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## פרשת יתרו

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### פרק יט פסוק א

בַּחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדְּבַר סִינַי:

### רש"י

ביום הזה: לא היה צריך לכתוב אלא ביום ההוא, מהו ביום הזה, שיהיו דברי תורה חדשים עליך כאלו היום נתנו.

### מושג

שיהיו דברי תורה חדשים עליך כאלו היום נתנו.

### Translation:

The words of Torah should be new to you as if they were given today.

### Explanation:

On one level the Musag is teaching that learning Torah should always be fresh and exciting as if the Torah was received this very day. Additionally, it is teaching that one should look at each day of his service to Hashem as a new day. One who failed yesterday should see today as a new opportunity for Teshuvah: to begin afresh as if the Torah was first given today, making yesterday's failures irrelevant. By the same token, one should not rely on past accomplishments, but live each day anew.

### Looking in the Pasuk:

Rashi quotes the Midrash which comments on the use of the words ביום הזה in the present tense, instead of saying ביום ההוא in the past tense. The Midrash answers that the power of Teshuvah allows us to look at the receiving of the Torah not as a past event, but rather as one that took place today. With this we understand the Pasuk that follows which mentions the fact that they had just left Refidim<sup>1</sup>.

### Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: One should look at every day as a fresh opportunity to observe the Torah.

Understand: One should not feel that failure to observe the Torah in the past will hinder his or her ability to observe it in the future. Rather, the power of תשובה allows one to begin the new day with a fresh slate as if the Torah was just given now.

Think: Looking at the context in which a lesson is taught, as well as the exact use of tense, plays a significant role in understanding the Torah's message.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Mechilta quoted by Rashi on (ד"ה ויסעו מרפידים) פסוק ב (ד"ה ויסעו מרפידים), which teaches that the point of the Torah telling us that they had left רפידים was to focus on the fact that they had done Teshuvah, that is to say that they had indeed moved on from the mistakes they made in רפידים.

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# NOTES

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1. Rashi's source is found in the *Tanchumah* which reads:

ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני: וכי ביום הזה באו? אלא כשתהא לומד אל יהו בעיניך ישנים, אלא כאילו היום הזה נתנה.

The most common understanding of this Musag is that one should approach the study of Torah with enthusiasm and excitement as if one were standing at Har Sinai and had just received the Torah. This sentiment is found in the Gemoroh (ברכות סג) which teaches:

ועוד פתח רבי יהודה בכבוד תורה ודרש: (דברים כ"ז) הסכת ושמע ישראל היום הזה נהיית לעם. וכי אותו היום נתנה תורה לישראל? והלא אותו יום סוף ארבעים שנה היה! אלא ללמדך שחביבה תורה על לומדיה בכל יום ויום כיום שנתנה מהר סיני.

The Gemoroh is commenting on the fact that after 40 years in the desert Hashem tells the people, "Today you have become a people". The day we 'became a people' obviously refers to the day we received the Torah, which, the Gemoroh points out, did not take place on that day. The Gemoroh answers that the Torah is dear to those who learn it as if it was given that very day.

While it is certainly possible that the Tanchumah Rashi quotes is echoing a similar message, this is not necessarily the case. A major difficulty with this understanding is that the *ביום הזה* mentioned in our Pasuk does not take place on the 6th day of Sivan, when the Torah was given, but rather on the first day of Sivan! Additionally, there is simply no hint whatsoever in our Pasuk to the giving of the Torah. If we were to compare it to the Pasuk mentioned in the Gemoroh, we would find that the Pasuk there reads לעם, נהיית לעם, you became a people, a clear reference to receiving the Torah. No such reference exists here. Therefore, we propose a different understanding of the Midrash. Rather than echoing the lesson taught in the Gemoroh, the Midrash is teaching a different lesson<sup>2</sup>. It is telling us that on Rosh Chodesh Sivan the people learned the lesson of *ביום הזה*. But, what happened on this day that was to become a lesson for all time?

The answer is that they came to מדבר סיני and prepared for תורה. However, where they came *to* is only half the story; where they came *from* is much more significant. The next Pasuk tells us וַיָּסְעוּ רַפְדִּים מִדְּבַר סִינַי וַיָּבֹאוּ מִקְדָּר סִינַי, they arrived in מדבר סיני and prepared to accept the Torah after leaving קדָר סיני. When we remember that רַפְדִּים was the place where רַפְדִּים עֲצָמֵן מִדְּבַר תּוֹרָה<sup>3</sup>, we marvel at the fact that they were able to leave that negative experience behind and proceed to prepare for the most intimate of relationships with Hashem. This models for us the power of Teshuvah, as Rashi on ב פסוק quoting the Mechilta comments: מֵה בִּיאָתָן לְמִדְּבַר סִינַי בְּתוֹשָׁבָה, אִף נִסְיַתֶּן מִרְפִּידִים בְּתוֹשָׁבָה.

The concept of Teshuvah allows us to leave yesterday behind. It allows us to look at today as a new day, as if yesterday never happened. This is the idea of יהיו דברי תורה חדשים עליך כאלו היום נתנו, Torah should be new to you as if it was first given today, making yesterday's sins irrelevant as if they were committed before the Torah was given. And, this amazing ability, to be able to look only at today - *ביום הזה* - was given to us as well. We are thus urged to look at each day as they did, כחדשים, as a new day, a new start, unencumbered with the mistakes of our past, the personal רפידים we all wish to leave behind. There is, at the same time, a facet of this idea that obligates us as well. For just as the mistakes of yesterday do not count against us, so too the accomplishments of yesterday do not suffice. We should look at every day as if the Torah was first given today as a motivation to not rest on the laurels of the past but to demand of ourselves constant growth in our עבודת השם<sup>4</sup>.

2. Questions for further discussion:

- Rashi comments that they arrived at מדבר סיני on ראש חודש. Does this somehow connect to our Musag?
- Compare and contrast the wording of Rashi and the wording of the Gemoroh in ברכות סג. Are there clear hints that the two דברי הז"ל are teaching different lessons?

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2 The wording of the Tanchumah, however, does not seem to support our explanation.

3 מאי לשון רפידים? ואמר לי: רפידים שמה. כתנאי, ר' אליעזר אומר: רפידים שמה, ר' יהושע אומר: שריפו עצמן מדברי תורה, וכן הוא אומר: (ירמיהו מ"ז) לא הפנו אבות אל בנים מרפיון ידים. (ברכות ה:)

4 Rov S.R. Hirsch understands this to be the lesson of the תרומת הדשן. The daily service in the המקדש begins with the clearing away of the ashes of yesterday's sacrifices. Rov Hirsch (ויקרא ו:ד) explains:

Fresh, as if had yet been accomplished, does the beginning of every new day call us to go to our mission with full new devotion and sacrifice, and nothing that has already been done may lessen the energy with which we go to our duty. The thought of what has already been accomplished can be the death of that which is still to be accomplished.