

Shavuot: The Mountain of Sinai Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The Gemara notes that Hashem seemingly 'forced' the Jews to accept the *Torah* and *Tosfos* asks why. The *Maharal* points out that Avraham Avinu wasn't chosen because of his actions, because Hashem didn't want His love for the Jewish people to be conditional and transitory. Hashem didn't force Avraham into anything; He tested him and he passed. But if Avraham wouldn't have been the right person to father the Jewish nation, Hashem would have chosen someone else, because the world couldn't continue the way it was. Hashem had to build the chosen nation. It wasn't a *bechira* dependent on merits. So too, *Klal Yisrael* went after Hashem into the desert. The *dor deah* were at a very high spiritual level. But Hashem didn't give them the *Torah* based on their consent of *Naaseh V'nishma*. Hashem wanted the *Torah* to remain with *Klal Yisrael* forever and he chose us unconditionally to bring the world to its purpose. The force wasn't because they didn't commit themselves fully. Although they didn't need it at the moment, it would be needed later. As the generations moved on and the Jews faced many struggles in exile, they and the *Torah* would be bound forever.

Hashem showed the Jewish people that it isn't possible for the world to continue without a nation to accept the *Torah*. They were given a behind the scenes look at how the world operates through the force of *Torah* and *mitzvot* and how it affects both the individual and global reality. Their free choice was taken away as they openly saw how there is no existence without *Torah*. How could they not accept it? We cannot refer to *Torah* as a choice *Klal Yisrael* made. We have to know that they saw it as the force that powers this world and that the absence of it is like committing suicide. And in order for us to recognize this, Hashem 'forced' us by revealing what was hidden. Hashem never wanted us to regret receiving the *Torah* so he continues to 'force' us all along history by making sure that we always return to *Torah*.

We cannot say that the generation of the midbar accepted the *Torah* and what does it have to do with me. We are all obligated forever. The good that will come out of our journey with the *Torah* will be that we will say there's no mistake here. It's divine and purposeful and there is no reality without it.

The Shem MiShmuel says that when *Klal Yisrael* said *Naaseh V'nishma* without knowing beforehand what they were meant to do, it indicated a deep love and trust of Hashem. But relationships have their ups and downs. So Hashem 'forced' them to commit eternally to *Torah* so that even during the downs when it be hard to see Hashem's love they would stay true to His word. When someone forces someone to do something, even if it's for their benefit, the reaction is resistance. The longer one is stuck with it, the more resentment builds up. However, making a decision to accept it has a long term effect. Hashem wanted to be sure that even at times that we will not feel His love we will stay committed. The merit of accepting the *Torah* even when they felt resistance is a gift that the generation of the desert bequeathed to their descendants. Sometimes we don't feel like doing a *mitzvah*. What gives us the ability to nevertheless do it is that at *Har Sinai* we were 'forced' to accept the *Torah*. Even when we felt an inner resistance we still said, *Naaseh V'nishma*. And this ensures that all future generations will remain committed.

When the *Torah* describes *Maamad Har Sinai*, it says that the nation saw the voices. Rashi explains, they saw what they heard. It was a miracle on a conceptual level. Rav Zevin notes that there is a difference between seeing and hearing. *Chazal* say we cannot compare hearing something to seeing it. A court can't accept testimony from someone who didn't see the act. Seeing provides total clarity. When *Klal Yisrael* saw the voices it meant that their level of clarity was so clear as if they saw everything. When Hashem said *onochi* it wasn't just a voice, they saw Hashem and that

the whole world stands on nothing but His will. They had such clarity that they said, "We will do and we will hear." And although it was impossible for them to say no to the *Torah* after such revelation, they still accepted it on the basis of the fact that they simply wanted to do Hashem's will. This was their greatness. The determination and commitment to *Torah* is what Hashem wants. The ability to do something just because someone said indicates a very close relationship. The ability to fulfill the *mitzvot* even without understanding is an indication of a great connection. Ultimately, what Hashem wants, even after we understand the *mitzvot* on a deep level, is to fulfill it simply because He commanded us to. And the ability to do so was handed down through the generations.

Chazal tell us that the *avot* kept the *Torah*. Why then is the day of *Matan Torah* so great? Rav Dessler says, the fact that we became *metzuva v'oseh*, that we were commanded to do what was given to us will ensure that the generations will keep the *Torah*. The connection between the *mitzvot* we do and the way the way Hashem relates to the world began at *Matan Torah*. Up until this time, the world existed on Hashem's *chesed*. Human actions didn't affect creation. After *Matan Torah* there was a revolution. Hashem changed how he operated the world and *mitzvot* now influence everything that happens both on a global and individual level.

How can we experience *Shavuot* and *Kabalat HaTorah* in every generation? Doing the *mitzvot* affect us, make us more divine like and help us see reality differently. But on condition that we do it because Hashem commanded. Giving *tzedakah* might make us feel good but it shouldn't be the motivating factor. Doing it because it's a *mitzvah* will positively affect a person on a very deep level, connect him to *Torah* as it did for all of *Klal Yisrael* at *Matan Torah*.



Mishlei: Torah The Protector Part II

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

"Can a person stoke the fire in his lap and his clothing will not burn." The same way idol worship consumes a person and leads him to gehinom, so too immorality affects the sinner and turns him into a person totally cut off from inner goodness. "They will not despise a thief if he steals to sate his appetite, for he is hungry. And if he is found, he will pay sevenfold; he must give all he owns." An immoral person may perceive himself dishonestly as a person whose hungry, but he covets not because he's about to die, but out of desire. The harm he does to other people and himself will be so vast that in the end in order to try to rectify what he's done, he'll have to give everything he has, because the damage he did to himself and others is so great.

Shlomo Hamelech calls a woman who betrays her husband '*chaser lev*' - devoid of sense. Someone who sins with such a woman, and this also refers to a person who devotes his energy to *avodah zarah*, to worshiping creation rather than the Creator, the fate of this person will be- "He will find wounds

(nega) and disgrace, and his reproach shall not be erased. Nega comes from the root word, l'negoa - to touch. He will not emerge untouched. His identity will change and everything that should be respected and that is enduring about him will disappear. He will be left humiliated and people will no longer trust him.

"For jealousy [shall arouse] the husband's wrath, and he will not have pity on the day of vengeance." Revenge is sweet because when someone harms you, you feel belittled and revenge seems to equalize the situation. The illusion is that you're lifted up by his degradation, but the fact is you aren't. Justice is different. It's oriented towards the victim, not the perpetrator. With secular justice, a thief will go to prison but the person wronged won't be recompensed. In *halacha* the thief must pay punitive compensation five times as much as what was stolen. The goal isn't revenge but creating balance. Only Hashem can mete out true justice. His justice is inescapable because his commitment to the world is real.

"He will not have regard for any ransom, neither will he consent though you give him many bribes." The damage caused by *avodah zarah* and adultery can't be paid back, why would a person think it could? On an external level money works and is enormously effective in getting what you want. But in terms of healing on the spiritual level, it has no power. Money can't erase the damage wrought by *avodah zarah* or immorality. It also doesn't work when it comes to Hashem's justice. In summary, searching for truth requires dedication. If you're doing one thing you can't simultaneously do something else. If you're dedicated to transient things, you're depriving yourself of what's enduring. And people who don't have *Torah* end up on the wrong path. There are middot that Hashem despises and that estrange us from Him. This includes arrogance, lying and killing which causes irreparable damage to the sinner and others. The remedy is to listen to the mussar of your father and to study the *Torah* of your mother. The light of Hashem's word will dispel the darkness and put a person on the straight path.

A Hard Day's Work 6C

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Justin Treger

The Chovas Halevovos in Shar Habitachon lays out what the life of working person who has *bitachon* in Hashem should look like. *Bitachon* is never an excuse or license to desist from hard work. One must never be lazy in seeking out a livelihood. Of course, one should look for something that fits one's interest, physical makeup, and intellectual

capabilities. It should enhance our *emunah* in Hashem and build our internal world. *Bitachon* is never an excuse to be lazy. Just as someone who owns a field must plow the earth and plant the seeds to reap a crop, we must never think that solely trusting in Hashem will replace hard work. Of course, we must have *bitachon* that Hashem should bless the work of our

hands. When we've done what we can to the best of our ability, with no further means to influence the outcome, then we must trust Hashem that it will work out for the best. But *bitachon* should never be an excuse not to apply our minds properly to our work or to avoid putting in the requisite effort needed.