

BS"D Parashat Yitro 5783

The Life Raft of Survival

Significance of Mount Sinai for the Created World

Parashat Yitro relates the most dramatic and significant episode for the existence of Am Yisrael and the world at large – the receiving of HaShem's Torah. In fact, the parasha can be summarized as “to be or not to be”.

Midrash Raba (parashat Vayaitzai) quotes the Amora Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish (Raish Lakish), that HaShem stipulated a fundamental provision underlying the entire spectrum of creation. If 2000 years “down the line” the Jewish nation will accept the Torah at Mount Sinai, then the universe (or universes) will continue to exist. However, if the Jews reject the Torah, then there will be no justification to maintain this material world and all matter will return to nothingness.

Another Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni parashat Yitro) states that HaShem uprooted Mount Sinai and held it over the heads of the Nation, declaring, “If you accept the Torah, all will be well; but if you reject it, then here will be your place of death”.

The Jewish worldview is that the implications of Am Yisrael and our observance of the letter and spirit of the Torah for creation cannot be overstated.

Ignorance and Stupidity

Humans are born totally ignorant, and it is the obligation and responsibility of Man – in the years HaShem allots us – not to add stupidity to our ignorance. Unfortunately, the great majority of humanity falls into the trap of believing that they are learned and intelligent, when in fact they are far from both.

Rabbi Shimon in the Midrash (Bereshit Raba 8) teaches that when HaShem informed the heavenly angels of His intention to create a being half-spiritual and half-animal to be called Adam (Man), the angels separated into two groups to voice their opinions about the “new boy on the block” combining shared natures of good and evil.

The angel of Chesed (Compassion) agreed that it was worthwhile to make Man, because he could be capable of acts of compassion. Emet (Truth) was opposed on the grounds that such a creature would always seek the path of least resistance and would live a life of falsehood. Tzedek (Justice) agreed to making Man because he would be capable of acts of justice. The angel of Shalom (Peace) disapproved on the grounds that man's animalistic instincts would overcome his angelic ones, and he would shed oceans of blood. HaShem, after hearing the pros and cons of His angel committee, took Emet and thrust it down to earth.

What does this mean?

HaShem rejected the opinion of the pro-mankind angels and agreed in principle with the opposition, as stated in Bereshiet 8,2:

Every inclination of the human heart is evil from birth.

This was demonstrated from the first day of creation, when Adam and Chava were expelled from Gan Eden within the first three hours of their existence – also causing the ultimate death of every human being yet to be born. Cain murdered his brother Abel not long after. Ten generations down the line, HaShem's quality of Justice emerged and caused the destruction of all humanity except for one man Noah, his immediate family, and the innocent species of the animal world. Not long after, HaShem dispersed the family of Man to the four corners of the earth because of their intention to make war on the Creator Himself.

Since HaShem had already decided to create Man, He had to find a way of hope for His new and multi-faceted species to survive for 6000 years (paralleling the six days of creation). He would take His ultimate Truth (Torah) and thrust it down on a particular people, thereby forcing them to be His agents in giving hope for mankind and the physical worlds. These agents are us – the Jewish nation as the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov – living a Torah way of life.

This is the background of parashat Yitro. HaShem held Mount Sinai over the heads of our ancestors and declared that if they refused to accept and fulfill the Torah, they would die there and destroy any hope for Man to rise above his animalistic inclinations.

Over time, nations and empires successively rose and fell due to their arrogance, ignorance, and stupidity. They failed to learn from their predecessors that the life raft of survival in this world for gentiles depends on the degree to which they acknowledge, respect, uphold, defend, support, extol, glorify and help the Jews – both as the Creator's chosen nation and as individuals.

As long as a nation showed respect and fidelity to the Jews, that nation would be blessed. Unfortunately for them, each in turn turned its back and betrayed us. That was the point of no

return for that nation, sealing its fate to descend from the stage of history and give way to another wannabe “Thousand-Year Reich”.

In descending historical order, there is the present malevolently antisemitic United Nations. Then England that abused its League of Nation’s mandate to establish an independent Jewish state, doing all it could to prevent its establishment until they were forcibly ejected to return to their island. The brutish-British blocked the only escape route for European Jewry during the Shoah, sealing the fate of hundreds of thousands of Jews. Germany and Russia rose before them in their antisemitic savagery, preceded by, but not outdoing, the Ottoman Turks, Catholic Spain, the Crusaders, Christian Byzantine, Rome, Greece, Persia, Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, ad nauseum. We met them all, and they are now, or will soon be, chapters in the history books that we write.

At this juncture in our return to Eretz Yisrael along the long trek to geula (redemption), we are witnessing the metamorphosis of the western democracies as they change their colors – slowly but surely – to blood red antisemitism. It is rampant in academia and in the workplace, on Jewish sites and institutions. Some of the most disturbing manifestations are condemning the State of Israel as apartheid, and for building schools and family dwellings in Shomron and Yehudah – the lands where the Tanach was written.

It is worthy to remind you here of the resounding and undisputed statement by Raish Lakish that if the Jews had rejected the Torah, all created matter would have returned to nothingness. Consequently, the core element that holds protons and neutrons together – surrounded by clouds of electrons and the 300 billion x trillion space objects – would have no reason to exist. In a classic work “Nefesh HaChayim” (The Soul [Essence] of Life) by the illustrious disciple of the Vilna Gaon, Harav Chaim ben Yitzchak (Itzkowitz, but better known as Reb Chaim from the town of Volozhin in

Belarus), he reiterates that the Jewish nation and our fulfillment of the Creator's mitzvot provide the life-giving force behind all that exists.

This masoret (tradition), passed from generation to generation, imposes the weight of creation on the Jewish nation (perhaps a source the Greeks added to their mythological family as the character Atlas who is condemned to hold the globe on his shoulders for eternity).

Is Judaism a Success Story?

When will we know if Judaism has succeeded in its mission to draw Man away from evil and falsehood and closer to HaShem?

We find the answer in two prophetic sources:

Yirmiyahu (chap. 16,19):

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O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble, to You shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: Our ancestors have bequeathed us lies, worthless things in which there is no profit. Can mortals make for themselves gods?

Yeshayahu (chap. 2,1-4)

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In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore.

Both Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu prophesied that, at some distant point in time (probably our generation), the gentile nations

will open their eyes to discover that they have been deceived by their parents and spiritual leaders to believe in vanity, futility, myths, distortions, fabrications, fallacies, and intended or unintended deceptions.

On that day, the original intentions of the Creator will have come full circle from Sinai – that subsequent to Am Yisrael's pivotal teachings, efforts and sacrifices, the spiritual part of humanity will have overcome its bestiality.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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