹ בַּיּוֹם חֲתָנָתוֹ וּבַיּוֹם שְׂמֵחַת לְבוֹ

The simple translation of this verse is, "Go forth and gaze, daughters of Tzion, at the King to Whom peace belongs (Hashem) as He wears the crown that his mother made for him on his **wedding day** and on the day that His heart was gladdened." But the Talmud (Taanit 28b) explains that the **wedding day** is a reference to מתן תורה - the day that Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish nation, and "the day that His heart was gladdened" is a reference to the day that the Tabernacle was constructed. Artscroll Publications accordingly translates the verse allegorically as follows:

*11) Go forth and gaze, O daughters distinguished by loyalty to Hashem, upon the King to Whom peace belongs adorned with the crown His nation made for Him, **on the day the Torah was given and He became one with Israel** and on the day His heart was gladdened by His Tabernacle's construction.*

The Jewish nation is married to Hashem, and our wedding took place at Mount Sinai, on Shavuot. What an honor to have been chosen to be Hashem's bride! But this honor comes with great responsibility. Husband and wife must be faithful to one another. When one is not, problems follow.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 105a) relates the following dialogue between the elders of the Jewish people and the prophet after the destruction of the first Holy Temple.

שמואל אמר, באו עשרה בני אדם וישבו לפניו אמר להן חזרו בתשובה אמרו לו עבד שמכרו רבו ואשה שגרשה בעלה כלום יש לזה על זה כלום אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לנביא לך אמור להן איזה ספר כריתות אמכם אשר שלחתיה או מי מנושי אשר מכרתי אתכם לו

The Sage Shmuel says: "Ten people came and sat in front of the prophet. He said to them, 'Repent!' They said to him, 'A master who sold his servant, or a husband who has divorced his wife, could they have demands on one another?'"

The elders alleged that since Hashem had destroyed the temple and exiled His people from Israel, He was done with them, and they had no further obligation to Him. They are like a divorced wife, or a servant who has been sold.

Hashem instructed the prophet to respond to their claim (Isaiah 50:1):

כֹּה אָמַר יְדֹדָי אֵי זֶה סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת אֲמַכֶּם אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּיהָ אוֹ מִי מְנוּשֵׁי אֲשֶׁר מְכַרְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לוֹ הֲיֵן בַּעֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם נִמְכַרְתֶּם וּבִפְשָׁעֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְתָּה אֲמַכֶּם

"Where is the divorce document that I gave to your mother? And who is the creditor to whom I have sold you? It is because of your sins that I destroyed the Holy Temple." (All you need to do is repent!)

Hashem will never exchange us for any other nation no matter what we do; we are married for life. Where is the proof to this?

Last Shabbat, in parashat Bechukotai, we read the תוּחָה – *the warning*-- in which Hashem read us the riot act, warning us very sternly that we must not ignore Him or His commandments. He will punish us with its 49 curses and their consequences until we come around and realize our responsibilities to Him. Yet, after a long list of “If you do that – I will do this to punish you!” Hashem says (Leviticus 26:43):

(מד) וְאִף גַּם זֹאת בְּהִיוֹתְם בְּאֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיהֶם לֹא מֵאַסְתִּים וְלֹא גְעַלְתִּים
לְכַלְתֶּם לְהַפֵּר בְּרִיתִי אִתְּם כִּי אֲנִי יְדֹוֹד אֶלְקֵיהֶם

44) But despite all of this, while they will be in the land of their enemies, I will not be revolted by them and I will not reject them to obliterate them, or to annul My covenant with them- for I am Hashem their G-d.

Hashem has promised us that no matter how much we sin, and no matter what we do, He will never get so upset with us that He will obliterate us or annul His covenant with us. *He is Hashem our G-d* no matter what; there is no other option. He will use all methods at His disposal to bring us back to Him, including harsh punishments.

The Midrash (ילקוט שמעוני רמז תרעה) on this verse adds an essential component.

לא מאסתים ולא געלתים לכלותם, וכי מה נשתייר להם לישראל
שלא [נגעלו ושלא] נמאסו, והלא כל מתנות טובות שניתנו להם ניטלו
מהם, מה נשתייר להם? זה ספר תורה! שאם לא היה קיים לישראל לא
היו משונים מאומות העולם כלום.

“I will not be revolted by them and I will not reject them to obliterate them,” But what do the Jewish people have left

*that has not been revolted and rejected? Alas, all the great gifts that were given them [The land of Israel and the Holy Temples] have indeed been taken from them! What is left? **The Sefer Torah is left! That is what preserves the Jewish nation by keeping them separate and different from all other nations of the world.***

Hashem has not, and never will, take His Torah away from us. On the contrary. He will always do whatever is necessary to make it possible to learn His Torah. It is the secret of our existence.

This truth, that the Torah has preserved the Jewish nation throughout their many and difficult years of exile, has repeatedly proven itself. Although it may look like we have been rejected because of the persecutions and suffering that we have endured in foreign lands at the hands of our enemies, we are still alive and well as Hashem's nation and we always will be. The reason for this, as the Midrash informs us, is the Torah.

The underlying logic is simple: Because the Torah (the Tablets) was the medium through which we became united with Hashem, as long as we keep that link strong and remain connected to the Eternal One, **we are also eternal**. But if we sever that connection, we cut off our source of life, and we cannot continue to live. The groups that adhered strictly to the Torah's commandments have persevered and have made it through the exile intact until this day. All the splinter groups that explored different ways to practice Judaism have fallen by the wayside.

Our Midrash mentions another crucial component for the Jewish nation's survival:

דבר אחר לא מאסתים בימי כשדים שהעמדתי להם דניאל חנניה
מישאל ועזריה, ולא געלתים בימי (מדן) [המן] שהעמדתי להם מרדכי
ואסתר, לכלותם בימי יונים שהעמדתי להם שמעון הצדיק. להפר בריתי

אתם בימי רומיים שהעמדתי להם רבי וחכמי הדורות. כי אני ה' אלהיכם
לעתיד לבא שאין כל אומה ולשון יכולה לשלוט בהם

I will not be revolted by them – this refers to the time of the
Kasdim, when I (Hashem) gave them Daniel, Chanania, Mishael,
and Azarya the prophets to lead them.

And I have not rejected them – this refers to when Haman tried
to destroy them, when I gave them Mordechai and Esther to
save them.

To obliterate them – this refers to the time of the Greeks, when
I gave them Shimon the Righteous to lead them.

To annul my covenant with them – this refers to the exile of the
Romans (the current exile), when I gave them Rabbi Judah the
Prince and all the great Sages of the generations.

The Midrash explains how at each major threat to the Jewish nation throughout Jewish history, Hashem saw to it that they had the proper Torah leader to guide them through their difficulties. Without the great leaders of each generation who, through the Torah, have Divine wisdom and the proper outlook necessary to understand the matter from the perspective of Hashem (Who actually gave us the problem to help us grow). the Jewish people would not have survived. But, because Hashem is not interested in destroying His people but rather wishes to just wake them up so that they will better their ways, *He provides the medicine before the sickness*, by providing us the Torah Sages to guide us.

This is why the greatest Torah Sages of the generation are regarded with such respect and awe. It is understood that through their vast knowledge of Hashem's Torah, they have acquired a piece of Hashem's

Divine wisdom and know the proper Torah path to follow. They are Hashem's agents planted in our generation to guide His people.

These Torah Sages also inspire their constituents to provide their communities with all the components necessary for the community to thrive and grow in their Judaism. Throughout Jewish history the Rabbinic leadership took charge of building yeshivot to guarantee scholars for the next generation, mikvahs for family purity, organizations of kindness to help the poor, burial societies, etc. They also authored many original scholarly holy Torah books that we study and are inspired by until today. They saw to it that Torah life was vibrant and alive in their communities. This guaranteed that it would be transferred to the next generation.

This brings us to a third and most crucial component in the transmission and continuity of the Torah; educating the next generation. This is done by parents in the house, and teachers in school. If they do not succeed in motivating the next generation of Jewish children to keep the Torah, our children will leave it and it will cease to exist.

In every generation, this always presented a formidable challenge to parents and educators. For some reason, the outside world always looks more enticing than the true and tried ways of the Torah. To the naked eye, the Torah ways seem old and antiquated. Without dynamic Jewish education that focuses on showing the children the Torah's benefit and relevance to their lives, they may seek fulfillment elsewhere.

Raising Jewish children in today's world is more difficult than ever before. The world around us has changed so rapidly. Morals and values once held sacred and sacrosanct have been abandoned or violated. Society has changed so drastically over the last decades that the foundations of society have eroded.

Pundits attribute it to technological advancement. Technological advances that now allow one to hold in his hand a device that can take him anywhere in the world to see and know what is going on there, have provided unending new distractions and interests for people to follow. It is a vast world, and there is no limit to the number of interesting places to visit. People are engrossed in their own pursuits with no regard for others.

This has made raising children very challenging. When children have access to so much information, much of which is frivolous, or worse, they are easily distracted from their studies. Even worse, it is difficult, if not impossible, to protect them from seeing things that are antithetical to their morals or values. Being exposed to foreign cultures and ideas may insidiously undermine their core values.

Another formidable challenge is getting the desired educational lessons through to the children. Even with state-of-the-art Smartboards and computers, no teacher or parent can compete with the sophisticated delivery techniques of the entertainment industry, which has figured out exactly what works and what doesn't. Moreover, education takes work; entertainment doesn't.

There is only one answer to this challenge. Parents and teachers must themselves be inspired. When they are inspired by the Torah, their infectious inspiration will affect the children and overwhelm all the other meaningless activities. Children always want to be part of something exciting, and if the parents and teachers are excited about being Jewish - doing mitzvot and learning Torah - the children, seeing how excited their parents and teachers are, will want to be part of it.

To this end, we must use every means at our disposal to inspire ourselves to be better Jews so that our enthusiasm will rub off on our children and friends. If we are not inspired, how can we possibly inspire others? This is the goal of Partners Detroit: To share and teach inspirational

Torah to all who wish to be inspired so that they may pass our deep and rich heritage on to their children and share it with their friends.

This is the only way that one can withstand societal pressure that lures us to follow its ways and detach us from our birthright. We must stay connected to the Torah, or we will perish.

In the autumn, as the leaves fall off their trees, they look back at the tree naked of its beautiful foliage and, pitying the tree, say to themselves, "How will the tree survive the winter without us? It is so naked and vulnerable!" Little does the leaf know that indeed it is he who will perish, *not* the tree. The tree will use the winter to gather the nutrients and minerals necessary to produce another whole crop of leaves in the spring. As long as the leaf remained on the tree, it was alive; but the second that it severed its connection, it had to die.

The Torah is the Tree of Life, the עץ החיים. As long as we are connected to the Torah, we will remain alive. But if we fall off, it is we who will perish, not the tree. We must all see to it that we remain connected to the Torah, the Tree of Life for the Jewish people.

This is the answer to Mark Twain's famous question published in *Harper's Magazine*, September 1897.

About Jews

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky

Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his importance is extremely out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

His contribution to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendour, then faded to dreamstuff and passed away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains.

What is the secret of his immortality?

* * *

The answer is that the Jewish people are eternal because they are connected to the Eternal One through the Torah via the guidance of each generation's Torah Sages.

Rabbi Yaakov Emden writes in the preface to his Siddur.

אנחנו האומה הגולה שה פזורה אחר כל מה שעבר עלינו מהצרות והתמורות אלפים מהשנים ואין אומה בעולם נרדפת כמונו מה רבים היו צרינו מה עצמו נשאו ראש הקמים עלינו מנעורינו להשמידנו לעקרנו לשרשנו מפני השנאה שסבתה הקנאה רבת צררונו גם לא יכלו לנו לאבדנו ולכלותינו כל האומות הקדומות העצומות אבד זכרם בטל סברם סר צלם ואנו הדבקים בה' כולנו חיים היום לא נפקד ממנו בכל תוקף אריכות גלותינו אפילו אות וניקוד אחד מתורה שבכתב וכל דברי חכמים קיימים לא יטה לארץ מנלם לא שלט בהם יד הזמן ולא כלם מה יענה בזה פילוסוף חריף היד המקרה עשתה כל אלה חי נפשי כי בהתבונני בנפלאות אלה גדלו אצלי יותר מכל נסים ונפלאות שעשה השי"ת לאבותינו במצרים ובמדבר ובארץ ישראל וכל מה שארץ הגלות יותר נתאמת הנס יותר ונודע מעשה תקפו וגבורתו

We are an exiled nation, a wandering sheep. After all that has happened to us, the troubles and suffering for thousands of years that no other nation has experienced, only us. How numerous were our troubles, how powerful were those who rose up against us to annihilate us and to uproot us because of their hatred for us based on their jealousy of us. Many were our troubles, but they could not obliterate us or terminate us. All the previous powerful nations are lost, with no memory left of them. But we, who cling to Hashem, are all alive and well! In the darkest times of our exile, not one letter of the Torah has been lost, and all the words of the Torah Sages are standing strong. None of them have fallen down and the hand of time has not affected them. What will the great philosopher say about this? Could this be a coincidence?

I swear by my life, that as I think into these wonderful matters, they are greater, to my thinking, even than the miracles that Hashem did for our forefathers in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and in the land of Israel! And the longer the exile continues, the greater the miracle of Hashem's power and greatness.

As we approach the festival of Shavuot, the anniversary of our “marriage” to Hashem through His wonderful and amazing Torah, we should recommit ourselves to increase our Torah study and mitzvah performance. This will inspire us, enhance our lives and the lives of those around us, and continue the eternal status of the Jewish nation.