

BS"D Parashat Naso 5785

THE TORAH AS A WAY OF LIFE

The holiday of Shavuot, when we receive the Torah every year anew with great satisfaction and pride, has now passed. However, in the first year when the Torah was given at Mount Sinai there is an apparent contradiction in our understanding the attitude of our ancestors' willingness to receive it.

On the one hand the Torah states (Shemot 24,7):

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנוֹ לְעַם יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֹל-אֲשֶׁר-אָמַר יְיָ נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע
וְנִשְׁמָע

Then he (Moshe) took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we shall obey."

Rashi explains that Moshe read the Book of Bereishiet and the three mitzvot that were given at the Mara encampment, to which the nation agreed wholeheartedly to accept.

However, the Gemara (Shabbat 88a) states that HaShem uprooted Mount Sinai and held it above the people saying, "If you accept the Torah now then all will be well. However, if you refuse, then here will be your burial place".

So, which is it. Did the Jews readily accept the Torah, or did HaShem have to coerce our ancestors to do so?

We will return to this.

The Torah is a Chok

The Torah contains two types of mitzvot: mishpatim and chukim. Mishpatim are those laws which are conducive to human understanding and may be found in the law books of other nations. Chukim are beyond logic and are not to be found in any other society. For example, the laws dealing with tuma (ritual impurity) and, of course, the Red Heifer.

Parashat Bechukotai begins, "If you follow My chukim (laws. Vayikra 26:3) you will be blessed.

The use of the word bechukotai (My chukim) describing the Torah as a "Chok" is problematic, because the Torah consists of many laws that we can understand (mishpatim).

I suggest:

When we, as individuals or as a nation, perform a single mitzvah or a number of mitzvot, such as avoiding usury or fulfilling the laws of interpersonal relations between neighbors, we reap blessings and a good life. Yet living according to the entirety of the Torah presents daunting challenges, as the Torah itself recognizes.

Regarding the Sabbatical year we read (Vayikra 25,20):

וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית אֵין עֹשֶׂה חֹקֶשׁ וְאֵין מְצַיֵּד וְאֵין מְעַבְדֵּי אֲדָמָה וְאֵין מְעַבְדֵּי אֲדָמָה וְאֵין מְעַבְדֵּי אֲדָמָה:

"In the seventh year, you might ask, 'What will we eat [in the seventh year]? We have not planted, nor have we harvested crops."

In an agricultural society, such as existed in Biblical times, it seems impossible that an entire nation could stop working the fields for a year. HaShem responds:

From here and other examples we see that the Torah in its entirety, as a political, religious and economic system transcends nature and cannot succeed if HaShem does not intervene in the functioning of society. Therefore, the Torah in its entirety is indeed a chok; a way of life beyond human understanding.

Did the Jews readily accept the Torah?

To return to the apparent contradiction regarding our receiving the Torah...

When Moshe read from the book of Bereishiet and the three mitzvot that were given to the Jews at the Mara encampment, as Rashi explains, the nation enthusiastically proclaimed **נשמע ונעשה** – “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey”. However, when the full gamut of mitzvot was presented to them as well as its impossible implementation as a rational, practical national program there were calls of regret. At that point HaShem uprooted Mount Sinai and held it above the people saying, “if you accept the Torah now, then all will be well. However, if you refuse here will be your burial place”.

The die was cast the moment they said **נשמע ונעשה** there was no way of return.

HaShem's Intervention

Despite the fact that the Torah is not yet the law of the land of Medinat Yisrael, HaShem unceasingly intervenes in every aspect of our lives. There is no natural way that the small population of 650,000 Jews in 1948 with no tanks, planes or heavy weapons could have repelled five standing armies of surrounding Arab states if not for HaShem's intervention.

In 1967 we defeated a coalition of Arab states backed by Russian advisors (pilots and others) and increased the area of the State threefold in only six days. And without the help of HaShem in the 1973 Yom Kippur war, the Syrian army could have easily walked into Haifa and the Egyptian army into Tel Aviv.

Our precarious security position in the midst of 22 Arab states of the Middle East and North Africa, as determined by HaShem in the Torah, is the very heart of the paternal relationship we have with our Father in Heaven.

As absurd as it is for a doctor to deny the divine miracle of the human body, or for an astrophysicist to deny the presence of a master intellect behind the trillions of heavenly bodies; it is ever more absurd and bizarre that a Jew could doubt that HaShem has brought about and sustains the Jewish State.

The ultimate CHOK, which is beyond all human understanding, is the day to day lives we lead in Eretz Yisrael, with our phenomenal success in all walks of life.

Why would any believing Jew want to live anywhere else except in HaShem's Holy Land?

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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