



Always Receiving

The year was 1935, and the Spanish government was making elaborate plans to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the Rambam's birth – seemingly a great honor and proud moment for Jews everywhere.

Yet, while many Jews around the world welcomed the initiative and prepared celebrations of their own, some had reservations. These concerns were addressed to the leading Torah sage of the time, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky:

“We do not need to commemorate the Rambam's birth, for he lives on wherever teachers and students discuss his words; his teachings upon which we meditate every day are his eternal remembrance. This has been an everyday occurrence for many generations – the wellsprings have not ceased to this day.”

Stamps and statues. Plaques and paintings. Buildings and bridges. These are the traditional ways we commemorate the great people of the past. The 1935 Spanish government sought to celebrate the legacy of the great Maimonides, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, the Rambam, in much the same way. But we Jews aren't in the habit of memorialising our leaders and teachers. Rav Chaim Ozer's objection was based on the fact that we live with the Rambam – with his writings and teachings – every day. His philosophical ideas and halachic rulings form part of our collective Jewish consciousness. The Rambam is not a historical relic; he is a figure of the present.

This vignette about the Rambam provides a window into understanding the Torah's approach to history. We do more than remember the fact that the Exodus from Egypt took place – we *relive* that liberation. The Rambam himself codifies

– based on the Talmud – that a person is obliged in every generation to see themselves as if they had personally gone out of Egypt. We live by the Exodus daily – by its messages of faith in G-d, of the importance of freedom and of resisting tyranny, and of dedicating that freedom to something greater than ourselves.

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comes around, it's not that we are remembering an event that happened in the distant past, but rather we experience the same spiritual energy that was unleashed in the world at the time of the original Pesach.

This same principle applies to every one of the events that are recorded in the Torah, and that we are called on to remember. We are not merely remembering; we are reliving and re-integrating the experiences, and making them part of our daily lives – tangible and relevant in every way.

Arguably, no festival embodies this idea quite like Shavuot, which is the anniversary of the giving of the Torah exactly 3,333 years ago. The Kli Yakar points out that when the Torah calls on us to celebrate the festival of Shavuot, it does so without mentioning it is the

anniversary of the giving of the Torah *at all*. We infer that Shavuot is the anniversary of the giving of the Torah from the date on which the festival takes place (the 6th of Sivan), but there's no explicit mention of it. Why would the defining dimension of Shavuot not be directly stated by the Torah?

He answers that the Torah did not want us to fixate on one day as the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, to relate to this day as a memory of the distant past.

Our relationship with the Torah is immediate and visceral. We receive it – we incorporate it into our lives – each and every day. When the Jewish people are approaching Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, the verse says, “In the third month of the children of Israel leaving the land of Egypt, on **this** day they arrived in the desert of Sinai.” Rashi notes that it says “**this** day” and not “that day.” “That day” would imply an event in the past, “this day” implies that it's happening *today*. Right now. Let us stop for a moment now and realise that at this moment in time we are actively receiving the Torah from G-d.

There's a unique offering which was brought in the Temple on Shavuot – two loaves of bread, made from the newly ripened first grains of the wheat harvest. The Torah calls this offering the *Mincha Chadasha* – the “new offering.” Why this focus on newness? Because Shavuot is a celebration of freshness and renewal. It's a celebration of renewed inspiration and renewed challenge. It's a celebration of Torah, today.

Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein is the Chief Rabbi of South Africa.