

Torah Talks: Dayenu Without the Torah? The Greatest Gift Ever Given

Introduction: The Dayenu Paradox

Every year at the Seder, we sing *Dayenu*, listing all the miracles God did for us on the way out of Egypt. One line always seemed strange to me:

"If He had brought us to Mount Sinai, but not given us the Torah — Dayenu, it would have been enough."

Wait — how could that be “enough”? Isn’t the giving of the Torah the *greatest* event in our national and spiritual history? What would be the point of standing at Sinai *without* receiving the Torah?

Part I: What Was Life Before the Torah?

Before the Torah was given, humanity wasn’t without moral guidance. The Torah itself says God gave Adam and Noah commandments — the **Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach**, the Seven Noahide Laws — which include basic prohibitions against murder, theft, and idolatry. These are laws a decent society would try to figure out on its own. (See Rambam, *Hilchot Melachim* 9:1.)

Chazal also say (Yoma 28b) that **Avraham Avinu kept the entire Torah**, even rabbinic enactments like *eruv tavshilin*. That raises a question: how? It hadn’t been given yet! The answer is — he figured it out. He intuited it. He used his moral clarity, spiritual greatness, and prophetic insight to reach the same truths.

But not everyone was Avraham.

Part II: The Struggle of the Individual

Every person comes into this world with two forces: the **yetzer hatov** and the **yetzer hara**. Our job is to figure out what's right and to choose it. But this is hard. Trial and error. Meditation. Mistakes. In earlier generations, this moral struggle was the entire religious experience. As the Midrash says (Bereishit Rabbah 14:1), "*Man was created with both good and evil inclinations.*"

To live spiritually meant to search. To discover. To wrestle with moral dilemmas without a map.

That was the pre-Torah world.

Part III: What the Torah Changed

Then came **Matan Torah** — not just a book of laws, but a *gift*. The Torah is a **shortcut to spiritual clarity**. It gives us what took Avraham a lifetime to discover, handed to us on a silver platter. You no longer need to sit in the forest and meditate for decades to know how to live with holiness. You have a manual.

And that's why Chazal call it a gift:

"Lekach tov natati lachem, torati al ta'azovu" — "I gave you a good acquisition; do not forsake My Torah." (Mishlei 4:2)

It's a "*lekach tov*" — a treasure, because it gives access to something that was once elite, rare, and nearly impossible to attain.

Part IV: So Why Dayenu?

So how could it have been "enough" to just come to Sinai?

Because even **just standing at Sinai** changed us. It was a prophetic encounter — a mass revelation that elevated us forever. It says in Devarim 4:33:

"Has a people ever heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard — and lived?"

Sinai made us into a nation. It forged our identity. It gave us a taste of what it means to be close to Hashem. Even without receiving the Torah formally, that moment of closeness and clarity would have justified everything that came before.

But the *Torah*? The Torah is what let us *keep* that connection, live by it, and pass it on.

Conclusion

Before the Torah, man was left to seek and struggle. After the Torah, we were given a roadmap. Not a burden, but a ladder. Not just a book, but a bridge between heaven and earth.

And so yes, *Dayenu* — even just reaching Sinai was transformative. But *Baruch Hashem*, He gave us even more — a guide to live by, so that we don't have to reinvent Avraham's wheel. We can climb higher because the ladder is already in our hands.