



A Shared Inheritance

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The first verse in the Torah I ever learned by heart comes from its final *parashah*. When my brother and I would go visit our father in New York for the summer, he would try to figure out things for us to do during the day, and one year—I must have been about ten or eleven—he sent us to this Chabad day camp for a week. We were not observant during the rest of the year at my mom's house, so my father probably thought it would be good training for us, maybe fill in some gaps. The thing I remember most vividly from that week is that every morning, all the campers would stand outside on the grass in a big formation and chant together:

Torah! Tzivah! Lanu! Moshe! Morashah! Kehilas! Ya'akov!

דברים לג:ד

תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב.

Deuteronomy 33:4

Moshe commanded us with Torah, the **inheritance** of the congregation of Ya'akov.



It was very exciting to be able to shout something in Hebrew, and especially something that seemed to have great significance, like a rallying cry. I knew some of the words, like “Torah,” and “Moshe,” but I didn’t know exactly what I was saying. I certainly didn’t know the word, “מורשה - inheritance” (*morashah*).

Morashah, it turns out, is a rather uncommon word form in the Torah. Its root, ש.ר.ש, appears quite frequently as a verb—over a hundred times in the Torah. And the more common noun form, ירושה (*yerushah*)—which eventually becomes the standard Hebrew word for “inheritance”—has appeared seven times so far in Sefer Devarim. But *morashah*, the Ba’al HaTurim¹ points out, appears only one other place in the Torah—early on in the Book of Exodus, in God’s description of the Land to Moshe:

שמות ו:ח

וְהֵבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת יָדִי לָתֵת אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיַּעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לָכֶם
מִרְשָׁה אֲנִי ה'.

Exodus 6:8

I will bring them to the Land that I raised My hand and pledged to give to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Ya’akov, I will give it to them as an **inheritance** (*morashah*). I am the Eternal.

Why this special form of “inheritance” for Torah and the Land? Does it indicate some distinction between these types of collective inheritance and the more standard family inheritance? The Talmud (in Bava Batra 119a) says that Moshe himself was uncertain about the precise meaning of the word:

יְרוּשָׁה הִיא לָכֶם מֵאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם; אוֹ דְלָמָּה, שְׁמוֹרִישִׁין וְאִינִן יוֹרְשִׁין?

¹ R. Ya’akov ben Asher (1269-1343), the son of the Rosh and also famous for his halakhic compendium the Arba’ah Turim.



Does it mean the same thing as “*yerushah*,” that it was an inheritance from their ancestors?
 Or maybe [the *נ* (*mem*) indicates a causative action, like the verb *morish*, to cause to inherit] and means that this is something they pass on as an inheritance, but never actually inherit themselves?

That latter distinction might make sense in this case, as the generation of Israelites who leave Egypt are not actually the ones who will cross over into the Promised Land. So maybe it is true that they will never really inherit the Land from their ancestors, but only pass it on.

But the Talmud answers, somewhat paradoxically: no, it isn’t one or the other. *Morashah* means both (תְּרוּיָהוּ)! It indicates both an inheritance that you got from your ancestors, and also an inheritance that you pass on and do not ever really inherit. It is both true that the Israelites who left Egypt did inherit the Land from their ancestors, but also that they never really took full possession of it, but were only able to pass it on as an inheritance to their descendants.

The Ba’al HaTurim takes the tension in this definition of *morashah* and uses it to resolve another seeming contradiction to the verse back in our *parashah*. “This is what our sages meant,” he writes, “when they said that the Torah is **not** your inheritance.” He is quoting the Tanna R. Yose ha-Kohen, who says, in Pirkei Avot:

משנה אבות ב:יב

וְהִתְקַן עֲצֻמָּה לְלַמֵּד תּוֹרָה, שְׂאִינָה יְרֵשָׁהּ לָהּ.

Mishnah Avot 2:12

Prepare yourself to learn Torah, for it is not your **inheritance** (*yerushah*).



How can R. Yose say this? Doesn't our *parashah* tell us that the Torah is מורשה קהילת יעקב, the inheritance (*morashah*) of the congregation of Ya'akov? Isn't that us?

But the Ba'al HaTurim is suggesting that R. Yose is using the more standard word for inheritance, *yerushah*, to indicate that we should not think of Torah as something we get automatically, just by inheriting it. We do inherit a claim to Torah from our ancestors, but it takes work to really acquire Torah.

The Torah is our inheritance, but that doesn't make it ours automatically. So we should think of it not as a *yerushah*, but as a *morashah*—an inheritance primarily in the sense that it is our obligation to pass it on. Whatever we acquire in Torah is not ours to keep, but to share forward.

I inherited this cycle of writing Hadar's Divrei Torah from R. Elie Kaunfer and it was intimidating from the start to try to live up to the incredibly high standard that he had set. He astounded me week after week with his ability to find in every *parashah* a critical source for some core Jewish prayer tradition—you can check them all out [on our website](#) for a tour through the Torah that doubles as a master class on Jewish Prayer.

And I am honored to pass this inheritance on to R. Tali Adler, whose Torah I had admired in writing before I had the *zekhut* to come work with her at Hadar. I have often had the experience of reading just one paragraph from R. Tali and having my understanding of a classic text entirely transformed, and my heart broken open a little bit in the process. The beauty and profundity of her Torah reminds me of words from this week's *parashah*: "מִמְּגֵד שְׁמַיִם מִטֵּל וּמִתְהוֹם רֶבֶצֶת תְּהַת - From the bounty of heaven, from dew (*tal*), and from the great depths that lurk beneath" (Deuteronomy 33:13).



The *morashah* in our *parashah* is given to *Kehillat Ya'akov*, the congregation of Israel, and the Ba'al HaTurim also notes that this language of “congregating” is important for the *morashah*, because it indicates that the inheritance of Torah can only be passed on when many people are involved:

בעל הטורים דברים לג:ד

אימתי התורה מתקיימת? כשמתאספין קהלת יעקב.

Ba'al HaTurim on Deuteronomy 33:4

When is the Torah fulfilled? When the whole congregation of Ya'akov is assembled.

And indeed, many people were involved in the passing on of these Divrei Torah.

Working with Hadar's editorial team is one of the greatest professional gifts I have ever received. Elisheva Urbas, the “Editing Rebbe,” introduced me to a whole new perspective on the practice of writing, and helped me understand that editing is a true artform unto itself. R. Effy Unterman provided wise counsel when writing crises erupted (there were many), and guided me back to shore. R. Jason Rogoff lent his eagle eyes to my writing (and citing), saving me many times from making terrible mistakes, and providing me with essential connections that sometimes resolved a problem I had been struggling with all week. And above all, I could not have done this without the remarkable editing gifts of Dr. Jeremy Tabick, who generously gave me countless hours of his knowledge and expertise and profoundly shaped every piece that came out this year. I have never had a better *havruta* in the comments of a Google doc, and I am profoundly grateful for it.

Sam Greenberg and Joy Feinberg also patiently worked with me and my frenzied last-minute revisions every single week to get the piece mailed out, often offering wise editorial



suggestions of their own in the final draft. David Khabinsky taught me how to sound good on podcast equipment, and Nadav Remez edited the recording, took out all my verbal stumbles, and made me sound reeeeeal smooth on Hadar's podcast, [Ta Shma](#). It took a whole congregation to get these out to you every week.

As I stood outside with all the other little boys at that Chabad camp that summer, shouting words I did not understand, it seemed rather unlikely that this Torah of my ancestors was really to become my inheritance. Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined then that I would one day be in a position to share words of Torah, and to participate in passing some of this inheritance on. I am so deeply grateful to all of you out there for reading and receiving these words about words. May we all be blessed to continue to share words of Torah together, week after week, year after year.

