

March 6, 2017

When I was sitting down and organizing my thoughts on what to write down in celebration of welcoming Ahavas Torah's new Sefer Torah into our midst, I was reminded of an Eli Nathan song, "Smile for the Camera." In it, Kenny's father takes him for his bar mitzvah in Jerusalem, where he tells him that he needs him to place his hand on the Kotel and smile for the camera. Kenny, very nonplussed with the whole Jerusalem bar mitzvah, places his hand on the Wall, where he hears the Kotel asking him, "Kenny, do you know why I am standing here, do you know what I stand for? Kenny, do you know where you are going, what's a bar mitzvah after all?" To which the Kotel responds, "Kenny, I am a part of a nation, of the Jewish people just like you, and I stand for their survival, and Kenny, so do you."

It has been mentioned during the excitement leading up to the purchase of the Sefer Torah, and I am sure that it will be spoken about at length during its welcome, how this celebration is similar to a wedding celebration. But why is that? The Medrash tells us that when the Creator of the World "descended" to Mount Sinai to the Jewish people, it was comparable to a wedding. The Lord was the groom taking in the Jewish people to be His partner, His bride. In this wedding, the Torah was given to them as a Ketuba, the wedding contract that expresses His love for us, our love for Him, and the eternal bond that will never be broken. The Torah is our Ketuba, and when a new Sefer Torah is welcomed into a Jewish community, we are renewing our vows, and refreshing our love for Hashem. This is why, as I understand, this celebration is referred to as a wedding. We take a step back to reminisce about that glorious day when the Torah was given and flip through the photo album of our nation's heritage. We celebrate in a second honeymoon, in an anniversary of sorts, rededicating our commitment and love for Hashem.

Ever since that wondrous day at Mount Sinai, we the Jewish People have been the bearers of the Torah. Generation to generation, through joy and tragedy, we have carried the flag of the Torah high, as both our pride and our comfort. From the generation of our teacher Moshe and throughout the generations of time, we have and will always guard it. Each father explaining the Torah's understandings to his sons, each mother imparting the Torah's love to her daughters. Like a chain, each link connects to the generation before, and to the generation that follows. And just like our nation, the Sefer Torah, our Ketuba, is likewise linked generation to generation. A Sefer Torah can only be written by being copied, word by word letter by letter from a different, parent Sefer Torah. Ahavas Torah's first Sefer Torah survived the Nazis and the Stalinists, and it is now proudly welcoming its next generation to be by its side. For all eternity, the entire Jewish people are interwoven with each other and with the Torah, from the marriage of our nation until the end of time.

However, we cannot compare the chain of the Jewish people and our Torah to a regular linking chain. A regular chain is only meant to connect what it is tied to from both ends, without any importance to the individual links. We however should understand that our chain throughout time is not just to connect us from Moshe's generation to the generation welcoming Mashiach and beyond. Rather, we are as a chain of gemstones, jewels, and pearls, each generation glittering and sparkling with their unique and individual beauty. Each generation that guards and celebrates the Torah is another gem on the studded chains of Hashem. As Hashem told us on Mount Sinai, by accepting His Torah and His proposal we will be a treasure of jewels from all of the nations.

I want to end with a well-known passage in the Talmud. Moshe, in one of his final teachings to our people tells us, "Be attentive and hear Israel: this day you have become a people to Hashem your God." The Talmud explains that even though we became a nation and the Torah was given forty years prior, Moshe stated "today," because each day that the Torah is studied with love, it is appreciated as if the Torah were given that day. Therefore, I think that it is not at all an exaggeration to say that, for those gathered here, today is literally an anniversary of the giving of the Torah. And I think that Hashem considers it as an anniversary as well.

*Reb Shlomo*