**Parenting from the Chag- Chag Shavuot- “Trusting Our Intuition”**

Many of us are familiar with the famous two words that the fledgling Jewish nation declares at Sinai as they accept the Torah- the now legendary words נעשה ונשמע, “we will do and we will listen.” Our willingness to blindly commit to the commandments of G-d’s Torah, evident by the fact that we say “we will do” before “we will hear”, highlights the tremendous commitment shown by the nation to G-d and His commandments. Even more, echoing across the centuries, the phrase נעשה ונשמע has become a hallmark of our own devotion to Torah throughout the generations.

Rav Soloveitchik, however, in an essay entitled “Mt. Sinai- Their Finest Hour,” recorded in the volume *Reflections of The Rav (pgs. 89-97)*, asks a very fundamental question regarding Am Yisrael’s famed response at Sinai. What separates us from the animal kingdom, the Rav notes, is our intellect and our ability to think rationally. Yet, at Har Sinai, “they [Bnai Yisrael] accepted a distinctive and demanding national destiny for themselves and for their future generations, without prior deliberation and without subjecting the proposition to critical evaluation. Such unqualified, undiscriminating commitments would seem rash and unwise in other spheres of life…Why would the angels in heaven salute the *na’aseh v’nishma* response of the Israelites which, in effect, negated the rational element that is the basis of man’s divine image?” In other words, why do we celebrate such a response- if in fact Bnei Yisrael’s reply seems to be almost irresponsible, especially considering the monumental life decision that was being made?

Rav Soloveitchik answers that in reality, there are two ways through which we make decisions in life. Regarding many decisions, we are meant to utilize our intellect and rational abilities to assess a given situation, and determine the correct and proper course of action. In the language of Kabbala, Jewish mysticism, this is known as using our “ratzon tachton*”*, our lower, practical will. There are, however, other decisions in life that cannot be decided by analysis and logic- as the gravity of the decision and an unknown future make an intellectual determination impossible. In those situations, we make our decisions based on intuition or instinct- a sense of what is correct that comes from within. This is called using our “ratzon elyon”, our “higher will”- and signifies tapping into something deep inside us. As Rav Soloveitchik powerfully explains, “the major decisions of man’s life are made spontaneously and suddenly, in response to an aboriginal command from within, and are not necessarily dictated by external considerations… decisions of faith, marriage, choice of profession, acts of military genius, and most pivotal resolutions in life are reached intuitively, without addressing any inquiries to the intellect.”

In this way, suggests The Rav, we can better understand the greatness of Am Yisrael’s declaration of “Naase V’nishma”. Faced with such a monumental decision, Am Yisrael tapped into their “ratzon elyon” and took a leap of faith, declaring their dedicated allegiance to Hashem and His Torah based on their intuition and instinct. Their intuitive decision to follow Hashem and commit themselves to Him, despite a lack of knowledge and logic, is therefore celebrated and commemorated joyfully.

I believe that that this idea is extremely relevant for us in parenting as well. As responsible parents, we strive to be thoughtful, careful, and strategic in the decisions we make for our children. When making important decisions connected to our family or our kids, we don’t hesitate to do the research required to make an informed and educated choice. There are many decisions in life, however- and particularly in parenting and raising children- where no amount of research and investigation will help. The factors involved are so numerous and involved that continued analysis wont help make a more informed decision. It is at these moments that we, as parents, must try to tap into our “ratzon elyon” and rely on our intuition to make the correct decision. We have to believe that our inner instinct, shaped by years of devotion and dedication to Hashem and His Torah, will guide us in the right way and help us make the right choice- and embrace that choice. And of course we must then daven that whatever choice we make, Hashem continues to help us and ensures that everything works out for the best.

At the foot of Mount Sinai, the Jewish Nation went against all logic in taking a leap of faith towards a commitment to G-d and His Torah. While by nature we are rational and intellectual beings, our life is full of major decisions that cannot be fully analyzed intellectually and rationally- for that, we must rely on our intuition and instinct. As parents as well, this reality is something that we must understand and embrace- despite the unknown. To end with the poignant words of The Rav, “We will because we will. This is the faith which initiated our peoplehood and which sustains us to this day.”

Wishing everyone a Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach!