



REVEALING THE ‘FIRST’ TORAH

TORAT ERETZ YISRAEL IN THE EYES OF RABBI NACHMAN

Torat Eretz Yisrael is a term which indicates the difference between the Torah of *Eretz Yisrael* and the Torah of *chutz laAretz*. In our privileged reality in which *Eretz Yisrael* is the world’s Torah center, a significant part of the processes of returning to *Eretz Yisrael* and of *kibbutz galuyot*, the question arises: is *Torat Eretz Yisrael* distinct and different from *Torat chutz laAretz*? Is it different in content, quality and essence? I would like to touch upon this question from the perspective of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, in *Likutei Moharan*, 78.

Rabbi Nachman begins by presenting a question: Torah is known as “your life and the length of your days” (חַיֵּיךָ וְאֶרְךְךָ יָמֶיךָ).¹ How then is it possible for us to stop studying the Torah? After all, everyone, from the greatest *talmid chacham* to the simple Jew, has to stop studying to eat and drink, to work, to live.

How does Rabbi Nachman understand the words, “your life?” The simple reading of the verse refers to adherence to G-d as a value that gives life, meaning, to our existence. Surprisingly, Rabbi Nachman reads the verse as a specific reference to Torah study! It is obviously not possible to study Torah all day and all night, so why does Rabbi Nachman think the intention is to literally study Torah? We will address that shortly.

The same question regarding life outside of Torah can be asked about the generations that preceded *Matan Torah*. It is clear that the world before *Matan Torah* was not only a world where one did not study Torah from a book, but a world in which no Torah

was formulated at all, and yet the world existed.

Rabbi Nachman suggests there was a “Torah” in the world even before *Matan Torah*. Torah is not just the *luchot*. The world was created with 10 Divine statements, and it is this “Torah” that animates and sustains the world. These 10 statements – the revelation of the Divine will in the world – were later replaced by the 10 Commandments at Sinai. Rabbi Nachman explains that the world, by its very existence, contained a Divinity which breathed life into it. In every act, in every situation, place or time, G-d was and is present.

This explains why the generation of the flood was punished, even before there were explicit commandments. Why was Cain punished even before “thou shalt not kill”? Because there was Divinity, Torah and a high expectation of human beings to live morally and compassionately. This Torah was not formulated in clear and orderly fashion, but reality, humanity and society were created such that they could live in peace and goodness.

This is how Rabbi Nachman explains the saying “*derech erez* precedes the Torah.” *Derech erez* is basic human moral behavior which chronologically and ideologically preceded the Torah as we know it.

Now we can ask two more questions: what is the need for a formulated and written Torah if there are Divine truths hidden in reality itself. Why do we need Jews, Judaism, and 613 commandments? And what is the connection between the Torah given at Mount Sinai and this ancient Torah?

The first question can be answered frankly: It didn’t work. Human society didn’t learn to conduct itself with a high consciousness of morality, goodness and Divinity. Regarding the second question, Torah as we know it is a concentrated summary of the Torah hidden in reality. Like anything revealed, it is more concentrated, stronger and more visible. But in essence, the 10 Commandments embody the 10 statements in which the world was created.

Returning to Rabbi Nachman’s question, we now understand why he chose to read the verse this way. This is a reading of the Torah of *galut*, which sees the visible Torah as the only lifeline, instead of seeing it as expressing the hidden Torah, the Torah that sustains reality. A *galut* perception of the Torah is one that clings only to the scroll itself. *Torat Eretz Yisrael*, as it appears from the Torah in *Likutei Moharan*, is the understanding that the visible Torah reflects an earlier Torah. It is *Torat Chaim*, which is not only observance of Torah and *mitzvot*, but a Torah that expresses connection to G-d from within our earthly lives, even when we are not studying Torah and keeping *mitzvot*.

A Torah that calls us to to see how Divine life beats its way into our hearts.

1 Devarim 1:20.

Rabbanit Nechama Porat teaches Talmud to women in Israel.



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