

Higher and Higher ישראל קדמו



The only thing that gives the Torah its significance and importance is that it was given to the Yidden! Therefore, as soon as there is even a minor concern that the Jews might be in danger, *chas v'shalom*, Moshe Rabbeinu did not waste a moment. He did not need to consult with anyone; not even with Hashem Himself. He simply broke the *luchos*; those *luchos* created by the very essence of Hashem...

Because if all of the Torah exists only to bring out the special innate quality of the Jewish people, then the moment that the Torah might be causing them some trouble, *chas v'shalom*, and a choice needs to be made between the Yidden or the Torah, there is no competition at all. Moshe Rabbeinu took the *luchos* and **broke them** in order to save the Jewish people...

(Leil Simchas Torah 5747)

Who Came First?

The source:

The Midrash states:

“שני דברים קדמו לעולם תורה וישראל,
ואיני יודע איזה מהם קודם, כשהוא אומר צו את
בנ” דבר אל בנ”י, אומר אני ישראל קדמו...”¹

“Two things preceded the world:
Torah and the Jewish people. I don’t
know which one of them came first.
But when the Torah says “Command
the B’nei Yisroel,” “Speak to the B’nei
Yisroel,” I can say that the Jewish
people came first...”¹

The Rebbe points out that the way
this discussion is written sounds quite

unusual. Why does the Midrash assert
that “I don’t know” which one came
first? Once we establish that the Jewish
people came first, isn’t that enough to
do away with the question altogether?

No, says the Rebbe. Because down
here in this physical world, the Torah
seems to be on a higher level than the
Yidden. Only when we look deeper
into their spiritual sources do we
discover the truth—that the Yidden
are higher. That is the meaning of “I
don’t know” which is greater. Because
the fact that the Yidden are greater
comes from a place that transcends

knowledge; I **do not** and **can not**
know!

This is also why the Midrash
uses the term “אומר אני—I say”
when offering the conclusion. This
is Eliyahu Hanavi talking, saying “I
say,” i.e. the essence of his *neshama*,
which is always unified with Hashem.
It is at that innermost point of the
neshama that we can recognize its
transcendence even over the Torah.²

In a deeper sense:

Torah and mitzvos are merely
mediums, so-to-speak, for the Yidden
to reach their ultimate potential.
When Yidden keep Torah and
mitzvos, they connect themselves, as
they exist in this physical world, with
the essence of Hashem, revealing their
true selves in the process. This is the
purpose of all of creation: For Yidden
to use Torah and mitzvos to reveal
the *Atzmus* of Hashem in the physical
world and create a *dira betachtonim*.³

In the fall of 5752*, the Rebbe was
visited by the Sephardic chief rabbi of
Israel, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, and

נדפס ע"י ולזכות
הרה"ת ר' אוריאל
וזוגתו מרת שבי ומשפחתם שיחיו
ויגלו

they had an hour-long discussion on various Torah topics. One of the issues spoken about at great length was about how special the Jewish people are, even in reference to the Torah itself.

The Rebbe began by citing the Alter Rebbe's ruling that whenever 10 Yidden come together, Hashem's presence resides among them—even if they are **not** involved in Torah study. "This is because the Yidden are higher than Torah," the Rebbe explained. "Torah itself says that the Yidden came first—not only chronologically, but in order of significance too..."

"This is true even while the *neshamos* are down here in this world, clothed in physical bodies. When a Yid wakes up in the morning—even before he washes his hands and even before he recites Modeh Ani while in a state that he cannot even utter any words of Torah—he still has his *neshama* and is still very much greater than the Torah itself!⁴

Moreover, the Rebbe explained, the superiority of the Jewish people

over the Torah is even regarding their physical bodies. The physical body has the unique quality in the fact that you truly see Hashem's infinite capability of creation in it. The *neshama*, as a spiritual being, does not express Hashem's power of creation as much. Furthermore, only in and with the physical body are we able to fulfill our mission of keeping Torah and mitzvos. Therefore, the body of a Yid

is extremely precious and needs to be properly cared for at all times.⁵

What Does Torah Do?

Although it is true that Yidden are greater and more important than Torah—it is the Torah itself that brings this fact to light and reveals the Yidden's intrinsic value. When Yidden keep the Torah and do what they are supposed to do, this inner


What Was The Alter Rebbe's Focus?

When summing up the Alter Rebbe's accomplishments during his physical lifetime, there are various facets. But the most important thing he accomplished was "הנפש אשר עשו"—The people he made..."

True, he wrote and disseminated much Torah: Tanya, Shulchan Aruch, and all the *maamarim* which cover a vast breadth and depth—"Longer than the earth and wider than the sea."

But they pale in comparison to his accomplishments in the lives of other people. After all, *tzaddikim* are likened to their Creator. In Eliyahu Rabba there is a lengthy discussion of what came first in Hashem's creations—Torah or the Jewish people. And the conclusion is that the thought of the Jewish people came first, before anything else...

(Chof Daled Teves 5741)



truth of the superiority of the Jewish people is revealed. That is not to say that keeping Torah is their only virtue. On the contrary—Hashem loves the Jewish people like a father loves his children, simply because of who they are and for no other reason at all. But in order for their innate qualities to be felt and expressed, even down here in this lowly world—they need to keep Torah and mitzvos.⁶

This is what the Torah is about—revealing the inner virtue of the Jewish people. That’s why the conclusion of the entire Torah sums up this theme by alluding to the story of Moshe Rabbeinu’s breaking of the *luchos* in order to save the Yidden, as we shall soon explain.⁷

With this in mind, it becomes clear that Torah and mitzvos can **never** cause harm to the Jewish people. Even when a Yid fails to fulfill his mission of Torah and mitzvos, *chas v’shalom*, it is impossible for this to result in a real degradation. The only reason why Torah exists is in order to reveal the greatness of the Jewish people—obviously it cannot do the opposite!

The only reason a Yid is sometimes able to stumble and transgress the Torah is due to the great elevation that

occurs after he corrects his mistake and does *teshuva*. With this, a Yid can reach an even greater level than where he was before the mistake.⁸

In a similar vein, Torah receives its holiness from the Jewish people: A *sefer Torah* only attains its *kedusha* if a Yid tans the hides into parchment with the express intent that it be לשם קדושת, ספר תורה, and the same is true with all the other necessary steps to create a *sefer Torah*.

Even a *p’sak halacha* only becomes part of the Torah when it is ruled on explicitly by a Yid down here in this world.⁹

One of the most famous farbrengens where the Rebbe discussed this subject was the night of Simchas Torah 5747*, before *hakafos*. It was a rare sight as the Rebbe broke down in tears during what seemed to be an ordinary analysis of a Rashi on Chumash. The Rebbe kept crying throughout the entire explanation as tears streamed down from his holy eyes and on to the floor, uttering the words in between the deep and emotional sobs.

The Rebbe began by asking a few questions on Rashi’s comment on the final *possuk* in Chumash, where he

explains the words “לעיני כל ישראל”—all the wonders that Moshe did in front of the eyes of all the Jewish people—to mean that he “broke the *luchos* in front of their eyes, and Hashem agreed with his decision...”

Why would the Torah end off, in Rashi’s view, on such a negative note—one that seems to be an act of destruction of Torah? How does this fit in with all the positive descriptions of Moshe Rabbeinu in this *possuk* about his care and concern and leadership of the Jewish people?

The Rebbe bases the explanation on another Rashi in Parshas Ki Sisa, when Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to carve out a new set of *luchos*. Rashi cites a *mashal*:

“There was a king who had betrothed a woman and then left her among his maidservants while he left the country. The maidservants acted immorally, and in the process, rumors were circulating about the king’s fiancé. A friend of the king acted quickly and tore up the marriage contract, saying, ‘If the king will decide to kill her, I will tell him that she is not yet your wife.’”



“The king is Hashem, the maidservants are the *eirev rav*, the friend is Moshe, the betrothed woman is the Jewish people...”

In other words, Moshe Rabbeinu broke the *luchos* in order to save the Jewish people from Hashem’s punishment.

Moshe Rabbeinu was able to break the *luchos*, created and crafted by the hand of Hashem Himself, in order to save the Yidden. Because the only reason why the Torah exists is in order to reveal the greatness of the Jewish people! If a situation arises where the Torah could *chas v’shalom* be harming the existence of the Jewish people, there is no question—Moshe Rabbeinu did not think twice: he **broke** the *luchos*!

After listing all the other qualities of Moshe Rabbeinu and his leadership of the Jewish people, the Torah concludes with this one—because this is indeed the greatest of them all!

Moshe Rabbeinu’s whole being was Torah. The entire Torah is called

“תורת משה”—because his whole existence was Torah.

Nevertheless, he was ready and willing to break his very essence, throwing down the precious *luchos* (which contained the basis for the entire Torah) and breaking them to pieces, just to protect a small minority of the Jewish nation who had stumbled and worshipped *avoda zara*!

This is the greatest description of Moshe Rabbeinu, the true and faithful shepherd of the Jewish people.

The Bottom Line:

Two important lessons that we can apply to our personal *avoda* from all of the above:

Firstly, we now understand how important the existence of the Jewish people is, even in the most physical sense. The body of a Yid is precious and takes precedence over everything else in the world. This is why, explains the Rebbe, the Chabad way of caring for fellow Jews is to help them out, first and foremost, with their basic physical needs. This is not done on condition that they should later learn some Torah or the like. We give them whatever they need, and

even “luxuries,” without any strings attached.¹⁰

Secondly, the Rebbe points out that we, as the Jewish people have the ability, and in fact the obligation, to demand whatever it is that we need from Hashem. Even if according to the rules of the Torah, we are *chas v’shalom* not deserving of the *geula* right now, we still have the power to override that ruling—because Yidden are greater and higher than the Torah itself—and we must demand of Hashem to put an end to the *galus*, “**Daloi galus,**” and send us the *geula* with **Moshiach now!**¹¹ **T**

1. In several *maamarim* this statement is quoted from Tanna D’vei Eliyahu, although in our print of this Midrash the statement is written differently. See Sefer Hasichos 5752 p. 117, fn. 24.

2. Leil Simchas Torah 5747, se’if. 34.

3. 15 Tammuz 5739, se’if 16-17.

4. Se’if 3.

5. Se’if 4.

6. Sefer Hasichos 5752 pp. 116-117.

7. Leil Simchas Torah 5747 se’if 38.

8. Shabbos Parshas Shoftim 5749 se’if 5-6.

9. Yechidus with Rabbi Eliyahu, se’if 6.

10. Yechidus with Rabbi Eliyahu, se’if 5.

11. Leil Simchas Torah 5747, se’if 40.