



Your Better Half

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The Tisch: Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim #2

Since each word and each letter of the Torah is precious, and as a way to ensure the accuracy of the Torah's texts, it's words and letters have been counted. And when you count from the end and from the beginning, the half-way point of the words of the Torah are the two words “*darosh darash*” he thoroughly investigated, or interpreted.

The Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim says that this expression, *darosh darash*, is both the midpoint of the Torah and the central principle of the Torah. The Torah is there for us to interpret. But even more so, these words come at the half-way mark through the Torah's composition to teach that without its human interpretation, the Torah itself is not complete; it is but half a Torah. Just as there is no king without subjects, no performance without an audience, Torah is not Torah in its fullest sense without the engagement of faithful and loving readers and interpreters.

The Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim is careful to underscore that the need for interpretation is continuous and enduring. The project of constructing the Torah's second half needs to be done in each generation according to the needs of its soul. This is not merely a project of making Torah seem relevant, but it's a project of making the Torah real. The Torah relies on us to establish its meaning and to keep it alive.



The image of the Torah as being half of itself without us was very striking to me. Not as a hermeneutical claim about interpreting the Torah, which is important and inspiring, but as a statement about who we are and how our identities are constituted. It seems to me that the opposite is also true, that just as the Torah is only half without our interpretation, we are only half without the Torah to study, love, and learn from. We are also only half of who we think we are. We often think of ourselves, of our identities as being somehow solid or essential at their core, but what if they're not? What if who we really are is in constant flux, opposite whatever we are called to engage with or interpret? What if we are just the capacity to respond to the texts that we read, the people we meet, the culture that we consume, and the experiences we have?

Ours is a culture of media consumption in large and often indiscriminate amounts. It has become passe to be overly selective about which books, magazines and articles we choose to read, which TV shows and movies we watch, which music we listen to. This is due to a lot of factors. We don't engage in this question because we think of ourselves as passive consumers and not active participants. We don't view ourselves as transforming and being transformed by all of these inputs. And when we do ask questions about our consumption, they often focus on whether what we are doing is a waste of time. Whether or not it is productive, whether what we are consuming is considered high quality or low culture, whether we need to characterize it as a "guilty pleasure" when we talk about it with our peers.

But perhaps the question is in fact a far deeper question about identity. Perhaps we need to acknowledge the extent to which the culture we consume is a culture that we participate in and help promulgate. Perhaps we need to adopt more of a "you are what you read" attitude and evaluate whether we are the people we really want to be based on what we absorb and how we react to it on both a conscious and unconscious level. It's hard to acknowledge that we are only half-people, that we are porous. But it's helpful to remember that we influence in equal measure to the extent that we are influenced, often in ways we don't anticipate. The



Torah teaches us and we transform the Torah. It is our responsibility to cultivate our own identities with deference to the great power of the culture that we participate in.

Degel Mahaneh Efrayim - Lekh Lekha	דגל מחנה אפרים - לך לך
This is the book of the generations of humankind. We will preface [our remarks] with what I said on the verse and [about] the goat for the sin-offering he deeply probed... In the tradition it says that he deeply probed (<i>darosh darash</i>) is the midpoint of the letters of the Torah. And one could say that it is known that the Written Torah and the Oral Torah are together one and neither one can not be separated from its fellow at all because one can not exist without the other. That is, the secrets of the Written Torah are revealed through the Oral Torah and the Written Torah without the Oral Torah is not a complete Torah. It is like half of a book until the Rabbis came and probed (<i>darshu</i>) the Torah and revealed the concealed matters. And sometimes they even uproot something from the Torah like the matter with lashes. “Forty” was written in the Torah and the Rabbis came and subtracted one. And it is all through the appearance of their holy spirit which appears on them and then they have the power to do this. Therefore the completeness of the Written Torah is dependent on the Oral Torah. And therefore anyone who says that there is no basis for a	או יאמר זה ספר תולדות אדם ונקדים מה שאמרתי על הפסוק ואת שעיר החטאת דרש דרש וכו' ואיתא במסורת דרש דרש כאן חצי אותיות שבתורה וצריך להבין זה מה בא לרמז בזה שכאן הם מניין חצי אותיות שבתורה וי"ל כי ידוע תורה שבכתב ותורה שבע"פ הכל אחד ואין אחד נפרד מחבירו כלל כי א"א לזה בלא זה דהיינו התורה שבכתב מתגלה צפונותיה ע"י תורה שבע"פ ותורה שבכתב בלא תורה שבע"פ אינו תורה שלימה והוא רק כמו חצי ספר עד שבאו חז"ל ודרשו התורה וגילו דברים הסתומים ופעמים הם עוקרין דבר מן התורה והיינו בענין מלקות שכתוב בתורה ארבעים ובאו רבנן ובצרו חדא והכל ע"י הופעת רוח קדשם שהופיע עליהם והיה כח בידם לעשות זה נמצא תלוי שלימו' תורה שבכתב בתורה שבע"פ ולכן האומר



fortiori reasoning from the Torah or who disagrees with one of the Rabbis' statements is equivalent to one who rejects the Torah of Moshe because it is dependent on the teachings of the Rabbis and they are the core of the completeness of the written Torah. And this could be what is hinted at by saying that **he deeply probed** (**darosh darash**) is the midpoint of the letters of the Torah that is - until the Rabbis probed the Torah it was not considered complete and could not be called a completed book. And similarly with every generation and its interpreters (*dorshav*), they complete the Torah. Because the Torah is interpreted in every generation according to its needs. And according to the roots of the souls of that generation so does Blessed God illuminate the eyes of the sages of the generation in His holy Torah. And one who rejects this is as if they have rejected the Torah, God forbid...

אין ק"ו מן התורה או שחולק על
מאמר אחד מחז"ל כאלו כופר
בתורת מרע"ה כי הכל תלוי בדרושי
חז"ל והם עיקר שלימות תורה
שבכתב וזה י"ל שבא הרמז דרש
דרש הם חצי אותיות שבתורה היינו
עד שדרשוה חז"ל אינה נקראת
התורה שלימה רק חצי ובדרושי
מאמרי חז"ל נשלם התורה להיות
נקרא ספר שלם וכן בכל דור ודורשיו
הם משלימין התורה כי התורה
נדרשת בכל דור ודור לפי מה שצריך
לאותו דור ולפי שורש נשמתן של
אותו הדור כך הש"י מאיר עיני חכמי
הדור ההוא בתורתו הקדושה
והכוfer בזה ג"כ כאלו כופר בתורה
ח"ו...