

Shavuot: The Mountain of Sinai

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

We know that the Jewish people said, “*Naaseh V’nishma*,” and willingly accepted the Torah. Why then did Hashem need to lift a mountain over their head and force them to receive it? When Hashem sent Moshe to redeem *Klal Yisrael*, Moshe said, “Behold they will not believe me and they will not listen to me.” They will say, “Hashem didn’t appear to you. How can we know that Hashem really spoke to you?” Hashem gave Moshe three signs, miracles that he should perform before the people to prove to them that he was a messenger of Hashem. If they would not believe the first two signs, how would a third sign help?

The Rambam tells us that the basis for our belief in Moshe and *Torah m’shamayim* is the fact that we all stood at *Har Sinai*. The Meshech Chachma explains the idea of what forcing *Klal Yisrael* to accept the *Torah* means. Free choice differentiates man from all other creatures and Hashem created the world this way, but the ultimate goal is to do away with it. Moshe reached this level of Adam before the sin through hard work. We must all come to this level eventually when our physical essence will become completely subsumed in spirituality. We will become a

vessel that can contain the sanctity Hashem wants to bestow upon us. Only Moshe had already reached this level. When *Klal Yisrael* came to *Har Sinai*, Hashem lifted them up and gifted them with the level of free choice, very close to the level Moshe had attained. This enabled them to become a vessel to contain what Hashem wanted to give them. Hashem spoke to them face to face and they experienced a very clear lofty state of prophecy. Moshe came to this by dint of sheer hard work; *Klal Yisrael* came to it because Hashem granted it to them in order that they would be able to experience what happened at *Har Sinai* in a way that they and all their descendants would know that Torah was from heaven.

The Ramchal describes that at *Har Sinai* Hashem gave us an understanding and an experience that made us recognize without a doubt the truth of *Torah*. When Hashem wanted to bring His nation close, He rent open the heavens and revealed to them what was normally hidden, so that they would clearly see the truth and that all of reality is Hashem’s control. They saw the spiritual power that gave life to every living thing on this world. They understood the secret of creation, why it was created and what gives it the ability to exist,

how it operates on a spiritual plane, and its end purpose. Hashem showed them how free choice works, the powers of evil and how they operate, the tricks of the *yetzer hara* and what gives him the ability to manipulate a person. Until this point, they had only seen externality and now at *Har Sinai* they saw what was behind it all. When a person reaches this level of clarity, free choice can no longer exist. After *Matan Torah*, Hashem brought them back to the level they were before and their ability to choose returned; because that is the purpose of life- to choose good. But they had to experience that level of open revelation to ensure that they would know that the Torah was from Hashem. They heard how Hashem spoke to Moshe, they saw he was a true prophet and that all that he taught came from Hashem. This is the basis for our belief and this is why although *Klal Yisrael* accepted the Torah, Hashem so to speak had to ‘force’ them by taking away their free choice. They understood that doing anything against the will of Hashem would basically bring death upon. It wasn’t a lack of commitment but rather Hashem wanted the giving of the Torah to become an immutable fact for *Klal Yisrael* that could never be disputed.

Mishlei: Torah The Protector

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

Chapter 6 in Mishlei discusses how the *Torah* connects us to Hashem and His light and the *mitzvot* bring it down to this world and give us the tools to elevate physicality to its spiritual essence. How does the *Torah* guard us? We have limited emotional and intellectual space. The *Torah* fills us up and gives us a sense of completion and the ability to do good and to be bonded to Hashem. “To guard you from an evil woman, from the smoothness of the foreign tongue.” Rashi explains that this doesn’t refer to an actual woman, but rather that the *Torah* will protect us from everything that is foreign; the most foreign of which is idol worship which is far removed from the nature of a Jew. The Maharal explains that *geulah* (redemption) is being able to be

yourself and *galut* is being estranged. The *Torah* guards us against estrangement from ourselves and the worst form of estrangement is idol worship.

Why did people worship idols? Adam was created with clarity. His mind was in *atzilut*, his heart was in *briah* and his body was in this world. He could see from one end of reality to the other. Enosh was his grandson. The word *enosh* means human, but it’s used to denote being human in its most mortal sense. *Enosh* lived in a time when man’s life span was already shortened, where sin was possible as a consequence of *eitz hadaat*, where one could convince oneself that evil was good and visa versa. *Enosh* understood very well the idea of Hashem as master of the world but the

idea that He controls every detail and that he is interested in human beings was difficult for him to grasp because of Hashem’s invisibility and his awareness of human frailty. So, he and his generation fell into the misguided way of thinking that one could only reach Hashem through the forces of nature, the same way one would reach a president through his bureaucracy. They created statues and specific ways to relate to them through rituals, but the final goal of reaching Hashem was forgotten. The *Torah* protects us from this estrangement. It teaches us how to find Hashem, not through a medium, but through one’s own heart, soul and possessions. We sometimes confuse inspiration with connection, *Torah* gives us clarity.

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"Don't covet her beauty in your heart, and don't let her captivate you with her eyelids." The pursuit of wisdom has three stages: observation, understanding and drawing conclusions. King Shlomo adjures us not to become entrapped by the so-called beauty of foreign worship which is often very enticing. He tells us not to confuse this with tiferet, inner spiritual harmony. Don't be taken in by the way it makes what you see seem to be in line with what they are saying. Platonian thought was divided in two segments- physicality that could be seen and the ideas

that lay behind them. In Plato's mind Hashem was not on the screen because the question- Where is it from and what is it for? was never asked. Shlomo Hamelech tells us not to be taken in by that external vision.

"Because a man is brought to a loaf of bread for a harlot, and a married woman will hunt a precious soul." A person will deprive themselves of everything until they are down to their last loaf of bread in their pursuit of what is foreign; and then the foreign belief will grab his soul and hunt it. We see things, but we don't let the observations affect us. In *Taana*

Deve Eliyahu, there's a dialogue between a Tanna and Eliyahu Hanavi. The Taana asked, it says in *Pirkei Avot*, "Who is a wealthy man, one who is content with his lot." Is there a person on this world who is content with his lot? Eliyahu replied that the *Mishna* refers to Hashem who created a perfect world. There are *tzadikim* and *reshaim* and the *reshaim* will be granted atonement, either in this world or in *gehinom*. In the end, Hashem will rejoice with all of His creation, even those whose souls are trapped in *gehinom* who will earn their atonement.

A Hard Day's Work 6B

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Justin Treger

Let us study the question of how hard a person needs to work in order to earn his livelihood destined by Hashem. In *Sefer Iyov* it says, "Man was born to work hard and the spiritual celestial forces will lift things up." This is an incredible statement which tells us that the way Hashem created us and His purpose for us was to work. There's no escaping hard work being the central focus of a person's life. Experientially we appreciate this too. When we're tired, we like to rest. But extend that vacation a little bit too long and there's something inside of us jumping to get back to activity. Many people who retire end up going back to work. There's something innate in the human being that is structured for hard work.

The *Malbim* says, man was born to work hard and through his toil he will earn his livelihood. Someone who amasses wealth without effort,

his money will not flourish and will not stay in the family to be bequeathed to his children. The primary success of a person is dependent on the work of his hands. One should not say that it's *mazal* or predestined. One of the most important things that determines one's financial success is hishtadlut. The *Malbim* learns this principle from the pasuk previously quoted in *Iyov*. Yes, there are *Gemaras* that speak about predetermined gains, but that's not the primary cause of a person's financial success, the real cause is hard work. Therefore, Hashem designed us with the tools to engage us in a life of hard work and that's the methodology to succeed.

Mishlei tells us, "The poor person makes his scales deceitful and the hand of a *charutz* will become wealthy." What is a *charutz*? *Metzudat Zion* defines it as an alacritous hand which is

always moving. He will become wealthy. *Metzudas David* explains that an alacritous person who puts in a hard day's work to earn his livelihood will not deceive people, and this hand will enrich its owner. Rashi says the word *chartuz* as opposed to *zaruz* has an inference of *emet* - hard truthful work. The *Malbim* adds that it refers to a hard-working honest person who thrives on putting his mind to the task and giving his absolute all in the most truthful and straightest way. That hand, says Shlomo Hamelech, will enrich you. There's no place for laziness in earning your livelihood and when you use *bitachon* and *emunah* in Hashem and predetermined income as an excuse to be lazy, you are destined to failure. *Bitachon* never replaces hard work which is inextricably bound to the life of every person who really wants to make it.