

THE *Harmony* OF TORAH STUDY

The last of the 613 *mitzvot* is to “write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the Children of Israel, and place it in their mouths, so that this song will be for Me a witness in Bnei Yisrael.”

Most of the Torah commentators believe the “song” referred to here is the entire Torah. It is from this verse they derive the *mitzvah* that every Jew must write his own Sefer Torah, a *mitzvah* that can be fulfilled by underwriting even one letter, as a single missing letter can invalidate the entire scroll and filling in that letter can make the scroll “kosher” again.

G-d in His Torah is the greatest practitioner of the economy of language. Each word, indeed each letter, offers greater insights into meaning, allusions, inferences, and secrets using the four basic elements (PaRDeS – plain meaning, alluded meaning, derived meaning, mystic meaning) to uncover as many as 70 different interpretations of the text.

Rabbi Moshe Reiss uses the poetic image from Shir HaShirim to further explain the magnificence of Torah study: “The King brought me into His chambers.” When viewed from the outside, the castle is magnificent. However, as one enters and goes from room to room, his awe grows as he encounters greater richness and beauty in the furnishings and accoutrements of each room.

So too with Torah study. During a cursory reading, one can already recognize the Torah’s splendor. However, as one delves ever more deeply into the text, one marvels even more at the myriad

nuances and textures that continue to be revealed. The Torah must be appreciated as a whole more than for any particular part of it.

This is what King David meant, posits Rav Reiss, when he wrote, “The Torah of G-d is perfect (complete); it restores the soul.” Only when the Torah is studied and observed in its entirety (rather than piecemeal) does it have the ability to restore one’s soul. Just as one cannot remove even one spring from a clock and expect it to work, so too one cannot remove one piece of Torah and expect it to work on one’s soul.



Two of the symbols that grace our Rosh Hashanah table are the pomegranate and the apple. Rabbi Itamar Schwartz clarifies the differences between them. While we pray that we may be filled with *mitzvot* like a pomegranate, the Gemara in Berachot says that “even the emptiest of them are filled with *mitzvot* like a pomegranate.” Rabbi Schwartz cites HaGaon HaRav Dovid Povarsky in explaining that each seed in a pomegranate is separate, enveloped in its individual sac and not connected to any other seed.

In a similar way, a person can have many *mitzvot*, do many acts of *chessed*, but these may remain individual acts if one does not infuse these acts with the unifying element of spirituality, indicating life’s deeper spiritual meaning and purpose.

On the other hand, the apple has its seeds at its core, and everything else surrounds them. The apple, the

meaning to our lives, is dipped in honey to provide the sweetness our lives need to be meaningful. Each act of observance becomes meaningful when performed as a thread in the fabric of the whole, rather than as an isolated, perhaps even rote, action.



Torah is not just the black-inked words that prescribe and proscribe our actions, but also the white parchment upon which those words are written, the purpose and spirit of the laws without which observance becomes an empty shell.

That is why, continues Rabbi Eliyahu Schlesinger, even if his parents wrote one, it is necessary for every individual to write his own Sefer Torah, to recommit himself to a life infused with Torah as his individual soul relates to G-d. And he must teach his children the entire song – not just the words – so they too will appreciate the beauty and majesty of the Torah to which they are heirs.

When *Bnei Yisrael* delve deeply into Torah study and give it voice, they sing the praises of G-d and bear witness to His sovereignty over the earth. As Rosh Hashanah approaches, let us write the score of the Torah on our hearts and join together in a joyous symphony of renewed harmony with all creation. Let the spirit and joy of a Torah life infuse our lives with meaning and may we merit the blessings G-d will bestow upon us in the coming year.

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