

Dear Friends,

The goal of Torah Learning Project is to give you a study experience that is both intriguing and uniquely satisfying. We invest much time and effort to ensure that your learning gives you a deep sense of personal fulfillment and leaves you wanting more.

In order to achieve this, we have created a dynamic, original curriculum that features:

- Thought-provoking issues
- Helpful, informative synopses
- Materials for 40 minutes of study
- Clear, easily understandable language and layout
- Challenging questions to consider at the end of each lesson

Our sincere aspiration is that your learning leaves you with a distinct sense of personal enrichment and a desire to continue growing in your studies.

We look forward to making many more rewarding learning experiences available to you in the future.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Yehoshua Werde
Director

Chavrusa Sushi is a coordinated network of creative learning programs geared toward the young working Chabad Professional. For comments questions or requests to join the Chavrusa Sushi Network, please email Director@Torahlp.com.

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ב"ה



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Torah

Introduction

What is Torah? What is unique about it? How does it work? And how does the Torah continue to remain relevant millennia after it was given?

About the uniqueness of Torah, the Midrash teaches:

Eichah Rabbah 2:13

אם יאמר לך אדם: יש חכמה בגוים - תאמן... (ואם יאמר לך אדם) יש תורה בגוים - אל תאמן

If someone tells you there is wisdom among the Goyim, believe him . . . If someone tells you there is Torah among the Goyim, do not believe him...

How is Torah different to conventional wisdom? And what makes it unique to Yidden?

We tend to think about Torah as a book of wisdom, however, the Torah is unlike anything we are familiar with. It is full of wisdom, but it is not wisdom. It tells a story, but it is certainly not a storybook. And it contains many instructions, but it is much more profound than any book of law. What is so extraordinary about Torah?

Blueprint of Creation

Based on a posuk in Tehillim, the Zohar teaches that Torah is the blueprint for creation and the master plan for the existence of the universe.

Tehillim 104

מָה רַבּוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ ה', כָּלֵם בְּחָכְמָה עָשִׂיתָ.

How numerous are your works, Hashem, you created all of them with wisdom.

There is certainly wisdom and intelligent design to be found within creation, but the Zohar teaches that this posuk from Tehillim means a lot more than that. Torah is the wisdom that the verse refers to as the tool through which creation was brought into existence:

Zohar, Terumah 161a

כד ברא קוב"ה עלמא הוה אסתכל בה באורייתא וברא עלמא ובאורייתא אתברי עלמא.

When Hashem created the universe, He looked into the Torah and created. It was through the Torah that the world was created.

To serve this function, Torah had to have preceded the world, as the Midrash teaches:

Midrash Tehillim 90:4

אלפיים שנה קדמה תורה לברייתו של עולם, שנאמר ואהי' אצלו אמון ואהי' שעשועים יום יום, ויומו של הקב"ה אלף שנה
The Torah preceded creation by 2,000 years, as it says (Mishlei 8:30) "I was a nursling beside Him, and I was [His] delight day after day" and a day in Hashem's days is 1,000 years [thus "day after day" means 2,000 years].

Torah is not of this world. It predates the universe and can therefore serve as a blueprint and instruction manual for the universe.

Because Torah is not of this world, it is able to provide a glimpse into the bigger vision for creation—the master plan and reason for which we were placed on this earth.

Since time itself is a creation, how is it possible for the Torah to predate time by 2,000 years? Doesn't the concept of predating—and certainly the concept of predating by a specific number of years—necessitate the prior existence of the dimension of time?

Maamar, Alpayim Shana 5711

הזמן עצמו הוא בריאה חדשה שנתחדשה בדרך יש מאין, דכשם שמציאות המקום היא מציאות חדשה שלא היתה קודם, כך גם הזמן הוא מחודש שלא הי' קודם בריאתו, וכידוע שזמן ומקום קשורים זה בזה. ולפי זה יוקשה ביותר, מהו ענין אלפיים שנה שקדמה תורה לברייתו של עולם. ומבאר כ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר, שאין הכוונה לקדימה בזמן אלא לקדימה במעלה,

Time itself is a creation that was brought into existence from nothing, and just as the existence of space is a created entity that did not exist previously, in the same way, time is an innovation that never existed before creation. As is known, time and place are connected to each other. According to this it is exceedingly difficult [to understand] the meaning of the 2,000 years that the Torah preceded the world?

The Rebbe, my saintly father in law, explains that the intent is not a precedence in time, but a precedence in realm.

The Midrash teaches us that Torah is not of this world, but is a remnant of a higher realm. More specifically, 2,000 spiritual realms above our created realm. (What these 2,000 realms mean would require introducing its kabbalistic context which is beyond the scope of this booklet).

Everything can be Found in Torah

Since Torah is the blueprint for creation, it follows that everything in our created universe should be able to be found within Torah and indeed can be found within Torah:

Mishnah, Pirkei Avos 5:22

הפוך בה והפוך בה דכולה בה.
Delve into [the Torah] and continue to delve into it, for everything is in it.

What does it mean that “everything is in it?”

The Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehudah Lowe 1520–1609) explains:

Maharal, Derech HaChaim, ibid.

הפוך בה דכולה בה, כלומר כאשר ישיג בתורה הנה הוא משיג בכל סדר המציאות, אחר כי דרכי העולם הזה יוצאים מן דרכי התורה

“Delve into [the Torah] and continue to delve into it, for everything is in it” meaning that when one

delves into the deeper meanings of the Torah one can come to an understanding of the entire universe, since all that occurs in the universe stems from Torah.

On a literal level, a story is told about Avner, a disciple of the Ramban (c. 1194–1270) who became an apostate. He once explained to his former teacher that he had left the faith because he found one of the Ramban's teachings to be absurd. The Ramban taught that everything in this world can be found in the parshah of Haazinu (Devarim 32:1-52). Avner challenged the Ramban to show him where he appeared in Haazinu. The Ramban proceeded to show him how the third letter of every word in the posuk (ibid 32:26) אַפְּאִיָּהֶם אֲשֶׁר־בִּיתָהּ מֵאֲנֹשׁ וְכָרָם spelled out his name. Seeing his mistake, Avner asked the Ramban to help him find a path back to Yiddishkeit, to which the Ramban referred him to the meaning of that posuk that outlined a path of teshuvah.

In a broader sense, this means that Torah is the address to consult whenever we are in need of guidance or council about anything in life, as it serves as the manufacturer's guide and user's manual for the universe. As the blueprint of creation, the Torah sheds light and insight that allows us to see the deeper purpose behind everything.

Bible Codes

In light of this insight, some scholars in recent decades claimed to have found bible codes that predicted certain current events.

A fascinating example of this:

Megillas Esther tells of the hanging of Haman's ten sons, following which it relates that Esther asked the king to grant the Yidden permission that "tomorrow" they be allowed to hang Haman's ten sons and it again tells us that the Jews hung Haman's ten sons. Why does it tell us about their hanging twice? Chazal explain that this word "tomorrow" means "There is a tomorrow that is now, and a tomorrow which is later," (Tanchuma, Bo 13 and Rashi, Shemos 13:14) indicating that this request was concerning an event that was to take place at some point in the future. Furthermore, in the Megillah there are a few letters in the list of the ten sons of Haman that are deliberately meant to appear smaller so that they stand out from the rest (and each one has its own reasons for being smaller). These letters spell out תשז which is a notation of the year, 5707, (1946-1947).

Following the Nuremberg trials, eleven prominent Nazis were sentenced to be hung in the early morning hours of October 16, 1946 (the court prescribed hanging as the method of punishment instead of death by firing squad or by electric chair that would seem more likely given the nature of the court). Furthermore, the night before the hanging, Hermann Göring committed suicide, reducing the number of those who were hung from eleven to ten.

In his final moments as he was led up to the platform to be hung along with nine other prominent Nazis, Julius Streicher suddenly blurted out "Purim-fest 1946!"

It is unknown whether Streicher knew just how relevant his words were, both in the connection to the second "hanging" of ten of "haman's sons" and the connection to 1946!

That being said, the Torah doesn't claim to contain these types of codes and their meaning is of little relevance to us

as Yidden, however the Torah does attest to the fact that everything can be found in it!

A more relevant interpretation of this concept (that everything can be found in Torah) is that Torah has advice for every possible situation. There is no conceivable scenario for which Torah does not offer guidance and direction.

Moreover, as we will learn, the Torah can be studied on many different levels and each word is filled with multiple layers of meaning, from the simple meaning, to fascinating and profound symbolic, homiletic, and mystical interpretations. Thus, everyone can find a part of Torah that speaks to them.

All of Existence Depends on Torah

Not only can everything be found in Torah, all of creation is also dependent on Torah. The Gemara goes so far as to say that the existence of creation was conditioned upon the Jews accepting the Torah at Sinai:

Shabbos 88a

התנה הקב"ה עם מעשה בראשית ואמר להם אם ישראל
מקבלים התורה אתם מתקיימין ואם לאו אני מחזיר אתכם
לתוהו ובוהו

Hashem made a condition with the works of creation and said to them: "If Yidden accept the Torah, you will exist, and if not, I will return you to absolute nothingness."

It is told that if there was ever a time that even one Jew could not be found studying Torah, the world would cease to exist.

One year, on Purim, the Baal Shem Tov's father, R' Eliezer, is

said to have been the only one in the entire world studying Torah at a certain time of day and for that time it was in his merit alone that the world continued to exist.

Yidden, Hashem, and Torah

As Yidden, we have a special relationship with Hashem through Torah:

Zohar Vol. III, 73a

תלת קשרין מתקשראן דא בדא ישראל מתקשראין באורייתא
ואורייתא בקודשא בריך הוא

Three bonds are tied one to another, Yidden are tied to the Torah and the Torah is tied to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The Zohar mentions three bonds, but only lists two, i.e., between the Yidden and Torah, and between Torah and Hashem. What is the third bond that it speaks of?

The Rebbe explains:

Maamar, Pasach Rabi Shimon 5734

קשר השלישי, הקשר דישראל וקוב"ה שמצד עצם הנשמה כמו
שהיא מקושרת עם העצמות

The third knot is the bond between Yidden and Hashem that is on account of the essence of the soul which is bound to Hashem's Essence.

When a Yid studies Torah, not only is he connected to Hashem through the Torah that he studies, but the Torah awakens within him his own personal and essential

relationship with Hashem. In this sense, the Torah is a guide, providing us with the language to help us access and relate to the deepest recesses of our neshamah.

Hashem's Infinite Wisdom Manifest on Earth

This relationship with Hashem that is fostered through Torah is a powerful one. Torah is Hashem's infinite wisdom that became manifest on earth in terminology that we are able to comprehend.

Tanya Ch. 5

כשאדם יודע ומשיג בשכלו פסק זה כהלכה הערוכה במשנה או גמרא או פוסקים הרי זה משיג ותופס ומקיף בשכלו רצונו וחכמתו של הקב"ה דלית מחשבה תפיסא ביה ולא ברצונו וחכמתו כי אם בהתלבשותם בהלכות הערוכות לפנינו וגם שכלו מלובש בהם והוא יחוד נפלא שאין יחוד כמוהו ולא כערכו נמצא כלל בגשמיות להיות לאחדים ומיוחדים ממש מכל צד ופנה.

וזאת מעלה יתירה גדולה ונפלאה לאין קץ, אשר במצות ידיעת התורה והשגתה על כל המצות מעשיות

When a person knows and comprehends a verdict as a halachah set forth in the Mishnah or Gemara or Poskim, he then actually comprehends and grasps the Will and wisdom of Hashem, Whom no thought can grasp, nor His Will and wisdom, except when they — Hashem's Will and wisdom — clothe themselves in the laws set before us. His intellect is also clothed within them.

Now this is a most wonderful unity; in the physical

realm there in no unity similar or parallel to it, that they [the person's mind and Hashem's intellect] should actually become one and united from every side and angle.

This is the distinctive, infinitely great and wonderful superiority of the mitzvah of knowing and comprehending Torah over all mitzvos requiring action.

Hashem's Infinite wisdom is so removed from anything we can possibly comprehend that it is truly a wonder how it became clothed within a language that even us mortals can grasp with our minds. When we study Torah, we get a chance to listen in on Hashem's thoughts, and we can catch a glimpse of Hashem's mind from an insiders perspective.

Maamar, V'Eleh Hamishpatim 5741

ירידת והמשכת התורה למטה היא באופן שגם לאחרי שירדה למטה ונתלבשה בשכל אנושי היא חכמתו של הקב"ה שלמעלה משכל הנבראים...ו...ע"י לימוד התורה בהבנה והשגה נעשית תורתו של האדם הלומד, שגם לאחרי שהיא נעשית תורתו של האדם הלומד היא נשארת במהותה תורת הוי'.

The descent of Torah below is in such a manner that even after it descended below and became manifest in human intellect, it remains Hashem's wisdom that transcends the intelligence of any created being...and by studying Torah in a way that it is understood to the student, it becomes the student's Torah; and even after it becomes the

student's Torah, it nevertheless remains Hashem's Torah in its essence.

Torah is not only the source of all earthly wisdom, it is also Divine wisdom, which is why it is infinite and why when we study it we are elevated to a higher level of consciousness, whether we are aware of it or not. Torah helps us see and intuit things differently and it refines us as human beings. A different way if putting it is that through mitzvos we behave in a G-dly manner, and through Torah we think and are able to view reality through a G-dly lens.

Davening and Torah Study

In Chassidus, our mission in this world is said to be two-fold: 1) To elevate the world to a spiritually refined state, and 2) to draw G-dliness down into this earthly experience. The Rebbe explains that this is why two of the major themes in the life of a Yid is davening and Torah study:

Ma'amar, Ani Ledodi 5712

תורה ותפילה הם ב' אופני ודרכי העבודה... התורה בכלל הוא מלמעלה למטה, דמה שישראל קיבלו את התורה הוא באופן דמתן תורה, היינו בדרך מתנה מלמעלה שלא מצד עבודת הנבראים... אמנם ענין התפילה הוא עבודה מלמעלה למעלה... זה שישנם שני דרכים אלה בעבודת האדם הוא משום שענין העבודה ניתן לאדם המורכב מנשמה וגוף... והרי הנשמה יש בה טבע העל'... וטבע הגוף הוא טבע הירידה, רוח הבהמה היורדת היא למטה, ותכלית הכוונה היא שיהי' חיבור הנשמה והגוף, וזהו כאשר פועלים בכל אחד מהם שיהי' היפך טבעו, שבנשמה שהיא בטבע העל' תהי' עבודה בדרך ירידה והמשכה ובגוף שהוא בטבע הירידה יהי' ענין דעל'... ולכן ניתנו ב' דרכי

העבודה מלמטה למעלה ומלמעלה למטה שהם תפילה ותורה
Torah study and davening are two types of avodah...the Torah represents a descent from above to below—for Yidden accepted the Torah as a gift from above, not as a result of the work of created beings...davening, however, is an avodah that starts out below and ascends above...The fact there are these two directions in the service of Hashem is because they were given to a person who is comprised of both soul and body...the soul has a nature to ascend...whereas the nature of the body is to descend “the spirit of the animal descends” and the purpose is for the body and soul to merge. This happens when each one of them is made to operate against its nature, i.e., that the soul that naturally ascends should serve Hashem by way of descending and the body that naturally descends should ascend. This is why we were given two types of service—to ascend and to descend—namely davening and Torah study.

The role of Torah study in the life of a Yid is to introduce the Divine into his earthly existence. It is about bringing the knowledge of Hashem, and knowledge of the Divine purpose from its lofty, spiritual state of abstraction into a state of physical cognition.

Deja Vu

When we study Torah, we are introducing a new perception into our reality. However, sometimes it may not feel so new.

The Gemarah says that, as fetuses, we studied the entire Torah before being deployed into life on this earth.

Nidah 30b

הולד...במעיי אמו... ומלמדין אותו כל התורה כולה... וכיון שבא לאויר העולם, בא מלאך וסטר על פיו ומשכחו כל התורה כולה.

A fetus in its mother's womb is taught the entire Torah and when it enters the world, an angel comes and strikes it on the mouth and it forgets the entire Torah.

If you ever heard a Torah thought for the first time and it sounded even somewhat familiar, now you know why!

The reason we are taught the entire Torah before we are born, is so that when we learn Torah, we may have *deja vu*, i.e., it will be something that we are already familiar with—something that we are reminding ourselves of, not something new that we are encountering for the first time.

ראייתני את י"לד הפלא"
מאת נ. ב. אורן

במסגרת תוכנית "ראייתני את י"לד הפלא" הוצגה בלילה האחרון של חודש סיון, תש"ל, בתיאטרון "העמק" הצגה מיוחדת מאת המחזאי והמבצע הנודע, מ. א. אורן. הצגה זו, שהיא פרי מחשבתו היצירתית של המחזאי, עוסקת על ילד פלא, המסוגל לראות את העתיד. הילד, הנקרא י"לד, נולד בירושלים, והוא מסוגל לראות את העתיד, וזוהי כוחו המיוחד. המחזה מתאר את חיי הילד, את התמודדותו עם כוחו המיוחד, ואת האהבה והחיים המשפחתיים שלו. המחזה מציג את הילד כגיבור, המסוגל להתמודד עם אתגרים רבים, ולהשיג את מטרותיו. המחזה מלא מרגשות, ומציג את חיי הילד בצורה מרתקת ומעניינת. המחזה מציג את הילד כגיבור, המסוגל להתמודד עם אתגרים רבים, ולהשיג את מטרותיו. המחזה מלא מרגשות, ומציג את חיי הילד בצורה מרתקת ומעניינת.



הצגת העתיד

הצגת העתיד היא הצגה מיוחדת, המציגה את חיי הילד הפלא, ואת התמודדותו עם כוחו המיוחד. הצגה זו, שהיא פרי מחשבתו היצירתית של המחזאי, עוסקת על ילד פלא, המסוגל לראות את העתיד. הילד, הנקרא י"לד, נולד בירושלים, והוא מסוגל לראות את העתיד, וזוהי כוחו המיוחד. המחזה מתאר את חיי הילד, את התמודדותו עם כוחו המיוחד, ואת האהבה והחיים המשפחתיים שלו. המחזה מציג את הילד כגיבור, המסוגל להתמודד עם אתגרים רבים, ולהשיג את מטרותיו. המחזה מלא מרגשות, ומציג את חיי הילד בצורה מרתקת ומעניינת.

In the 1950s, a child was born in Yerushalayim who is reported to have known the entire Torah even before he learned to read. Every time someone started reciting something from Torah, he was able to continue the recitation by heart without having ever seen or heard the text being read before. This was

also specific to Torah; when they tried the same test using a newspaper article, he wasn't able to stand up to the test. In 1954, a Haaretz reporter published an article claiming to have interviewed the child and his parents and was able to verify the accuracy of the report. Did this boy's malach perhaps forget to strike him on the mouth?

What is Torah?

We can understand why Torah is of utmost significance, but what is Torah? When we say the word “Torah,” what are we referring to?

Shemos 24:12

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֵלַי הַהָרָה וְהִיָּה שָׁם וְאֶתְנַה לְךָ אֶת
לַחַת הָאֵבֶן וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוֹת אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי לְהוֹרֹתָם.

And Hashem said to Moshe, “Come up to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets, the Torah [law] and the commandments, which I have written to instruct them.”

Hashem invites Moshe onto the mountain, promising to give him “the Torah” and “the mitzvah.”

What are these two things?

The Rambam (1135–1204) explains:

Rambam, Introduction to Mishnah Torah

כל המצוות שניתנו לו למשה בסיני בפירושן ניתנו. שנאמר ואתנה לך את לוחות האבן והתורה והמצוה. תורה זו תורה

שבכתב. והמצוה זו פירושה. וצונו לעשות התורה על פי המצוה.
ומצוה זו היא הנקראת תורה שבעל פה.
כל התורה כתבה משה רבינו קודם שימות בכתב ידו. ונתן ספר
לכל שבט ושבט וספר אחד נתנהו בארון לעד. שנאמר לקוח
את ספר התורה הזה ושמתם אותו וגו'.
והמצוה שהיא פירוש התורה לא כתבה אלא צוה בה לזקנים
וליהושע ולשאר כל ישראל. שנאמר את כל הדבר אשר אנכי
מצוה אתכם אותו תשמרו לעשות וגו'. ומפני זה נקראת תורה
שבעל פה.

The Mitzvos given to Moshe at Har Sinai were all given together with their explanations, as implied by [Shemos 24:12]: "And I will give you the tablets of stone, the Torah, and the mitzvah."

"The Torah" refers to the Written Law; "the mitzvah," to its explanation. [Hashem] commanded us to fulfill "the Torah" according to [the instructions of] "the mitzvah." "The mitzvah" is called the Oral Law.

Even though the Oral Law was not transcribed, Moshe Rabeinu taught it in its entirety in his court to the seventy elders. Elazar, Pinchas, and Yehoshua received the tradition from Moshe.

The Torah is essentially the written text and its interpretation. Both of which were given by Hashem to Moshe at Sinai.

The interpretation of Torah includes three subcategories that were also given at Sinai:

- 1) Important details of the Mitzvos and information that is necessary to understand the written Torah that were told to Moshe orally.
- 2) A system with which to study and derive ideas from Torah—i.e., the 13 principles given at Sinai (orally) that are used to interpret the Torah.
- 3) And a mandate to the sages to legislate precautionary measures in order to protect and maintain the integrity of Jewish practice (which becomes Jewish law provided their legislation is accepted in practice by all Jewish communities).

While the original written Torah is extant, preserved by hundreds of thousands of identical copies of Torah scrolls that have survived millennia in very different cultures, the interpretation of Torah was preserved through an unbroken chain of transmission from teacher to student beginning with Moshe who received its knowledge from Hashem at Sinai.

Only after 1,500–1,800 years of oral transmission, these teachings were recorded in written form in the Talmud to preserve them so they may survive the dispersion of the Jewish community to remote locations throughout the world.

While it did not originally appear in written form, the oral tradition constitutes an equally essential part of Torah that augments and works in tandem with the written word.

Why Does Torah Require an Oral Interpretation?

Why was the Torah given as a written text with an oral interpretation? Why couldn't it all have been written down?

Throughout the course of history, there have been factions (such as the Tzedokim and the Kara'im) who broke away

from the central Jewish community because they refused to recognize the oral transmission of Torah. These groups adhered only to the written Torah without accepting any form of oral tradition. Where did they go wrong?

Multiple Possible Interpretations

Because the Torah is written without any vowels or punctuation, we wouldn't know how to read the Torah without an oral tradition. Many words can be translated to refer to a variety of different interpretations, ideas, or instructions, and without an oral transmission, we wouldn't know which way is correct. In fact, even with the clearest of texts you will run into this problem, as Rabbi Yosef Albo (1380–1444) points out:

Sefer Ha'ikrim 3:23

ומאשר כל דבר הנכתב מאיזה מין שיהיה, כבר אפשר שיובן בשתי הבנות מתחלפות, עד שאפשר שתהיה הבנה האחת מסכמת לכוונת האומר, והשנית מתחלפת לה מכל וכל, כמו שכתב הרמב"ם ז"ל באגרת תחיית המתים, כי שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד (דברים ו'), העברים יבינו ממנו האחדות הגמורה, והנוצרים יפרשו אותו על כוונה השילוש.

Anything that is written, regardless of the form, is able to be interpreted in two totally different ways, to the extent that it is possible, that one way expresses the writer's intent, and the other way is the total opposite.

As the Rambam writes in his letter about the resurrection of the dead, that "Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echod" is understood by

Jews to mean absolute unity, whereas Christians interpret it as referring to the trinity [three entities].

Missing Information

The Torah's instructions are also missing information that without tradition we would not be able to figure out what they mean.

Take, for example, the mitzvah to don tefillin:

Devarim 6:8

וקשרתם לאות על ירך והיו לטטפת בין עיניך
*And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand
and as totafos between your eyes.*

Without an oral tradition to explain what this means, how would we know what this posuk is instructing us to do?

What should you bind? How should you bind it? When should you bind it? Where on your hand should you bind it? What are "totafos?" And what should be bound "between your eyes?" How big should it be? and so on.

As you can see, without the oral tradition we are left in the dark about what the Torah is instructing us to do; and the same is true of every mitzvah.

You may be wondering, if these details that fill in missing information and clarify the correct way to read and understand the text can be communicated orally, why couldn't they have been written down and included in the written Torah?

The Torah is written in a unique manner that allows for multiple layers of meaning and interpretation of a single word or sentence. For example, the four classical layers of meaning in Torah are called:

- 1) Pshat: The literal meaning
- 2) Drush: The homiletic meaning
- 3) Remez: The symbolic meaning
- 4) Sod: The esoteric meaning

Each of these layers exist for every word in Torah. If the Torah had to spell everything out so that it didn't require any interpretation, this dynamic of multiple layers of meaning would be lost.

Moreover, language and meaning changes with time, so a clear set of instructions from hundreds of years ago would be difficult to understand today, even if it were written in perfect English! Take, for example, the following recipe from a cookbook written in 1390 CE. The recipe is for saffron rice, and yes, it's written in English! Without any commentary, can you figure out how to follow the instructions?

Ryfe ^p of Flefh. ix.

Take Ryfe and waishe hem clene. and do hē in erthen pot with gode broth and lat hem seeþ wel. afterward take Almañd mylke ^v and do ^g þ to. and colō ^v it wiþ safroñ ā falt. ā messe forth.

When the Torah is taught by way of a text with an oral legend or key to interpret it, its meaning is preserved throughout the ages.

Adaptation

Additionally, the fact that the Torah was given as a set of principles along with an oral tradition that explains how to interpret them, serves a very important purpose. As times change, so do circumstances; and in order for a set of rules to be applicable for all eternity, it must be able to be adapted to every possible situation that may arise:

Sefer Ha'ikrim 3:23

לפי שאי אפשר שתהיה תורת השם יתברך שלמה באופן שתספיק בכל הזמנים, לפי שהפרטים המתחדשים תמיד בענייני האנשים, במשפטים והדברים הנפעלים הם רבים מאוד משיכללם ספר- על כן נתנו למשה בסיני על פה דברים כוללים נרמזו בתורה בקצרה, כדי שעל ידם יוציאו החכמים שבכל דור ודור הפרטים המתחדשים.

It is impossible that Hashem's Torah could ever be completed in such a way that it will be sufficient for all times, for, there are constantly new details in human affairs, judgments and events—and they would be far too numerous to be included in a book.

Therefore, general principles in oral form were transmitted to Moshe at Sinai, hinted at briefly in the written Torah, so that through them the Sages in every generation would derive the new details that arise.

This dynamism that exists in Torah enables poskim in modern times to figure out the Torah's position on all sorts of technological innovations that could not have been discussed thousands of years ago.

For example, the Torah does not say “do not drive a car on Shabbos,” but the prohibition against kindling a fire would prohibit us from igniting an engine (amongst other issues).

This is only possible because the Torah was given as a set of principles along with a method to interpret them which is what makes Torah so adaptable to any and every possible situation.

Rabbinic Legislation

Many people believe that a rabbi has a certain jurisdiction to decide Halachah. The reality is that a rabbi only helps people figure out how to understand Torah law and apply it to their unique situation. The Rabbi is confined by clear sets of principles that govern how he can determine what the Halachah is in various instances, and these principles were not made up by rabbis, but were given to Moshe along with the written Torah.

As we mentioned earlier, the function of the oral tradition transmitted by our sages is threefold:

1. To pass on information and laws received at Sinai that are pertinent to our understanding of the Written Torah but were not given as part of the written Torah (*Halachah l'Moshe miSinai*).
2. To derive laws and ideas from the written Torah utilizing the established principles transmitted from Sinai (the 13 principles)
3. A system that instructs rabbis to enact new legislation to preserve the integrity and observance of the Torah.

This third function for this principle is itself established in the

written Torah:

Vayikra 18:30

ושמרתם את משמרתִי

Create a safeguard for My safeguards

Moed Katan 5a

עשו משמרת למשמרתִי

This means you should make a fence around My safeguards.

For this reason, Chazal created certain safeguards to protect the letter of the law.

For example, while the Torah only prohibits one to cook milk together with real meat, Chazal added fowl to this prohibition. They did so because if it was allowed to cook fowl with milk, people might mistakenly come to cook real meat with milk and transgress a Torah prohibition.

While this safeguard was established to distance people from transgressing the Torah prohibition, once the safeguard was instituted by Chazal and became the accepted practice among all observant Jewish communities, it no longer remains just a safeguard and we become scripturally obliged to obey it. This sanctioning of rabbinic legislation is based on the following mitzvah:

Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos, Lo Sa'aseh 312

האזהרה שהזהרנו מלחלוק על מעתיקי השמועה ע"ה ומלסור מכל מה שיצוו במעשי התורה, והוא אמרו: "לא תסור מן הדבר

אשר יגידו לך” (דברים יז, יא).

The 312th prohibition is that we are forbidden from disagreeing with the Sages who pass down the Oral Tradition, or from deviating from any of their instructions in Torah matters. This is what the Torah says “Do not turn away from the matter that they will tell you” (Devarim 17:11).

Human Involvement

Contributing to Torah

The fact that the Torah was given as a set of principles and methods of interpretation necessitates our involvement to figure it out.

This is a deliberate part of the master plan for creation.

Hashem gave us the Torah—not only as a set of rules to obey—but as dynamic wisdom for us to figure out and contribute to by further developing the ideas stated therein and by applying them to all sorts of new situations that arise.

The Midrash provides an analogy:

Seder Eliyahu Zuta Ch. 2

והלא מקרא ומשנה מפי הגבורה נאמרו. ומה בין מקרא למשנה? משלו משל. למה הדבר דומה. למלך בשר ודם שהיה לו שני עבדים. והיה אוהבן אהבה גמורה, ונתן לזה קב חיטין ולזה קב חיטין. לזה אגודה של פשתן ולזה אגודה של פשתן. הפקח שבהן מה עשה. נטל את הפשתן וארגו מפה. ונטל את החיטין ועשאן סולת, ביררה טחנה. ולשה ואפה. וסידרה על

גבי השלחן. ופרס עליה מפה. והניחה עד שלא בא המלך, והטפש שבהן לא עשה ולא כלום. לימים בא המלך בתוך ביתו ואמר להן. בניי. הביאו לי מה שנתתי לכם. אחד הוציא את [פת]הסולת על גביה השלחן ומפה פרוסה עליו. ואחד הוציא את החיטין בקופה. ואגודה של פשתן עליהן. אוי לה לאותה בושה.אוי לה לאות הכלימה,

Were not both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah spoken by Hashem? Then what difference is there between them?

To what can this be compared? To a king who gave each of his two beloved servants a measure of wheat and a bundle of flax. The wise servant took the flax, spun the thread, and wove a cloth. Then he ground the wheat, made flour, baked bread, and spread the cloth over it until the king came. But the foolish servant did nothing at all. When the king returned, he said to them: "My sons, bring me what I gave you." One servant showed him the bread with the cloth spread over it, and the other servant presented his raw wheat and flax. How great was his shame and disgrace!

It is our job to take the Torah and develop it further. This is part of the reason why it was given to us.

While we are given the opportunity to engage in the development of Torah and its application to all sorts of scenarios that were never previously conceived of, all of our contributions (when they legitimately follow the guidelines for how Torah is to be interpreted) were given to Moshe at

Sinai. As the Talmud Yerushalmi tells us:

Yerushalmi, Pe'ah 1

מקרא משנה תלמוד ואגדה אפילו מה שתלמיד וותיק עתיד
להורות לפני רבו כבר נאמר למשה בסיני

Scripture, Mishnah, Talmud, Homiletics and even what a senior student is destined to instruct before his teacher, was already said to Moshe at Sinai.

The Torah was given as a book containing multiple interpretations, along with system to decipher it. Thus, when we follow the system and arrive at a new insight or new application of a din that was never thought of previously, it too was given to Moshe at Sinai.

The History and Development of the Oral Law

The Mishnah was the first major redaction of the oral law that was compiled by Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi between the years 180–220 CE and consists of statements and discussions between sages until that time period, citing and organizing the law as they received and derived it.

Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi compiled the Mishnah fearing that Jewish law may be lost due to persecution and the exile and dispersion of Jews across the world.

Additional statements from Chazal of this time period are included in various Midrashic works (midrash means “to derive from the biblical verse” and contains homiletic interpretations of the Torah) as well as in the Tosefta (which literally means “a supplement” to the mishnah) or in a Braisa (statements from that time period that are often quoted in

Gemara but were not included in the Mishnah).

The Gemara provides an elucidation of the Mishnah and was compiled from discussions between the Chachomim following the Mishnaic period. There are two versions of the Gemara, the Talmud Bavli that was compiled around 500 CE, and the Talmud Yerushalmi that was compiled about a century earlier.

The term “Talmud” often refers to the combination of both the Mishnah and Gemara. These texts are collectively referred to as the teachings of Chazal (an acronym for *chachmeinu zichronam livracha*—our sages of blessed memory). These are the only texts that contain original parts of the Oral Law. Any texts that follow serve only to clarify and explain these teachings.

After the redaction of the Talmud, there were three general eras in the development of Talmudic law. The first is the Geonim; this is a reference to the sages of the great Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumpedisa from around the year 600–1000 CE. During this time, there weren’t many new commentaries introduced. The writings of the time primarily consist of Responsa. The most notable of the Geonim was Rav Saadia Gaon who wrote commentaries on the Torah and many other works.

The era of the Rishonim followed, from around 1000 CE until about 1500 CE when the Shulchan Aruch (was published and the printing press made it easier for rabbis to disseminate their writings (thus diminishing the overall quality of Jewish scholarly publications). This period included the likes of the Rambam, the Ramban, Rashi, and the Tosaphists.

During this time, the study of Kabbalah became popularized.

The most recent era is that of the Acharonim and includes all of the rabbis who published Torah works since the publication of the Shulchan Aruch.

The distinction between Rishonim and Acharonim is primarily a historic difference, and its relevance to Halachah is only that a sage from a latter era may not dispute a sage from an earlier era without bringing support from a sage from at least that previous era.

The Obligation to Study torah

Rambam, Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:8

כל איש מישראל חייב בתלמוד תורה בין עני בין עשיר בין שלם בגופו בין בעל יסורין בין בחור בין שהיה זקן גדול שתשש כחו אפילו היה עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה ומחזר על הפתחים ואפילו בעל אשה ובנים חייב לקבוע לו זמן לתלמוד תורה ביום ובלילה.

Every Jewish man is obligated in the study of Torah, whether he is poor or rich, whether he is in good health or is suffering, young or very old and weak; even if he is so poor that he is living on charity and begging at doorways; even one who must support a wife and children is obligated to set aside time, every day and every night, for the study of Torah.

The Rambam explains why Torah study is such a critical mitzvah:

אין לך מצוה בכל המצוות כולן שהיא שקולה כנגד תלמוד תורה אלא תלמוד תורה כנגד כל המצוות כולן, שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה.

There is no mitzvah that is equal to that of Torah study. But, Torah study is equal to all of the Mitzvos together. The reason for this is because study leads to practice.

While Yiddishkeit places the emphasis on deed, and not on thoughts or intentions, Torah study is considered more important than even practice. Ironically, this is for the very reason that it leads to practice!

Yiddishkeit is designed to provide a holistic experience that engages the entirety of the person, including the mind, the heart, and the body, but intent alone is of no value without practice. Yet, when ranking importance, study is more important than practice, for it is what ensures that there will be practice.

This may be better understood in the context of Jewish continuity. Today's practice of Yiddishkeit is not enough to ensure that Yiddishkeit will be around tomorrow. It is specifically the study of Torah that inspires the continuity of our own Yiddishkeit and it is what will inspire our children to maintain that practice long after we are gone. This is because the mind is the key to our decisions. And when we train ourselves to see things from a Torah perspective, we will be inclined to practice Torah's teachings as well.

This concept was demonstrated by a critical plea made by Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai to Vespasian that ultimately

secured the Jewish future in the time that followed the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash in 70CE and the dispersion of Yidden into golus. What was Rabban Yochanan's unique request?

Gittin 56a

כי מטא להתם אמר שלמא עלך מלכא שלמא עלך מלכא א"ל מיחייבת תרי קטלא חדא דלאו מלכא אנא וקא קרית לי מלכא...איברא איברא מלכא את דאי לאו מלכא את לא מימסרא ירושלים בידך דכתיב והלבנון באדיר יפול ואין אדיר אלא מלך דכת" ויהיה אדירו ממנו וגו' ואין לבנון אלא ביהמ"ק שנאמר ההר הטוב הזה והלבנון...אמר ליה מיזל אזילנא ואינש אחרינא משדרנא אלא בעי מינאי מידי דאתן לך אמר ליה תן לי יבנה וחכמיה ושושילתא דרבן גמליאל ואסוותא דמסיין ליה לרבי צדוק קרי עליה רב יוסף ואיתימא רבי עקיבא משיב חכמים אחור ודעתם יסכל איבעי למימר ליה לשבקינהו הדא זימנא והוא סבר דלמא כולי האי לא עביד והצלה פורתא נמי לא הוי

When Rabban Yochanan reached [Vespasian] he said, "Peace unto you, O King, peace unto you, O King."

Vespasian said, "You are deserving of death, because I am not a king and you call me king . . ."

He replied, "In truth you are a king, since if you were not a king, Yerushalayim would not be delivered into your hands, as it is written, 'And Levanon shall fall by a mighty one' (Yeshayahu 10:34). Mighty one [is an epithet] applied only to a king, as it is written, 'And their mighty one shall be

of themselves etc.’ (Yirmiyahu 30:21). And Levanon refers to the Beis Hamikdash, as it says, ‘This goodly mountain and Levanon’ (Devarim 3:25).

[As they were speaking a messenger arrived from Rome to inform Vespasian that he had been appointed Emperor.]

Vespasian said, “I will now be going, and will send some-one to take my place. You can, however, make a request of me and I will grant it.”

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai said to him, “Give me Yavneh and its wise men, the family chain of Rabban Gamliel, and physicians to heal Rabbi Tsadok.”

Rabbi Yoseph, or some say Rabbi Akiva, applied to him the verse, “[Hashem] turns wise men backward and renders their knowledge foolish” (Yeshayahu 44:25). He ought to have petitioned Vespasian for deliverance of the Beis Hamikdash.

Rabbi Yochanan, however, thought that [Vespasian] would not grant such a large request, and then even a little would not be salvaged.

Rabban Yoochanan did not request that Vaspasian spare Yerushalayim, he asked that he secure the Jewish future by ensuring that its house of study remained and that its scholars survived. In so doing, Rabban Yochanan paved the way for

Yiddishkeit to continue long after the fall of the organized institution. Rabban Yochanan understood that the secret to the future of Yiddishkeit was the study of Torah.

Torah is Our Life

Torah is not only a set of rules or ideas, it is the master plan of creation. It is a tool to understand the Divine, and it contains within it all of the insights that there is to know about who we are, why we are here, and what our mission and purpose is in this world. And, on a global level, Torah is what defines us as Yidden and what unites us as a people.

As we say in Birchos Krias Shema:

Birchos Kriat Shma

כִּי הֵם חַיֵּינוּ וְאַרְךָ יָמֵינוּ וּבָהֶם נַהֲגֶה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה.

For they [the words of Torah] are our life and the length of our days and in them we will toil day and night.

Take-aways

- » Torah is much more than a book of wisdom. It preceded creation and served as the blueprint for creation, therefore everything can be found within Torah.
- » Torah is Hashem's infinite wisdom that became manifest in human logic, allowing us to appreciate the Divine. It doesn't only serve as our connection to the Divine, it also exposes our essential relationship and connection to Hashem that is independent of Torah (but is revealed through Torah).
- » The oral Torah is just as essential a part of Torah as the written law.
- » The Torah was given with an oral partner in order to clarify misunderstandings in the written text and to allow Judaism to stay relevant by being able to adapt to changing circumstances.
- » We are instructed to study Torah night and day for it is our life.