

# What Makes The Torah Great?

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

The Torah has been described in many ways: a love letter, a *ketubah*, one long poem, a mystic message of black on white fire, a compendium of law and story, a family diary, the foundation stone of Israel, a written assurance of God's love. Turn it over and over, the Rabbis advise us, for everything is in it.

What makes the Torah such a protean document — why does it evoke such varied metaphors and so reverential an approach? The traditional answer, and still the answer many would give, is that it is the written word of God and therefore by definition inexhaustible. Whether one accepts that conclusion or not, even a Divine text is insufficient without one more ingredient.

To have great books, said Walt Whitman, there must be great readers. This greatest of books has had the greatest of readers. For thousands of years the Torah has been the focus of scholars, saints and sages, the distilled genius of the Talmudic Rabbis and their innumerable disciples. Words seemingly wrung dry by fantastic intellectual exertions suddenly, miraculously, show themselves capable of new meanings to new generations. This year on *Simchat Torah* as we hold aloft the Torah, let us also celebrate the great readers, commentators and lovers of this eternal text. And let us join them.