



Partners In Torah
San Diego Study Guide

תשפ"ג יטרו

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Partners In Torah San Diego

Mission Statement:

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

Welcome.

Thank you for coming.

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

Hashem created this world and everything in it with a purpose, which Hashem revealed in the Torah's very first word. As Rashi explains (Genesis 1:1):

א: בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

1) *In the beginning of Hashem's creating the heavens and the earth.*

Rashi comments:

בראשית ברא - אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשוני כמ"ש רז"ל (ב"ר) בשביל התורה שנקראת (משלי ח) ראשית דרכו ובשביל ישראל שנקראו (ירמ"י ב) ראשית תבואתו

1) *This verse begs for an interpretation. It is to be interpreted as the Sages have rendered it in the Midrash, "for the Torah, which is called ראשית (reishit), and for Yisrael, who are called ראשית - reishit."*

This means that the **ב** commencing the word בראשית is to be translated as **for**. Putting it together with the rest of the word, it comes out saying Hashem created the world just **for reishit**; what is the **reishit** for which Hashem created the world? Since both Torah and Yisrael are called ראשית - **reishit**- it means that, "For the Torah and for Yisrael, Hashem created the heavens and the earth." Hashem created the world for the Jewish people to keep and study the Torah.

The first book of the Torah, Bereshit, teaches us about the holy foundations and the creation of that Jewish nation, which is built on the Patriarchs; Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and on the Matriarchs; Sarah, Rivka, Rochel, and Leah. The Torah carefully chronicles the seminal events in their lives to illustrate their complete dedication and perfect service to Hashem. In the Torah that Hashem wrote and gave to Moshe on Sinai, Hashem personally testified about their holiness and purity, and, therefore, built His holy nation from their children.

After spending 210 preparatory years in Egypt, the Jewish nation was finally ready to receive the Torah and complete the purpose for creation. On the first day of Sivan, just 45 days after leaving Egypt, in a flurry of wonders and miracles, the Jewish people camped at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. They prepared themselves during the next few days, and, on the 7th of Sivan, Hashem appeared on Mount Sinai and gave the Torah to the Jewish Nation. With the Jewish people's receipt of the Torah, the purpose for creation was realized.

Unfortunately, things did not go so smoothly. Just forty days later, as a result of a miscalculation, the people thought that Moshe had "died" and would not return from heaven and sought a replacement for him in the form of a golden calf. When Moshe returned with the Tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them and saw the golden calf, he understood that the Jewish people were no longer worthy of them and threw them to the ground, breaking them.

The next day, Moshe returned to heaven to plead with Hashem to forgive the Jewish people for their sin. Hashem accepted Moshe's pleas at the end of forty days and agreed to give them a second set of Tablets. Moshe came down to announce his success, and the next day went up for another forty days to receive the second set from Hashem. Forty days later, on the 10th of Tishrei- Yom Kippur- he came down with the second set of Tablets. These Tablets had on them the Ten Commandments and the other 603 mitzvot engraved on them. In the forty days that Moshe was in heaven, Hashem had taught him the Oral Torah – the guidelines and details of the 613 mitzvot, which comprise the Torah. The last Mishna in Tractate *Taanit* calls Yom Kippur, the day on which we received the Torah that we have today, as **בְּיוֹם הַתְּנִיחוֹ, זֶה מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה** "The day of our wedding with Hashem."

At long last, although it took longer than expected, creation achieved its purpose! The Jewish Nation now had the Torah and could

commence fulfilling the purpose of the world by learning and keeping the Torah's mitzvot.

Moshe wasted no time and immediately began teaching the Torah to the Jewish people. The Talmud (Eruvin 54b) informs us:

תנו רבנן, כיצד סדר משנה? משה למד מפי הגבורה. נכנס אהרן ושנה לו משה פירקו. נסתלק אהרן וישב לשמאל משה. נכנסו בניו ושנה להן משה פירקו נסתלקו בניו. אלעזר ישב לימין משה ואיתמר לשמאל אהרן. רבי יהודה אומר לעולם אהרן לימין משה חוזר נכנסו זקנים ושנה להן משה פירקו נסתלקו זקנים נכנסו כל העם ושנה להן משה פירקו נמצאו ביד אהרן ארבעה ביד בניו שלשה וביד הזקנים שנים וביד כל העם אחד. נסתלק משה ושנה להן אהרן פירקו נסתלק אהרן שנו להן בניו פירקו נסתלקו בניו שנו להן זקנים פירקו נמצא ביד הכל ארבעה

The Rabbis taught. How was the Torah taught to the Jewish people? Moshe learned the Torah directly from Hashem. Aharon, his brother, entered, and Moshe taught him the Torah. Aharon sat to Moshe's left, Aharon's children entered, and Moshe taught them the Torah. They sat on Moshe's right and the Elders came in and Moshe taught them the Torah. The Elders then sat to the side and the entire nation entered and Moshe taught them the Torah. Hence, Aharon heard the Torah directly from Moshe four times, his children - three, the elders- two, and the Jewish people once. Then Moshe left, and Aharon taught it to all of them, then his children, and then the elders. It comes out that each one heard it four times.

Having heard the Torah directly from Moshe one time, and, subsequently, from Aharon, his sons, and the Elders, the Jewish people were now equipped to learn the Torah on their own and to discuss it with their peers. And learn it they did, for the forty years during which they traveled through the wilderness. They taught it to their children and their children to their children until today. From the day Moshe taught the Torah to the Jewish people, it has been diligently studied from generation to generation without interruption.

Attesting to this idea is the following story in this week's portion (Exodus 18:13).

(יג) וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרַת וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה לְשֹׁפֵט אֶת הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה מִן הַבֹּקֶר
עַד הָעֶרֶב

13) It was the next day that Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood with Moshe from the morning until the evening.

The Sages explain that this occurred shortly after Yom Kippur; the people had questions that needed answers and presented cases that needed judging. They went straight to Moshe to have their matters clarified, which resulted in a very long wait.

Upon seeing this, Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, felt it was disrespectful to the people to keep them waiting for so long. He also believed that Moshe would be unable to sustain such a burdensome regimen, and that Hashem didn't expect him to do the impossible. In Yitro's opinion, Moshe needed to delegate some of his responsibility to others, and he told Moshe so (18:20-22):

(כ) וְהִזְהַרְתָּה אֹתָהֶם אֶת הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת הַתּוֹרָה וְהוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם אֶת הַדֶּרֶךְ יֵלְכוּ בָּהּ
וְאֶת הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּן
(כא) וְאָתָּה תְּחַזְּקֵה מְכֹל הָעָם אֲנָשֵׁי חֵיל יִרְאֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲנָשֵׁי אָמֶת שְׂנֹאֵי בְצַע
וְשֹׂמֵת עֲלֵהֶם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת
(כב) וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת הָעָם בְּכֹל עֵת וְהָיָה כָּל הַדָּבָר הַגָּדוֹל יָבִיאוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְכָל הַדָּבָר הַקָּטָן
יִשְׁפְּטוּ הֵם וְהִקְלָה מֵעֲלֶיךָ וּנְשָׂאוּ אֹתָךְ

20) You shall caution them regarding the decrees and the teachings, and you shall make known to them the path in which they should go and the deeds that they should do. 21) And you shall discern from among the entire people men of accomplishment, G-d fearing people, men of truth, people who despise money, and you shall appoint them leaders of thousands (600), leaders of hundreds (6000), leaders of fifties (12,000), and

leaders of tens (60,000). 22) They shall judge the people at all times, and they shall bring every major matter to you, and every minor matter they shall judge, and it will be eased for you, and they shall bear with you.

Having received their ordination from Moshe, the new judges would have a direct connection to Hashem Who gave the laws, entitling them to Hashem's help in adjudicating their cases. This is the source of "Semicha" (Rabbinic ordination), the process by which a rabbi or judge becomes authorized to judge matters of Jewish law. Moshe used his divine intuition to choose the individuals who satisfied the verse's quite rigorous criteria.

Men of accomplishment – men who are independently wealthy and prosperous and don't need favors or the approval of others. Men who have the strength of character to lead. Also, men who are wealthy in mitzvot and good deeds, so they are protected by Hashem and have no fear of others.

G-d fearing men – who are reliable to do what Hashem wants them to do.

Men of truth – people who do not lie or go back on their word.

Men who despise money – They despised their own wealth, so they certainly do not want others' money and would not compromise the law for a bribe.

These attributes were in addition to the three most important attributes enumerated in Deuteronomy (1:13) wisdom, understanding, and well known as righteous.

(יג) הָבוּ לָכֶם אֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וְנִבְנִים וַיִּדְעִים לְשִׁבְטֵיכֶם וְאֲשִׁימָם בְּרָאשֵׁיכֶם

13) Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and well known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads.

After consulting with Hashem, Moshe implemented Yitro's four-tier suggestion. The highest tier comprised those who were, "One in a thousand," who stood out in their greatness over a thousand other people. The next tier comprised those who were "One in a hundred," and so on. The number of judges necessary for the 600,000 people in the Jewish nation was 78,600 judges. A quick calculation reveals that one out of every seven or eight people was a judge of some sort.

This may strike you as odd; after all, what kind of people was this nation, always arguing and needing adjudication for their disputes?

We find the answer in how Moshe described what the people wanted from him. Upon Yitro asking Moshe why he is keeping the people waiting, Moshe answered (v.15),

(טו) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְחִתְּנוֹ כִּי יָבֹא אֵלַי הָעָם לְדָרֹשׁ אֵלַיִם

*15) Moshe said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me **to seek Hashem.**"*

This is what the Jewish nation is all about. Throughout the forty years that the Jewish nation wandered in the wilderness, all of their physical needs were taken care of. How then did they spend their time? They sought Hashem. What does this mean? This encompasses the entire spectrum of Torah. Torah scholarship, the laws pertaining to how to act properly towards one's fellow man, and the relationship one should have with Hashem to serve Him properly

This gives us a glimpse into what the camp life of our forefathers was during their wilderness sojourn. It was like one big yeshiva, its students studying Torah all day. Moshe and Aharon were the *Roshei Yeshiva*, the heads of the yeshiva; Aharon's children and the Elders were under them, and then there were the other judges to whom the "students" could go to resolve their arguments. When a "*chavruta*" – *study partner*, got into an argument that they couldn't resolve, they

would take their question to a judge of ten, who would try to provide an answer. If they accepted the answer, fine; but if not, they took their question to the next level, the judge of fifty. This process continued until finally, if no one could satisfactorily resolve the matter, it went to Moshe.

This process forged us into the wise, knowledgeable nation that we became. The entire nation heard the entire Torah from Moshe, Aharon, his sons, and the Elders. They had the intellectual capacity to absorb and keep all that information in their minds. Because no two minds are the same, they came up with different understandings and take-aways from the information, needing to clarify it so that the Torah would remain pure and correct. This deepened and broadened their understanding of the material, and when they reached an impasse, they had greater teachers from whom to learn. This is where the judges came in.

This process, which started when Moshe gave Semicha to the first group of judges in the year 2448 (from creation), continued unbroken for 1682 years, until the year 4130 (= 370). Each Sage had to receive Semicha from a sage who had received semicha all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu. At that point, because of the difficulties of the exile, the official semicha was interrupted. Yet the process of a student becoming a rabbi still required the approval of an accepted authoritative rabbi. This was to ensure that the Torah that they would teach would be authentic and true to the teachings of Moshe from Sinai.

Torah scholarship is only valid when learned from an authorized teacher. It is an exact science and has rules and formulas that must be adhered to for the information to be valid. These rules comprise the Oral Torah and must be transmitted faithfully and accurately to the

student from a qualified teacher. Once a student has absorbed and mastered the rules and regulations learned from his teacher, and with his teacher's approval, he is qualified to be a teacher himself. Transmitting the Torah from teacher to student is the only valid way Torah can be learned.

Throughout Jewish history, at all times and every place that Jews lived, it was always the first priority of the community leaders, rabbis and parents of Jewish children, to establish a Torah center for Torah study so that the Jewish people could fulfill the purpose of creation, to study and keep the Torah.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch phrases it this way:

So that the time of their wandering in the wilderness was indeed the High School of the Jewish Nation. To spread the Torah, the Teachings of G-d through every stratum of society of the Jewish nation was to be their task for all the coming centuries; the people stood about Moses from morning till night, and Verse 15 declares their purpose to be in general: "They come to me לדרש אלקים to seek Hashem."

The Midrash similarly informs us that Yaakov our forefather set the precedent before the first exile by sending Yehudah to Egypt to establish a Yeshiva for Torah study prior to anyone else's arrival in Egypt. As the verse tells us (Genesis 46:28):

(כח) וְאֶת יְהוּדָה שָׁלַח לְפָנָיו אֶל יוֹסֵף לְהוֹרֵת לְפָנָיו גִּשְׁנָה וַיְבֵאוּ אֶרְצָה גִשְׁן

28) He sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen ...

ואמרו (תנחומא ויגש יא) להתקין לו בית תלמוד שיהא מורה שם הוראה שיהיו
השבטים הוגין בתורה

It was to establish a Yeshiva from which to teach the Torah, so that the Tribes would be able to study Torah.

History teaches us that it is only through a strong connection to the Torah that the Jewish nation remains the Jewish nation. Without Torah, Jews assimilate and blend into the surrounding society until all vestiges of Judaism disappear from them. It is hard to be different, and one must have a very strong reason for doing so. It is only through learning the Torah and seeing first hand its wisdom and relevance to life that one is able to withstand the pressure to blend in. The Torah and its mitzvot provide a wholesome, peaceful, and meaningful way to live life for those who keep it. It provides the Jewish people with the proper morals and values given by Hashem in a world that has lost its way.

If the Jewish people learned the entire Torah from Moshe, what were they learning throughout the forty years? Didn't they know everything already?

The study of Torah is unlike the study of any other wisdom. One studies medicine to be a doctor. If one has no aspirations of being a doctor, but would rather be a lawyer, any time spent studying medicine is a waste of time because it will not further his knowledge about law. He needs to spend his time studying law, so he will be most knowledgeable in his practice of law.

Not so the Torah. Torah study, even if it is something that one knows well, is a mitzvah in itself. The Vilna Gaon is known to have said that if it were not a mitzvah to also know the entire Torah, he would have spent his entire life studying the very first Mishna in *Berachot*, the

first tractate of the Talmud (dealing with the laws of reciting the Shema).

Not only is pure Torah study a mitzvah, it is actually the Torah's greatest mitzvah. The Mishna in tractate *Peah* (1:1), incorporated into the daily prayers, says:

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא:
כבוד אב ואם, וגמילות חסדים, והבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו, ותלמוד תורה
כנגד כלם

The following are things that a person who performs them benefits of their fruits in this World, yet the principal remains intact for them in the World to Come. They are: Honoring one's father and mother, bestowing kindness, visiting the sick, providing hospitality to guests, arriving early to the synagogue, bringing peace between a man and his fellow, but the study of Torah is equivalent to them all.

The Sages are careful to explain that even one word of Torah studied is equivalent to all the other mitzvot combined. So powerful is the mitzvah of Torah study.

The reason for this is, that when a person studies the Torah he is connected directly to Hashem. The Sages teach us that Hashem and his Torah are One.

The Talmud teaches us that the first word of the Ten Commandments, אני, is an abbreviation for **אנא נפשי כתבית יהבית** - I have written my soul down (in the Torah) and given it to you.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (d. 1746) in his work *Derech Hashem* explains.

ספר דרך ה' - חלק ד פרק ב - בתלמוד תורה

ב. בכלל ההשפעות הנשפעות ממנו ית' לצורך בריותיו יש השפעה אחת עליונה מכל ההשפעות, שענינה הוא היותר יקר ומעולה שבכל מה שאפשר שימצא בנמצאים, והיינו שהוא תכלית מה שאפשר שימצא בנמצאות מעין המציאות

האמיתי שלו ית', ויקר ומעלה מעין אמתת מעלתו ית', והוא הוא מה שמחלק האדון ית"ש מכבודו ויקרו אל ברואיו. ואמנם קשר הבורא ית' את השפעתו זאת בענין נברא ממנו ית' לתכלית זה, והוא התורה

Among the endowments that Hashem has bestowed upon His creations, there is one endowment that is higher than all others and is the choicest and most precious of all that exists in the world. It is the ultimate creation, above all others, because it is the closest thing to the reality of Hashem Himself. Its own preciousness and greatness are similar to the preciousness and greatness of Hashem Himself. That (endowment) is that Hashem bestows upon man, His own honor and glory. However, Hashem tied this honor and glory to something He created, and that is the Torah.

In other words, a person can bring into himself Hashem's honor and glory by studying the Torah, which contains Hashem in it, so to speak, and to the degree that we study and know the Torah, to that degree we have Hashem's honor and glory within us.

This phenomenon has been observed in the great Torah Sages throughout Jewish history. The holiness and saintliness of a true Torah Scholar is evident in his every motion and action.

So, even if the Jewish nation in the wilderness repeatedly learned and reviewed the same information, they were fulfilling the greatest of all the mitzvot and becoming holier and holier with every word. There is so much more, though.

The Torah is infinitely deep. Although there is a finite number of words and letters in a Torah scroll, the Torah, composed by Hashem, has an infinite number of levels. The deeper one goes, the more he sees that he has just scratched the surface. The most brilliant of men have spent their entire lives studying the Torah, without wasting a single second, and they have never exhausted its wisdom. They were never

bored or lacked something new to learn. On the contrary, the more they learned, the more they wanted to learn, constantly plumbing new depths and gaining greater wisdom and knowledge of Hashem. This is why the Torah is infinite - it is a reflection of Hashem's wisdom, and Hashem is infinite.

When one has had the privilege of studying the Torah at any level of depth, it is easy to see the Torah's amazing wisdom, depth, and breadth. This is what kept the Jewish people very busy during the forty years they wandered through the wilderness. They learned the Torah deeper and deeper.

May we all merit to have the opportunity to study the Torah so we, too, can benefit from its splendor and wisdom.