



## Doers of the Torah

*“In the third new moon after the children of Yisra’el had come out of the land of Mitsrayim, on this day they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. For they set out from Rephidim, and had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Yisra’el camped there before the mountain. And Moshe went up to Elohim, and YHWH called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘This is what you are to say to the house of Ya’aqov, and declare to the children of Yisra’el: “You have seen what I did to the Mitsrim, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. And now, if you diligently obey My voice, and shall guard My covenant, then you shall be My treasured possession above all the peoples – for all the earth is Mine – and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a set-apart nation.” Those are the words which you are to speak to the children of Yisra’el.’ And Moshe came and called for the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which YHWH commanded him. And all the people answered together and said...”*

Imagine the children of Yisrael standing at the foot of Mount Sinai before YHWH, being presented with the Torah and commanded to keep it, then answering, ‘All that YHWH has said, we will study, learn, and think about, then we will do it if we decide it is right and relevant for us today.’ (Heaven forbid!)

Of course that is not what they said, but rather,

*“And all the people answered together and said, “All that YHWH has spoken we shall do.”*

We should be doers of the Torah first and foremost, rather than just hearers and learners of it, as is written,

*“And become doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror, for he looks at himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what he was like. But he that looked into the perfect Torah, that of freedom, and continues in it, not becoming a hearer that forgets, but a doer of work, this one shall be blessed in his doing of the Torah.”*

This understanding of our faith as a religion of action as well as understanding is demonstrated by the scriptural verse in which the children of Yisrael were standing at the foot of Mount Sinai and gave their acceptance of the entire Torah with the words “na’aseh v’nishma” (We will do and we will hear/understand). In other words, the children of Yisrael promised first to observe the laws of the Torah, and only afterward to study and understand these laws.

When Moses first ascended to Mount Sinai, YHWH commanded him to tell the people that if they accepted the covenant, YHWH would make them a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Upon hearing these words, the people responded, “All that YHWH has said, we will do.” Later in the text, after Moses related specific commands to the people, they again said, “All of the things that YHWH has said, we will do.” A few verses later, after Moses wrote and read aloud the words of the Torah, the people uttered the phrase “na’aseh v’nishma,” (We will do and we will hear). They promised with great trusting faith to do all that YHWH commanded, even before they heard what those commands were to be. Is doing possible without first understanding? Yes. Must understanding always precede and bring one to doing? No.

Emphasizing deed over study and learning might seem to promote a religion by rote, in which people perform rituals without any understanding of the significance of their actions. But the scriptural precedent and insistence

that “na’aseh” precedes “nishma” actually allows for the establishment of a coherent community first unified in its practice, even while allowing for later discussion and learning about the details and significance of the practice of Torah. It also demonstrates whole-hearted and trusting faith in the One who gave it. We should accept and obey YHWH’s Word to us and trust in Him that it is right and best – do first, then learn and understand the details of it later at our leisure. That is the epitome’ of trust and obedience.

I leave you with these words, given to us by a few wise men:

*“All my days I have grown up among the wise and I have found nought of better service than silence; not learning but doing is the chief thing; and whoso is profuse of words causes sin.”*

*“If thou hast learnt much Torah, ascribe not any merit to thyself, for thereunto wast thou created.”*

*“He who learns in order to teach is given the opportunity both to learn and to teach; but he who learns in order to practice is given the opportunity to learn and to teach, to observe and to practice.”*

*“Separate not thyself from the congregation; trust not in thyself until the day of thy death; judge not thy fellow-man until thou art come into his place; and say not anything which cannot be understood at once, in the hope that it will be understood in the end; neither say, When I have leisure I will study, perchance thou wilt have no leisure.”*

I would add to this, say not that I will learn first, then when I have learned, I might do. Perchance you will never find the time nor have the inclination to do.

And, finally:

*“Great is the Torah which gives life to those that practice it in this world and in the world to come; as it is said, ‘For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh;’ and it says, ‘It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones;’ and it says, ‘It is a tree of life to them that grasp it, and of them that uphold it every one is rendered happy;’ and it says, ‘for they shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck;’ and it says, ‘It shall give to thine head a chaplet of grace, a crown of esteem it shall deliver to thee;’ and it says, ‘for by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased;’ and it says, ‘Length of days is in its right hand, in its left hand are riches and honor;’ and it says, ‘For length of days and years of life, and peace shall they add to thee.’”*

*“And YHWH commanded us to do all these laws, to fear YHWH our Elohim, for our excellence always, to keep us alive, as it is today. And it is righteousness for us when we guard to do all this command before YHWH our Elohim, as He has commanded us... Oh, that they had such a heart in them, to fear Me and to guard all My commands always, so that it might be well with them and with their children forever!”*