

Living
Lessons
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תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב

*The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage
of the congregation of Yaakov.*

Lesson For Life

The word תורה originates from the word הוראה, meaning “to teach.” The Torah is not merely a history book that recounts the stories of our past. Every part of the Torah offers a lesson for our day-to-day lives. Even the stories within the Torah hold a special message about how we should conduct ourselves. Therefore, when we learn the Torah, we should ask ourselves what lesson it is trying to teach us.

This is why the Torah is called תורה אור, the illuminated Torah.¹ The Torah is not a storybook or even an ancient book of wisdom. Rather, the Torah illuminates our lives, guiding us constantly in the right way to behave. When we need guidance in any area of our lives, we should look to the Torah. For every part of a person’s day and at every stage of life, the Torah is there to guide the way and show how to act.

When we lead our lives by the light of the Torah, we can be confident that our lives will be meaningful and exactly as Hashem wants.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*The Torah is described as a “Lesson For Life”. Can you think of a story from the Torah that taught you something important? What was the lesson?
Think of a time when you weren’t sure what to do, and how learning from the Torah might have helped you choose the right course of action.*



Our Sages Say

The Main Thing

למדנו ללמוד לא להפסיק – אלא המעשה – לא המדרש הוא העקר, אלא המעשה.² Learning is not the main thing, but rather action.

The goal of learning Torah is to know what to do. We don’t learn to be smart or impress others. The reason we learn Torah is to follow the mitzvot and understand how to lead our lives.

Not a Storybook

ווי להווא בר נש דאמר, דהא אורייתא אתא לאחזקה ספורין, ווי געלמא – Woe to the people who say that the Torah came to tell us stories.³

Every story in the Torah is not just a story of the past, but a lesson for our lives today. The Torah is true and everlasting; therefore, every part of it applies to every generation.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

*Our Sages say that “learning is not the main thing, rather an action.” Why do you think it’s more important to follow the teachings of the Torah than just to learn about them?
The word “Torah” means “guidance,” to show us the way. How is the Torah like a guide that helps us know how to act in our lives?*



Word Power

Hora’ah, not Mitzvah

If the point of the Torah is to learn how to keep the mitzvot, why do we call it Torah, which means “guidance,” and not simply name it “Mitzvos”?

The explanation is that the term “mitzvah” refers to a command that one must follow, even if they don’t understand it. However, “Torah” means guidance. When you guide someone, you show them the way in a manner they can understand and appreciate its beauty.

The beauty of Torah lies in understanding the qualities of mitzvot and how they enhance our lives.⁵



Did You Know?

Chumash

Generally, when people refer to the Torah, they mean the Five Books of the Chumash. The reason the Chumash is most often called Torah is that it contains the 613 mitzvot. Since the goal of the Torah is to teach us how to lead our lives, the mitzvot are the primary focus of the Torah.⁴



Pearls of Wisdom

Transformation

Mitzvot are incredibly important because they create a profound change in the world around us, transforming it into something holy. When we only learn Torah, the ideas lack a real-world effect. By fulfilling the mitzvot, we can actually improve the world for the better.



Help!

When R' Mendel Futerfas⁶ was five years old, one of the boys in his class forgot to bring his bottle of ink to Cheder. He turned to the boy next to him and asked to borrow some ink.

"No, you should have remembered to bring your own," the other boy said. Reb Mendel's classmate had to ask someone else for ink.

Their Rebbi saw what happened but didn't say anything. A little while later, the Rebbi asked the first boy to show the class the Aleph-Bais. "This is an Aleph, this is a Bais, and this one is a Gimmel," the boy said, pointing to the letters.

"Wrong!" said their teacher.

The boy was very confused.

"But Rebbi, this is what you taught us... This is how we have been reading for the past two years."

"You are wrong," said their Rebbi.

"Aleph is when your friend asks you for ink, and you give it to him.

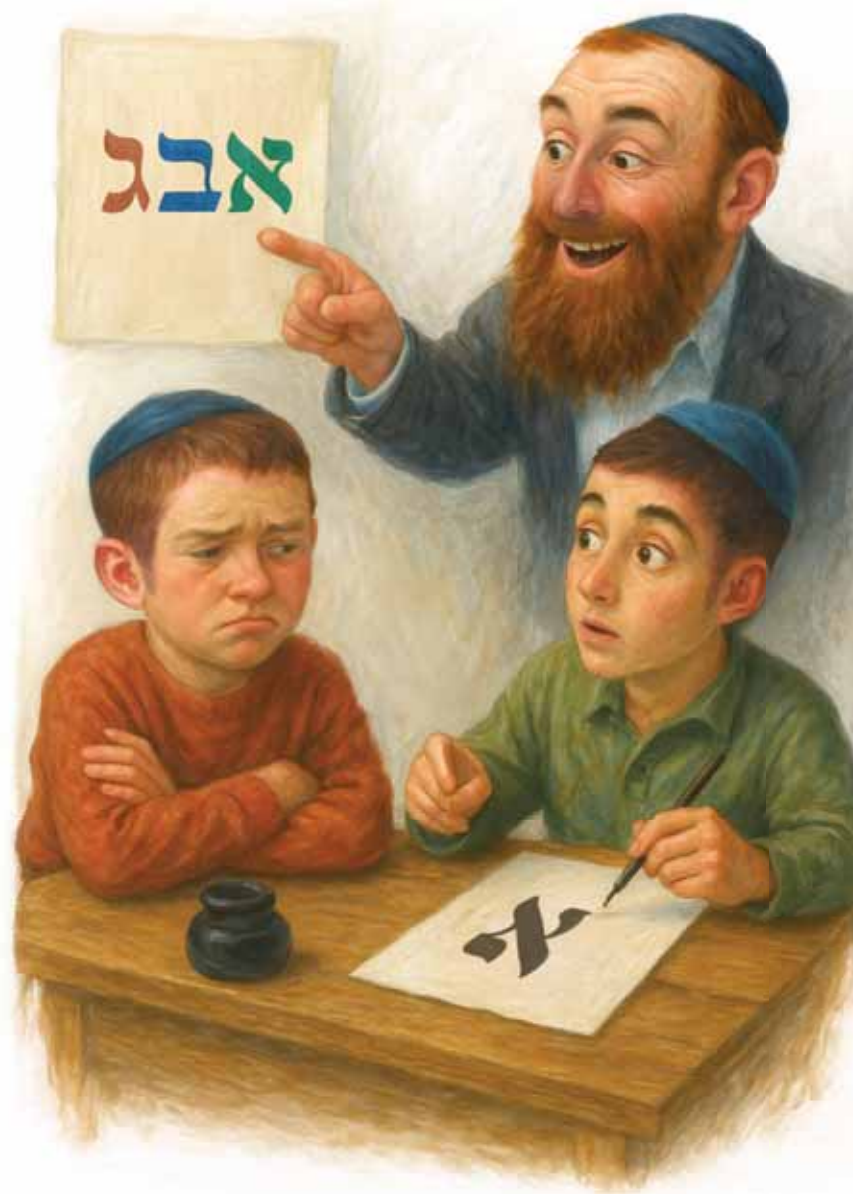
Bais is when your friend asks you for ink, you give it to him.

Gimmel is when your friend asks you for ink, and you give it to him!"

The whole Torah teaches us how to act.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

In the story, the Rebbi taught that helping a friend with ink was like learning the Aleph-Bais. Can you think of something you did for someone else today, and how that action might be like following a teaching of the Torah?



תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב

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An Inheritance for Everyone

When older people pass away, they often leave their children an inheritance. This can include money, property, or items of sentimental value. An inheritance is not earned through hard work or effort. Being a child automatically entitles you to your family's inheritance.

The Torah is referred to as the "inheritance of every Jew." We are all like Hashem's children, and as children, we have inherited Hashem's most precious gift—the Torah. We don't need

to do anything to deserve this gift, and no Jew can claim more ownership of the Torah than others. Just by being Jewish, we all have an equal right to the Torah. From a tiny baby to the wisest Rabbi, we all have a portion in the Torah.

This means that each of us can connect with the Torah and study it. It doesn't matter what family or community you belong to— as a Jew, the entire Torah is accessible to you.



Word Power

יעקב

The passuk Torah Tzivah calls B'nei Yisrael by the name Yaakov. The name יעקב is associated with the word עקב, meaning "heel." None of a person's qualities are noticeable in their heel. The heel of a genius and a simple man looks the same. Likewise, the name Yaakov symbolizes a profound level at which all of B'nei Yisrael are equal. Our bond with the Torah is identical; the simplest Jew shares the same connection to the Torah as the most esteemed talmid chacham.⁷

קהלת יעקב

The word קהלת means "congregation." This includes converts who join the congregation of B'nei Yisrael. Everyone has a connection to the Torah.⁸

Did You Know?

The First Lesson

As soon as children are old enough to speak, their father should teach them this passuk.⁹ This passuk teaches children that every Jew, including them, has the right to learn Torah.¹⁰

The Second Luchos

The passuk of Torah Tzivah is read in Shul in the Torah portion of Simchas Torah.

Simchas Torah celebrates the giving of the second set of Luchos. The second Luchos were given after B'nei Yisrael sinned with the golden calf and returned to Hashem. Therefore, as we celebrate the giving of the second Luchos, we read this passuk, emphasizing that even those who have sinned and strayed from the path of the Torah still maintain a connection to it.



CHALLENGE YOURSELF

The celebration of the second Luchos stresses that our connection to Torah remains even after doing aveiros. How can this idea effect how we view people who don't follow the Torah?

Our Sages Say

Stealing

Rav אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: כל המונע הלכה מפי תלמיד כאילו גוזלו מנחלת אבותיו Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Anyone who withholds a Halacha from their student, it is as if they stole his inheritance.¹¹

Every detail of the Torah is relevant to every single Jew. Therefore, no one has the right to withhold parts of the Torah from you. Withholding the Torah from someone is like stealing what belongs to them.

A Lost Prince

Even if someone hasn't studied Torah for many years and then decides to start learning, they have the right to do so. It is like a prince who was kidnapped from his palace as a young child. Even if a hundred years pass, he won't be ashamed to return to his birthplace, for he is coming to reclaim what is rightfully his.¹²

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

What are some barriers that might prevent you from feeling entitled to learn Torah, and how can they be overcome?



Pearls of Wisdom

Deepest Connection

Although many parts of the Torah are deep and difficult to understand, every Jew has a connection. This is because when we learn the Torah, we connect to Hashem. In this connection, we are all equal. Even if there are parts of the Torah we can't understand, when we study it, our connection to Hashem is as strong as anyone's else's.¹³

Extra Food for Thought

Withholding Torah knowledge is like stealing an inheritance. In modern contexts, what might be considered "withholding" Torah from others?



Equal Opportunity

R' Yannai once saw someone dressed like a Talmid Chochom. "Rebbi, will you come eat by us?" R' Yanni asked.

"Sure!" Replied the man.

R' Yannai gave him food and drink. As they were eating, R' Yannai asked the man to share some Gemarah thoughts.

"I don't know any." The man said.

"Do you know any Mishnayos?" asked R' Yannai.

"No."

"How about a Possuk?"

"Also not."

R' Yannai was very upset that this man joined his meal without sharing any Torah

R' Yannai began, "A dog ate Yannai's bread..."

The man got up and grabbed R' Yannai. "You are stealing my inheritance!" he shouted.

R' Yannai was confused. "I didn't take anything from you."

The guest explained, "Once I was walking past a school and I heard children learning. They didn't say Morasha Kehilas Yannai, they said Kehillas Yaakov. Why would you call me a dog? I, too, have a part in Hashem's Torah.

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Torah from Moshe

When we learn Torah without guidance, we can easily stray from the truth. It may be tempting to interpret parts of the Torah according to our desires rather than as Hashem intended. People often seek what feels best to them. Therefore, it is possible to distort the Torah for our own gain. We might not even realize it, but our self-interests can influence how we understand the Torah.

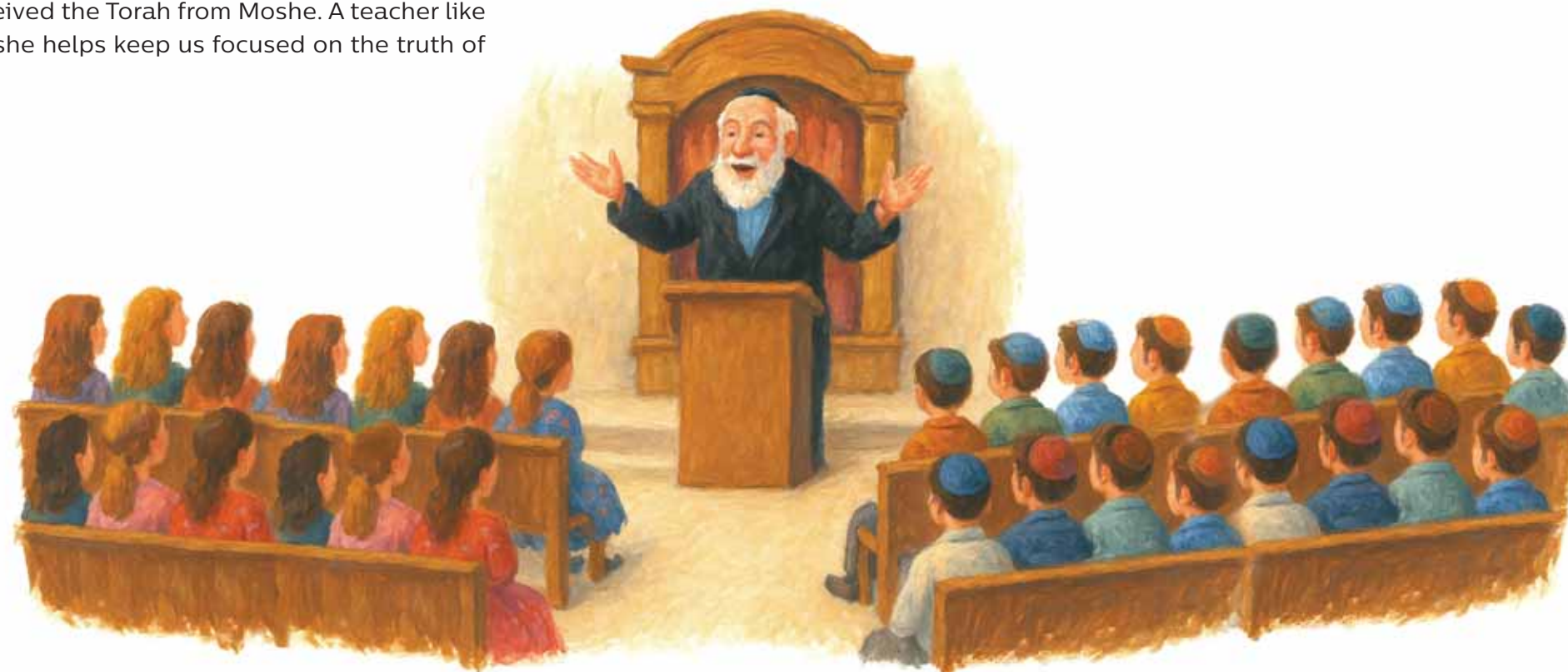
This is why the pasuk emphasizes that we received the Torah from Moshe. A teacher like Moshe helps keep us focused on the truth of

the Torah. When we learn the Torah with the guidance of a holy teacher, we can grasp the truth without our self-interests interfering.

To learn Torah with humility and a genuine desire for truth, one must study under the guidance of the holy teachers and leaders of each generation.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How can we determine if we truly understand Torah or if our understanding is based on our own desires?



Pearls of Wisdom

Responsibility

When someone knows a part of the Torah, it is their responsibility to share it with others. Everyone can be a teacher of Torah, helping to guide those who are less knowledgeable. Teaching others not only affects them but also impacts all future generations. By setting someone on the path of Torah, we transform not only their lives but also the lives of their descendants.¹⁴



Word Power

611

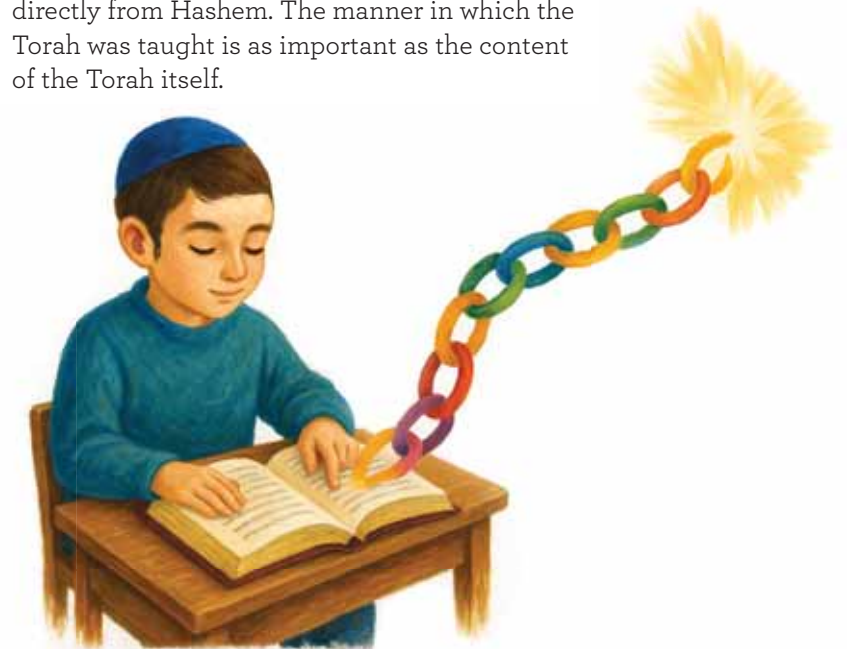
The word תורה has a gematria value of 611. This is the number of mitzvos we received through Moshe, as the first two Aseres Hadibros were given by Hashem.



Our Sages Say

Chain of Transmission

משה קבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים למשנה. – Moshe received the Torah from Hashem and gave it to Yehoshua, who in turn gave it to the Zekanim. They passed it to the Nevi'im, and the Nevi'im conveyed it to the Anshei Kneset Hagedola.¹⁵ The first Mishnah in Pirkei Avos teaches the order in which the Torah was passed down through the generations. Understanding the mesorah (chain of tradition) of Torah is crucial. When we trace the chain of how the Torah was transmitted throughout history, we realize that every teacher received the Torah in a lineage leading back to Moshe, who received it directly from Hashem. The manner in which the Torah was taught is as important as the content of the Torah itself.



Like Shemittah

מה שמטה נאמרו כללותיה ופרטותיה ודקדוקיה מסיני אף כלן נאמרו כללותיה. – Just as Shemita was revealed to Moshe by Hashem with all its details, every mitzvah was also given to Moshe with all its details.¹⁶

Every detail of the mitzvos was given by Hashem to Moshe; we cannot simply create our own rules.

Tradition

מסורת סיני לתורה – The mesorah (chain of tradition) is a fence for the Torah.¹⁷

The tradition we receive from our teachers in understanding the Torah serves as a fence around it. To grasp the truth of the Torah, free from our self-interests, we must accept the manner in which our Chachamim transmitted it through generations, tracing back to Moshe at Har Sinai.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

What ideas in the Torah does the “fence” of Mesorah protect?



Did You Know?

Connect to the Divine

The Torah teaches that one should cleave to and connect with Hashem. The Gemarah explains that this connection is achieved through associating with Talmidei Chachamim. By connecting with Talmidei Chachamim, we learn how to serve Hashem and become connected to Him.¹⁸

Huge Stars

A good teacher is like a star that seems small but is actually massive.¹⁹ Sometimes, a good teacher may seem insignificant and unimportant in our lives. However, upon closer examination, we realize the tremendous influence they have on us.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

How does learning from wise teachers help us connect with Hashem?



Extra Food for Thought

Since all Mitzvot details came from Moshe, can we interpret them in our own way?

How can everyone contribute to teaching Torah, even if they lack Torah knowledge?

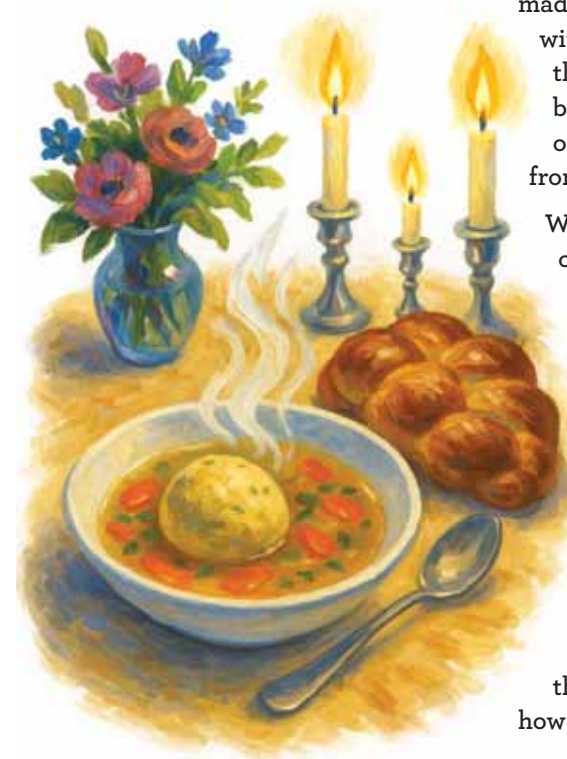
Can our own desires change how we understand things?



The Tzedukim and Baysusim

Antignos was a student of Shimon Hatzadik and became the leader of B'nei Yisroel after Shimon Hatzadik's death.

He taught that one should not serve Hashem for reward but should serve faithfully for the sake of heaven. Two of Antignos's students were named Tzadok and Baysus. They felt that this teaching made no sense. Why would someone serve Hashem without expecting a reward? They, therefore, concluded that the Torah tradition of the Rabbis was not valid and broke away. They began a new religion that followed only the written Torah and ignored the oral tradition from Moshe.



Without the oral Torah, understanding the intention of the written Torah is impossible. This led to some extreme interpretations. For example, the Torah states that one should not light a fire on Shabbos. They interpreted this to mean that even fires lit before Shabbos were prohibited. Consequently, they would sit in the dark and eat cold food throughout Shabbos. To challenge this, the Rabbanim instituted the obligation to prepare warm food for Shabbos—commonly known as cholent.

Not believing in the oral tradition of Torah is considered kefirah of the entire Torah. For this reason, the Rabbanim instituted various laws to demonstrate how wrong the Tzedukim and Baysusim were.

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Special Portion

The passuk “Torah Tzivah” teaches that the Torah was given to every Jew. When Hashem gave the Torah to each of us, it was a personal gift to every individual. This means that every Jew has a portion of the Torah that Hashem created specifically for them. It is our job to learn Torah and discover the section made for our neshamah.

This is why everyone enjoys different parts of the Torah. One person may feel more connected to the Gemarah, while others may find a deeper connection to the Midrash. Some

might enjoy learning the laws of Shabbos, while others prefer studying the laws of monetary damages.

When a person studies the portion of Torah connected to their neshamah, they can comprehend it on a deeper level than others. In fact, it's possible to uncover new insights and chiddushim in their segment of Torah that were never previously revealed. Even the greatest Talmidei Chachamim may not be able to discover these ideas, as this part of the Torah was specifically crafted for your neshamah.

Hashem loves each of us so much that He created a piece of Torah with all of us in mind!





Moshe's Tears

Before Moshe passed away, Hashem revealed to him all the future leaders of the Bnei Yisrael. When he saw Rabbi Akiva, Moshe noticed that Rabbi Akiva was explaining the reasons for the crowns atop the letters in the Sefer Torah. This made Moshe cry.

Hashem asked Moshe, "Why are you crying?"

"He is teaching things that I don't know," Moshe replied.

"Don't worry," Hashem responded. "Just keep listening."

Suddenly, one of the students asked Rabbi Akiva, "Rebbi, where do you know all this from?" Rabbi Akiva responded, "I learned it in a tradition passed down from Moshe, who received it at Har Sinai."

Although this part of the Torah was given during the giving of the Torah, it could only be revealed by Rabbi Akiva, as it was the portion of the Torah connected to him.



Our Sages Say

Their Chiddush

אין אדם יכול לחדש דבר בתורה שחבירו מזומן לחדשו כי הכל מוכן לקניו מיום שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה נִבְרָאָה – A person cannot discover a new Torah insight that someone else is meant to uncover. Because that new idea was designated for that individual when the Torah was created.²⁰

Main Focus

ללמוד אדם תורה במקום שֶׁלבו חָפֵץ – A person should always learn the section of Torah they enjoy most.²¹

If you find a part of the Torah that is particularly enjoyable to you, it is a sign that this is your section of the Torah, and you should concentrate on studying it.²²



Did You Know?

In the Womb

Before a baby is born, it is taught the part of the Torah it is most connected to but forgets it before birth.²³ Throughout a person's lifetime, they must discover this part of the Torah. When they do, it will feel familiar because they learned it before birth.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Have you ever experienced a sudden sense of familiarity when learning something? What might that mean?



Word Power

You Will Find It

The Gemarah teaches, וְגַעַתָּ וּמְצֹאתָ, which translates to, "If you work hard to learn Torah, you will find Torah."²⁴

The Gemarah doesn't say, "If you work hard, you will understand Torah," but rather, "You will find Torah." This is because when we discover our part in Torah, we aren't understanding something new; we are simply finding what has belonged to us all along.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

What does "working hard" mean for you when learning something?



Pearls of Wisdom

Lost Forever

If someone doesn't discover their part of the Torah, it will be lost forever. This is because only you can uncover your part in the Torah; no one else has the ability to reveal it. Therefore, it is crucial to learn Torah and find our part to reveal.²⁵

Torah Journals

One way to discover the part of the Torah that resonates with you is by writing for Torah journals. These journals are dedicated to chiddushim and new ideas in Torah. Even if someone feels they aren't smart enough to participate, they should realize that everyone has a section of the Torah destined for them. It doesn't matter if you feel smart or not; everyone has something to contribute to the Torah.



Extra Food for Thought

How can one find their portion in Torah?

If new Torah ideas are waiting to be revealed, how can we make it easier for people to discover them?

If Hashem created a Torah piece just for you, what does that say about the importance of each person?

Endnotes

1. משלי ו, כ"ג
2. אבות א, י"ז
3. זהר ג, קנ"ב א
4. גור אריה בראשית א, א
5. דרשות המצות מהר"ל
6. Chabad Chassid and Mashpia 1907 - 1995
7. ספר המאמרים מלוקט א 201
8. טור על התורה
9. שולחן ערוך יורה דעה
10. בן יהודע סוכה מ"ב עמוד ב'
11. סנהדרין צ"א עמוד ב
12. ילקוט דברים תתקנ"א, ל"ב
13. ליקוטי שיחות חלק ד 1156
14. קידושין ל עמוד א'
15. אבות א, א
16. ספרא בהר א
17. אבות ג, י"ג, דרך חיים מהר"ל
18. חינוך מצוה תל"ד
19. בבא בתרא ח עמוד ב', בן יהודע
20. צוואת ר' אליעזר הגדול י'
21. עבודה זרה י"ט עמוד א'
22. מכתבי תורה קי"ט
23. עץ הדעת טוב משפטים
24. מגילה ו עמוד ב'
25. אור החיים דברים כ"ב, ג'