

THE SEVENTH WISDOM

PARASHAS VA'ESCHANAN

Torah does not merely contain wisdom - it creates wise people.

Moshe Rabbeinu tells Klal Yisrael:

וְשִׁמְרֵתֶם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם כִּי הוּא חֲכָמְתְּכֶם וּבִינְתְּכֶם לְעֵינֵי הָעַמִּים

“You shall observe and perform them, for this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations.”

Devarim 4:6

The Alter of Kelm asks: Why does the Torah emphasize what the nations will think of us? We do not keep the Torah to win their approval or admiration.

The answer is that the Torah is revealing something fundamental: Torah does not merely contain wisdom - it creates wise people.

A person who truly studies and lives according to the Torah gradually learns how to see the world differently. Torah trains him to recognize truth and falsehood, honesty and deception, humility and pride. It teaches him to understand human nature and the many hidden motivations of the human heart.

The Torah does not merely tell us what to think. It teaches us how to think correctly. When its values become part of a person, that inner wisdom eventually becomes visible to everyone around him. This is the meaning of the words “for this is your wisdom.” Torah transforms the person who lives by it.

A REMARKABLE ENCOUNTER

The Secret of the Sheikh

A remarkable story is told about Rav Moshe Galante, zatzal, who lived several centuries ago in Tzfas.

Not far from Tzfas was a small Arab village in which there lived a wealthy and highly respected sheikh. His reputation extended throughout the region. Whenever someone became critically ill, the patient's family would come to him for help.

The sheikh would enter a private room for several minutes. When he emerged, he would announce one of two outcomes: the patient would recover, or the patient would not survive.

Astonishingly, his predictions were never wrong.

When Rav Moshe heard about this, he did not dismiss the reports, nor was he merely searching for a miracle. He wanted to discover the truth behind the sheikh's mysterious ability.

Rather than confronting him directly, Rav Moshe gradually earned his trust. Week after week, the two men met and discussed astronomy, medicine, mathematics and other branches of knowledge. Sometimes their conversations continued for hours.

With every discussion, the sheikh became increasingly impressed by Rav Moshe's extraordinary wisdom.

Finally, after many weeks, the sheikh turned to him and said:

"You are far wiser than I am. I know six branches of wisdom, but you possess a seventh wisdom that I do not understand. Please teach it to me."

Rav Moshe smiled and answered, "I will teach you my wisdom - but first, you must reveal yours."

The sheikh hesitated.

"My family has guarded this secret for generations," he explained.

Rav Moshe replied, "True wisdom is worth more than any family secret."

After considering his words, the sheikh finally agreed. Before the secret could be revealed, however, Rav Moshe was required to prepare himself. He fasted for two days, immersed in a mikvah and dressed in simple white garments provided by the sheikh.

When the preparations were complete, the sheikh led him through the narrow streets of the village until they reached an old stone building. He removed a large iron key from his robe and opened its heavy wooden door.

Inside, the room was completely silent.

At the far end hung a magnificent curtain. The sheikh approached it reverently and slowly drew it aside.

Behind the curtain stood an enormous stone plaque. Carved upon it were the words:

שׁוֹתִי ה' לִנְגְדִי תָמִיד

"I have set Hashem before me always."

Tehillim 16:8

The letters of Hashem's Name were formed from dazzling diamonds.

The sheikh spoke quietly.

"After preparing myself, I stand before these holy words and pray. If the diamonds blaze with light, I know that the patient will live. If their light begins to fade, I know that the patient will die. My family has guarded this secret for generations, and it has never failed."

Rav Moshe listened carefully. He looked at the diamonds, then at the pasuk, and finally at the sheikh.

He asked only one question:

"Do you know what these words mean?"

The sheikh lowered his eyes.

"No," he whispered. "I know only that they are holy."

At that moment, the difference between the two men became clear.

The sheikh had devoted his life to the mysterious power of a single pasuk, yet he had never stopped to understand what that pasuk was teaching him. Rav Moshe understood that the greatest treasure in the room was not the diamonds, the secret or even the miracle.

The greatest treasure was the Torah's message itself.

THE LESSON FOR US

Our Seventh Wisdom

Perhaps Rav Moshe's question was not meant only for the sheikh. It is a question that each of us must ask ourselves.

Every day we open a siddur or Chumash. We recite words that we have read hundreds - perhaps thousands - of times. Because they are so familiar, we may forget to stop and ask:

“What is Borei Olam teaching me through these words?”

We may know how to pronounce the words. We may recognize their holiness. But have we allowed ourselves to understand them? Have their lessons entered our hearts and changed the way we think, speak and behave?

This is the wisdom described by the Alter of Kelm. The Torah is not asking us to impress the nations. It is teaching us that when a person truly lives Torah, its wisdom becomes visible - not because he tries to appear wise, but because the Torah has made him wise.

The sheikh devoted his life to the power of one pasuk. Rav Moshe devoted his life to understanding every pasuk.

Perhaps that is the seventh wisdom: not discovering something that no one has ever seen, but rediscovering the priceless wisdom that Hashem has lovingly placed before us every day - waiting for us to slow down, look again and finally understand His words.

Shabbat Shalom.

Adapted from the shiur “Parashat Vaetchanan: The Seventh Wisdom,”
by Rabbi Michael Kaplan, presented on the Mi Kamcha Yisrael channel.

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