

# Zman Matan Torah: Our Name is Yosef, Not Joe

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In our tefillos we refer to Shavuot as *zman masan toraseinu*, the time of the giving of the Torah. Our reaction to Hashem giving of the Torah to the Jewish people was expressed in the statement of *naaseh v'nishma*, we will do and hear. The Ohr Hachaim points out that every Jew that witnessed the giving of the Torah spontaneously answered *naaseh v'nishma* without consulting their friends or family or even forming a committee to first look into the pros and cons of accepting the Torah. Every individual accepted and answered *naaseh v'nishma* with a full commitment and were compared to the angels, as stated in the gemara:

*Rabbi Elazar said: when the Jewish people said "we will do" before "we will hear", a bas kol (voice from heaven) came out and said "who revealed to my children this secret that the administering angels use, as it says (Tehillim 103:20) bless Hashem, his angels, mighty in strength, that do His will to hear the voice of His word".*

**Shabbos 88a**

אמר רבי אלעזר: בשעה שהקדימו ישראל נעשה לנשמע יצתה בת קול ואמרה להן: מי גילה לבני רז זה שמלאכי השרת משתמשין בו? דכתיב (תהלים קג) ברכו ה' מלאכיו גברי כח עשי דברו לשמע בקול דברו, מסכת שבת דף פה.

We see true *d'veikus*, cleaving, and love of Hashem on the part of every individual through their statement of *naaseh v'nishmah*. One could ask that when the Jewish people stood by Har Sinai to accept the Torah, it says (Shemos 19:17) that they stood literally under the mountain, which is interpreted by the gemara as a reference to being forced to accept the Torah, and it was not just a voluntary act. In fact, the gemara describes the scene:

*God suspended the mountain over [the Jewish people] like a barrel, and said "if you will accept the Torah, it will be good, and if not, there will be your burial place."*

**Shabbos 88a**

כפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה - מוטב, ואם לאו - שם תהא קבורתכם. מסכת שבת דף פה.

The midrashim explain that the statement of *naaseh v'nishmah* only applies to *Torah sheb'ksav*, the written Torah, whereas the gemara is referring to the *Torah sheb'al peh*, the Oral Torah, which required coercion on the part of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This coercion on the *Torah sheb'al peh* was only necessary until the time of Mordechai and Esther, where at the conclusion of the events of Purim, when the Jewish people escaped complete annihilation, the Megilla records *kiymu v'kiblu*<sup>7</sup>, they willingly accepted all parts of Torah, including the *Torah sheb'al peh*.

One could ask how it was the Jewish people didn't accept the Oral Torah at Har Sinai. For instance, the Torah says "לא תבערו אש", do not burn a fire [on Shabbos], which is interpreted by the gemara to prohibit giving the death penalty on Shabbos. Did the Jewish people only accept this at face value, which would mean they didn't have any fires burning on Shabbos, and no stoves cooking food on Shabbos at all? It is inconceivable that the Jewish people were on the level of karaaites and tzedukim, who refused to accept any part of *Torah sheb'al peh*.

Rav Leib Bakst zt"l explains that all the parts of *Torah sheb'al peh* that did not require a great amount of deep analysis and were easily understood were accepted by the Jewish people at Har Sinai. One cannot separate *Torah sheb'ksav* and *Torah sheb'al peh*, as they are all one unit, and were accepted together. There are, however, areas of *Torah sheb'al peh* which require a tremendous amount of effort and delving into in order to understand. This was the part of *Torah sheb'al peh* that the Jewish people were forced to accept through Hashem holding the mountain over their heads.

The Tanchuma indicates this unique quality of *Torah sheb'al peh*.

*For only those that love Hashem with all their heart, soul and possessions can study [Torah sheb'al peh] as it says "you shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your possessions." From where do we know that this love refers to study? See what it says afterwards "and these things that I command you shall be on your heart" and what is that? This is study, and what study is on the heart? We would say "and you shall teach your children" this is study which requires sharpness. The first parsha of krias shma does not refer to reward in this world, as the second parsha does, "and I will bring rains in their time", [the first parsha] refers to the reward for doing mitzvos but without learning Torah, and in the second parsha it is written "with all your heart and with all your soul" and doesn't mention "and with all your possessions" to teach that anyone that loves wealth and pleasure can't study Torah sheb'al peh, for it requires great effort and lack of sleep, and there are those that waste themselves away on it, and therefore its reward is in the world*

לפי שאין לומד אותה [תורה שבעל פה] אלא מי שאוהב הקב"ה בכל לבו ובכל נפשו ובכל מאודו שנא' ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאורך (דברים ו'), ומנין אתה למד שאין אהבה זו אלא לשון תלמוד, ראה מה כתיב אחריו והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך ואי זה זה תלמוד שהוא על הלב הוי אומר ושננתם לבניך זו תלמוד שצריך שנון, ללמדך שפרשה ראשונה שבק"ש אין בה פירוש מתן שכרה בעוה"ז כמ"ש בפרשה שנייה והיה אם שמוע תשמעו וגו' ונתתי מטר ארצכם, זה מתן שכר עוסקי מצות (ס"א תורה שבכתב) שאין עוסקין בתלמוד, ובפ' שנייה כתיב בה בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם ולא כתב בכל מאדכם ללמדך שכל מי שאוהב עושר ותענוג אינו יכול ללמוד תורה שבע"פ לפי שיש בה צער גדול ונדוד שינה ויש מבלה ומנבל עצמו

<sup>7</sup> The Torah Temima points out that it should have been written *kiblu v'kiymu*. Since the word *kiymu* comes first, there must have been a previous *kabalah* before Purim, namely by Har Sinai.

to come.

### Midrash Tanchuma Noach 3

עליה לפיכך מתן שכרה לעה"ב  
מדרש תנחומא פרשת נח סימן ג

This midrash is a proof as to why *Torah sheb'al peh* wasn't fully accepted at Har Sinai, since it requires a full commitment of love and dedication to Torah and Hashem.

One should still ask why Torah was given in such a manner of force in reference to *Torah sheb'al peh*. Why couldn't the Jewish people accept everything at the very outset with the words of *naaseh v'nishmah*?

The gemara even asks that since the Jewish people were forced to accept the Torah, this gives an excuse for one not to observe the mitzvos in a proper manner. The gemara says:

*From here is a great claim on the Torah.*

#### Shabbos 88a

מכאן מודעא רבה לאורייתא.

מסכת שבת דף פח.

Rashi explains:

*For if you are called to judgment as to why you didn't fulfill what you accepted, there is an answer, that it was accepted against our will.*

שאם יזמינם לדין למה לא קיימתם מה שקבלתם  
עליכם - יש להם תשובה, שקבלוה באונס.

The gemara continues and says that the answer to the claim is that in the time of Purim the entire Torah was accepted willingly by the entire Jewish people. Still, why was it necessary for the Torah to be accepted in two steps?

## Torah as the Blueprint of the World

The entire world was created to give us the opportunity to lead our lives under the observance of Torah and mitzvos. Everything in this world was created to follow the word of Hashem. For example, lulavim and esrogim were created for the sole purpose of being used for mitzvos on Sukkos. The desire to sin through the yetzer harah was only created so that we should be able to fight that inclination and follow mitzvos instead. The laws of the Torah control our lives.

All our actions in our performances of mitzvos are all part of nature which is a part of Torah. Torah preceded the world. Chazal tell us *Bereishis bara Elokim* means that Hashem created the world for the sake of Torah which is called *reishis*, the ultimate.

We are all aware that on this earth, things such as climate, weather conditions, daily earthly functions and even life and death are not in the control of man. These daily events are placed upon us and are considered against our will, as we are taught (Pirkei Avos 4:22) that we live and die against our will.

The idea that *Torah sheb'al peh* was forced upon us is meant to indicate to the Jewish people that Torah is a part and parcel of daily life. We are prepared and willing to accept all daily natural events regardless of our own desires. The Torah was forced upon us to reinforce the notion that Torah is built into the workings of the world. The world is a model of the Torah. Just as we

accept life which was thrust upon us without our agreement, we accept Torah even when it was presented to us in a coercive manner.

*On Shavuos, Rav Yosef would say “prepare for me a three year-old calf.” And he would say “if not for the effects of this day, how many people named Yosef are there in the market?”*

**Pesachim 68b**

רב יוסף ביומא דעצרתא אמר: עבדי לי  
עגלא תלתא. אמר: אי לא האי יומא  
דקא גרים, כמה יוסף איכא בשוקא?  
מסכת פסחים דף סח:

Rav Yosef wanted and requested to eat very fancy foods on Shavuos, for this day was a very joyous one. Rav Yosef was convinced, as we should be, that if it were not for the *kabalas haTorah* on Shavuos, we would not be any different than the rest of the human race.

Rashi explains:

*If it were not for this day: that I learned Torah and grew to greatness, there are many people in the marketplace named Yosef, and what would be the difference between me and them?*

אי לאו האי יומא: שלמדתי תורה  
ונתרוממתי - הרי אנשים הרבה בשוק  
ששמך יוסף, ומה ביני לבינם.

The *kabalos haTorah* of Shavuos not only differentiated us from the rest of the world but also elevated us. The words we recite in our prayers in numerous places, אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים, that Hashem chose use from all the nations, is in reference to Torah, Shabbos and Yom Tov. A non-Jew is forbidden to learn Torah or keep the Shabbos, since these mitzvos differentiate us.

Our names are not John or Joe. We are Yosefs, proudly continuing the names and actions to emulate our forefathers. Take advantage of this Shavuos to utilize our time and efforts in a fashion of Torah-observant Jews.