

Light Insight

The Title Deed

The Torah is not a history book. It is the instruction manual of the world. So why doesn't the Torah begin with the first of the Maker's instructions, i.e. the commandment to sanctify the new moon, which comes only at the beginning of the second Book, Exodus? Instead, the Torah begins with the Book of Genesis, identifying the Creator and the connection of the Jewish People to Him.

Rashi, in his commentary on the first words of the Torah, asks this question. He answers that if the nations of the world should come and exclaim "You are thieves! You stole the land of the seven nations of Canaan," then the Jewish People will be able to point to the Book of Genesis in the Torah and say "The whole world is G-d's. He created it and He gave it to whom He deemed fit. He decided to give the Land of Israel to

them, and then He decided to take it away from them and give it to us."

Of course, one could ask, "What if the nations of the world do not accept the veracity of the Torah? What kind of a deed of ownership is it that relies on such a self-serving argument!"

While we cannot demand that the nations of the world accept the Torah as compelling evidence, since they were not witnesses to the Revelation at Mt. Sinai, nor have they the benefit of an unbroken chain of transmission of the Torah; *we who do*, however, must know that our right to the Land of Israel comes from the Owner of the World, and our title deed to it is His Torah.

De-Construction

You drive up to your dream home. It's been two years in the planning, and three to build. You usher your guests up to the top of the west wing and proudly fling open the doors to the guest suite. The doors snap against

their stops. Then a small shudder shakes the house. What starts as a distant groan grows louder and louder and then, before your eyes, the entire west wing parts company with the house and falls away, crashing to the ground like a slow-motion picture. You and your guests are left wide-eyed in horror and disbelief, gazing into fifty feet of nothingness two inches from the ends of your toes.

The Torah is the blueprint of the world. Just as a builder takes great pains to study the blueprint of a house before a single bulldozer raises its claws in earnest, just as he measures and calculates and evaluates, slide-rule and calculator at the ready, so too G-d creates the world from His blueprint — the Torah.

It makes good sense therefore, that a Torah Scroll which lacks even one letter is invalid. For just as one missing line in the plans of a building may lead to the west wing crashing into ruins in front of your eyes, so too one letter missing from a Torah Scroll is as though vast tracts of the universe have been erased.

Response Line

Case Blitstein wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can you answer a question for me? Why are there no vowels written down in a Torah Scroll?

Dear Case,

The simple reason the Torah has no vowels is that the Hebrew alphabet doesn't have any. The vowel sounds are sometimes written as dots under the letters, but they aren't necessary. Just as you can read tricky English words like 'psychic' and 'queue' without looking in a dictionary, Hebrew

speakers can read Hebrew without the dots.

Hence, the entire Torah, Prophets, and Writings, the Mishna and Talmud and all the classic commentaries were written without any vowels. Even today, Israelis read menus, soup cans and street signs with no vowels. That's just how Hebrew is.

But there is another answer to your question: The Hebrew language is holy, and the Hebrew alphabet is holy. Even the shapes of the letters contain many lessons and mysteries. So too, the absence of the vowels has much to teach us. For example: the letters of a word are like its 'body.' The vowels are like its 'soul.' Just as the soul is the life of the body, yet it is invisible,

so the vowels remain unwritten and invisible, yet they breathe 'life' and meaning into every word.

The Torah is not just a book, but an interactive medium. The absence of vowels beckons us to become partners with the Torah, to breathe life into its letters. In return, the Torah breathes life into us, as it says "It is a Tree of Life to those who uphold it."

Just as one hammer blow shatters a rock into many fragments, so every word in the Torah has many meanings and secrets. Some of the hidden meanings of the Torah are derived by reading the words using various vowel combinations. For example, the words 'In the beginning' can be read to mean that G-d created a single 'stone' — the focal point from which the universe expanded.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

The Loftiest Level

Adam and Noah were not given more than seven commandments by G-d. If these spiritual obligations were sufficient for them to achieve their spiritual perfection, why was it necessary for the Jewish People to be commanded so many hundreds more, and for Jews living in the

Torah in these words:

"Every mitzvah which I command you today you shall observe and fulfill in order to live and prosper, and to inherit the land which G-d has vowed to give to your forefathers." (Deuteronomy 8:1)

Spiritual perfection has different levels. The level achieved through the seven Noachide commandments is a successful, disciplined life and relationship with both G-d and man.

Land of Israel to be required to observe all 613 mitzvos?

The answer is supplied by the

In order to prosper spiritually and achieve a level which transcends time and place, it was necessary for Jews to be given the mitzvos of the Torah which prepare them for eternity and for an intimacy with G-d. To achieve the loftiest level, they must also fulfill those special mitzvos connected with the Land of Israel so that they will inherit the land whose spiritual power makes possible prophecy, the constant presence of the Divine Presence and a miraculous existence. This is what G-d promised the first of our forefathers when He vowed: *"I will give you the land...and I shall be your G-d." (Genesis 17:8)*