



A COMMITMENT OF LOVE

Shavuot, the holiday commemorating Matan Torah at Har Sinai, is an opportunity to reflect on an important dimension of our relationship with Hashem: our marriage.

To address this Shavuot-related issue, we can look to an insight from our recent holiday — Pesach. Many ask a simple question about the “Dayeinu” poem that we read at the Seder table. The text reads: “Had we arrived at Sinai and not received the Torah, dayeinu — it would have been sufficient.” How is this possible? Our entire existence is predicated upon us accepting the Torah. As the Talmud teaches (*Avodah Zara* 3a):

ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי מלמד שהתנה הקב"ה עם מעשה בראשית ואמר אם ישראל מקבלין את תורתי מוטב ואם לאו אני אחזיר אתכם לתוהו ובוהו.

“And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day” (Genesis 1:31). This teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, established a condition with the acts of Creation, and said: If the Jewish people accept My Torah at the revelation at Sinai, all is well, but if they do not accept it, I will return you to the primordial state of chaos and disorder.

The simple answer is that dayeinu means it would have been sufficient to express gratitude for arriving at Har Sinai. Of course, the journey would have been incomplete without the actual giving of the Torah, yet our

experience at Sinai was itself reason enough for thanks. The question remains: what is it about being at Har Sinai in and of itself, even before the giving of the Torah, that is something we should be grateful for?

One answer is expressed in a poetic phrase found in a very different context — the Tisha Bav Kinnot of Rabbi Eliezer Hakalir that describe “*chitun chokekei Chorev*.” The literal translation of this expression is “the marriage engraved at Sinai,” which we mourn and long for on Tisha Bav. This concept of marriage is the key to understanding the experience at Sinai. The relationship established between us and Hashem at Har Sinai was a commitment of love — a marriage.

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At Har Sinai, even before we received the Torah, we entered into a new, transformational stage — a marriage with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah, Acharei Mot* no. 20) captures this in one concise phrase:

ביום התונתו וביום שמחת לבו, ביום חתונתו זה הר סיני, וביום שמחת לבו זה אהל מועד.
On the day of his marriage and on the day of his heart's gladness: On the day of his marriage this is Har Sinai, and on the day of his gladness this is the Ohel Moed.

For this stage in our relationship we say “dayeinu.” We began our courtship on Pesach with the recitation of Shir Hashirim, which describes our feelings for Hashem and His feelings for us. Yet only when we stood under the chuppah at Har Sinai did we enter into a permanent bond of marriage — a commitment of love.¹

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, in *Made in Heaven* — his volume explaining Jewish marriage — teaches how this model of the wedding at Sinai explains many of our contemporary wedding customs: walking to the chuppah with candles, which reminds us of the fire that flashed at Sinai; the groom arrives at the chuppah first, as Hashem arrived first before Moshe ascended; and the ketubah is a contract that delineates the responsibilities of the couple to each other much as the Luchot represent a contract between Hashem and the Jewish people.

When we arrived at Har Sinai, the Torah describes that we stood *b'tachtit hahar* — “at the underneath of the mountain.” Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yitro* no. 283) describe this as an expression of Hashem's affection to us:

ויתיצבו [י"ט, י"ז] (נכפפו) [נצפפו] מלמד שהיו מתיראים מפני הזיקין ומפני הזועות מפני הרעמים ומפני הברקים. תחת ההר [י"ט, י"ז]

מלמד שנתלש ההר ממקומו וקרבו ועמדו תחת הר סיני שנאמר ותקרבו ותעמדון תחת ההר עליהן נאמר בקבלה יונתי בחגי הסלע וגו' “*And they stood*” — *they crowded together — which teaches that [the Jewish people] feared the fireworks, quaking, thunder and lightning. “At the underneath of the mountain” — this teaches that the mountain was uprooted from its spot and they came close and stood beneath Har Sinai. As it says, “and you came close and you stood under the mountain,” and about this it is said in tradition, “my dove in the cleft of the rock.”*

The mountain over our heads was our protective cover — the chuppah of our wedding with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Perhaps this is why we count seven sets of seven days marking our process of purity in anticipation of Shavuot each year. Before a wedding, a bride prepares by counting seven clean days in preparation. Similarly, our sages teach that the Jewish people immersed in the mikvah before Matan Torah. It is also noteworthy that this marriage takes place on the fiftieth day of preparation, since the number fifty represents completeness — a complete commitment between Hashem and the Jewish people.

This metaphor is powerful and important in comparison to others. Sometimes, the Torah compares our relationship with Hashem as servants to a master (*ki avadai hem*), and at others as children to a parent (*banim atem LaShem Elokeichem*). Each of these has a specific connotation and affect. However, the comparison of HKB”H to a husband, which is expressed also in detail in Sefer Hoshea, has far reaching implications. A committed spousal relationship is interdependent and symbiotic. We need HKB”H, and (as it were) He needs us. As Reb Levi Yitzchak of

Berditchev once reminded Hashem on Yamim Noraim, if it were not for us, who would proclaim His great name in this world?

Marriage is an expression of love and commitment; both are crucial aspects of our relationship with Hashem. Hashem tells us that “He loves us an everlasting love” and our opening line in the daily Shema is our call to love Him. The covenant at Sinai where all our souls were present expressed Hashem's commitment to us as His people, and us to Him as a *goy kadosh*, a nation sanctified (through kiddushin) to Him.

Such is marriage. When an individual in a committed relationship navigates a rough patch, returning to the core elements of love and commitment can help sustain the relationship. During this challenging time, we can use Shavuot — the anniversary of our marriage with Hashem — as an opportunity to reflect on our shared love and commitment to give us strength, hope and joy. Just as when we stood together at Har Sinai under the chuppah and we did not see Him, but felt His love and closeness, so too this Shavuot we can feel His love and closeness.

Endnotes

1. This idea is developed by R' Hirsh Melech of Dinov in several places in his writing. A footnote in *Derech Pikudecha, Lo Taaseh* no. 45 (*he'arot chelek hamachshava*) explains:

רבינו יסד דרוש ארוך בענין זה והזכירו בספריו פעמים בארוכה ופעמים בקצרה ועיקרו בספר אנרג דפרקא אות רל”ב (עמ' קנ”א) וז”ל הנוגע לענינו, והנה כבר קדם מאמרינו כמה פעמים שעד היום כנסת ישראל היא כמו ארוסה כי אירוסין נקראים כמ”ש השי”ת במתן תורה ואתם תהיו ל”י ממלכת וכו', ל”י הן המה הקידושין כמו הרי את מקודשת ל”י ידים מוכיחות. There are different perspectives as to whether Matan Torah constituted the Kiddushin or Nissuin aspect of our marriage with Hashem.