

בס"ד

דברי תורה ד'צבי אליהו
DIVREI TORAH

עקב

Eikev

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Tradition

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There is famous Jewish song which boasts about "Tradition." The singer belts out the word with pride and buffoonery which we the audience are meant to look upon with feelings of nostalgia as we contemplate a bygone era where our ancestors practiced meaningless rituals for reasons they'd long forgotten. This perspective is the antithesis to the meaningful life that Torah offers us, and the antithesis to a message in this week's parsha.

A verse in the Torah states "*And it will be that if you listen to my commandments that I **command you today**, to love Hashem your G-d and to serve Him with all of your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rains in your land in its time...*"(Devarim 11:13-14) There is so much depth to this verse and so many questions we could ask to understand it better. I want to focus on the words, "that I command you today." Why does the Torah focus us on the word "today"? The message that we have to listen to Hashem's commandments would be clear without saying that they were commanded "today. Why mention that the commandments were commanded "today"?

Rashi (11th century) explains that the word "today" teaches us how we should experience the commandments which are written in the Torah. Experience these commandments as if they were given to you today. See them as new, as if today were the first time you ever heard them. This still requires some explanation. How does the newness of these commandments

inspire me personally? After all, they are still commandments. Most of us are probably not overjoyed to hear the newest regulations promulgated by the federal government or the newest modifications to the highway laws. How do Rashi's words help us understand that Torah is special because it was commanded today?

There is story I once heard about the great astronomer Johannes Kepler and this story illustrates how to appreciate the Torah as if it were given today. Kepler was a 17th century astronomer, best known for discovering laws which govern how planets orbit around the sun (also called the laws of planetary motion).

Kepler was a passionate scientist who was convinced that the planets followed perfectly circular orbits around the sun. For years he labored to find proof for his theory. Much to his disappointment, his observations consistently showed that the planets did not describe circular orbits but rather elliptical ones. When he finally realized that the orbits of the planets, while not perfectly circular, adhered to a unified law of planetary motion, he was elated. The universe had order, and he had discovered it.

Kepler faced numerous challenges to publishing his theory, but his enthusiasm was indomitable. His attitude was summed up in a letter which I once heard translated in a lecture. A statement from this letter beautifully describes the value of seeing the Torah as new. Paraphrased, Kepler's words were as follows: "If no one believes my work, if all of my efforts fall upon deaf ears, I don't care. G-d Himself has waited 5,000 years for someone to understand His

universe, and I have done it!" What a tremendous remark! This is what it should feel like to learn Torah. When we delve into this miraculous gift we call Torah we must know and understand that we are peering into the very essence and secrets of G-d's creation. Every nuance, every mitzvah is a message from G-d of how He runs His universe. When we read a line of Torah or learn a new halacha this is voice we should hear, "today I have discovered a secret of G-d's universe which has laid waiting for me from the beginning of time itself."

Learn Torah. Look at it with the freshness and importance of a message from G-d hidden to all the world until your eyes

discover it. Look deeply into its words, its nuances, and ask scholars to help you understand it deeper. Take a single verse or a single message from this week's Torah. Think about it. Repeat it 10 or fifteen times to yourself. What does it say to you? How does it touch you? Can you find the hidden meanings G-d has put there. Make the effort, and know that you will be rewarded, in the World to Come, if not immediately in this world.

May we all merit to understand the treasure that is our Torah, to appreciate it, learn it, and live it as it is meant to be lived. GOOD SHABBOS!!!