

Parashat KI TISSA: 5774, 2014
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כי על פי הדברים האלה כרתתי אתך ברית ואת ישראל -For according to these words have I sealed a covenant with you and Israel, (34:27)

The Gemara Gittin (60b) derives from the words “Al Pi”, which literally means “according to the Mouth”, that Torah She’b’alpeh, which Moshe Rabbeinu received on Har Sinai from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, may not be transmitted through a written form or text, but only Al-peh, orally. That is exactly how it was done. See Rambam in his Hakdama to his Yad Chazaka where he delineates the exact procedure from Moshe until the end of the Chachmei HaTalmud, Ravina and Rav Ashi. Since it is all oral, success in the learning process depends not only on the talmid who absorbs it but also on the enthusiasm of the Rebbe who passes it on.

The Torah She’b’alpeh (the Oral Torah, or Talmud) is the foundation of that which separates our people from the nations of the world. Many nations are connected to the Written Torah (Tenach), whereas the Oral Torah remains exclusively and uniquely ours.

The Written Torah can be placed in a bookcase and remain there without obligating one too much, but the Oral Torah demands constant and unending study.

The Oral Torah is a Torah of life. It envelops a person from the time to he rises in the morning until the time he goes to sleep. It guides his behavior minute by minute, hour by hour. It tells him not just what to eat, but also how to eat how to obtain the food. It teaches us that not only must one’s food be kosher, but the mouth that eats it must be kosher. The Torah She’b’alpeh teaches us what our eyes, our legs and our hands should be used for. It shows us how to react when the blessings of HaShem shower upon us and how to react when the Hand of HaShem strikes painfully.

Because the Oral Torah is a Torah of life, (*Ki Heim Chayeinu veOrech Yameinu*) it is for every Jew. It is not focused on any one segment of society but on all. The Gemara tells of a student who traveled six months to study in Yeshiva for one day and traveled six months to return home to his wife; away one year to study Torah one day, and he is recognized as “Yeshiva Student” (Chagiga 5b). Another Gemara relates about a student who required hearing a concept of the Talmud four hundred times until he was able to absorb it, showing the perseverance of the student and the patience of the Rebbe (Eiruvim 54b)

Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked by a Ba’al Teshuva who struggled with the mastery of Gemara, if he could make a Siyum on one page of the Gemara which he just completed. He said it took him six full months until he was able to read the text without vowels, translate every word, and comprehend the contents. Rav Moshe responded, “Yes, you can make a full Siyum, with the Hadran and Kaddish, and the meal will be deemed a Se’udat Mitzvah. Please send me an invitation and I will personally attend, it will be my Simcha as well”. Wow! The joy of mastering one page of the Talmud. Now contrast this with the Chachmei Lublin who had to master 400 pages of the Talmud by heart in order to gain entrance into the famed Yeshiva of Lublin in Poland. Torah She’b’alpeh is for everyone to enjoy, whether you master four hundred pages or one page.

Therefore, the Covenant that HaShem made was over the Torah She'b'alpeh. Shavu'ot, and the first Luchot, represents the giving of the Written Torah, while Yom Kippur, the 2nd Luchot, represent the giving of the Torah She'b'alpeh. Thus, this is followed with joy and dancing on Simchat Torah.