

Torat Moshe
Pesach/Shavuot
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אֲשֶׁרֵי הָעַם שֶׁכָּבְדָה לּוֹ אֱשֶׁרֵי הָעַם שֶׁהָאֱלֹהִי

“Fortunate is the nation who have it so, Fortunate is the nation whose G-d is Hashem”.¹ Fortunate are we, who have a treasure known as Torah. The more we study the Torah the more we discover. Its depth is unlimited because of its divine origin. When studied, it helps us understand who we are as a people. It also helps us understand the greatness of Moshe and the fact that Moshe is the greatest prophet that ever lived. The two passages that emphasize this point are Genesis Chapter 15 and Exodus Chapter 3. In Genesis 15, Hashem promises Avraham’s offspring will inherit the land of Israel. Hashem explains that the process of inheritance of the land requires exile, servitude, and redemption. In Exodus 3, Hashem appears to Moshe at the burning bush. It is here that the conversation that started with Avraham continues with Moshe. This is where Hashem lays out the plan to take the children of Israel out of Egypt, to bring them to the land of Israel and participate in the revelation at Sinai. It is within this process that Hashem explains to Moshe that Hashem will take the nation of Israel as His people. Chazal explain that the conversation at the burning bush took an entire week. Within this conversation, Moshe questions his worthiness to be the leader. In Exodus 3;11 it states:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִי אֲנִי כִּי אֵלֶיךָ אֶל־פָּרַעֲהוּ וְכִי אֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should take the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

Hashem answered Moshe:

וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־אֶתְנֶנְךָ עֲמֹד וְזָה־לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת־הָעָם מִמִּצְרָיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה:

And He said, "For I will be with you, and this is the sign for you that it was I Who sent you. When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Hashem’s answer doesn’t seem to answer Moshe’s question. Why would the Children of Israel coming to Mount Sinai to worship Hashem be a sign that Moshe is a worthy leader? The nuance of Moshe’s question is important. He asks “Who am I” but uses the word אֲנִי (Anochi) for I. This usage indicates a deep existential request. Why would the return to Sinai answer Moshe’s question?

A few weeks ago, I was privileged to hear a shiur from Rav Tzvi Pesach Danziger about a difference of opinion between Rambam and Smag concerning the mitzvah of belief in Hashem based on the understanding of the first of the ten commandments. This discussion gave me a new

¹ Metzudat David on Psalms 144:15:1

אֲשֶׁרֵי הָעַם. מְשׁוּבַח הָעַם שֶׁכָּרְבָה טוֹבָה יֵשׁ בִּידוֹ וּמְשׁוּבַח הָעַם שֶׁהוּא אֱלֹהִי אֲשֶׁר בִּידוֹ לְהַשְׁפִּיעַ טוֹבָה מְרֻבָּה בְּגִמּוּל הַמַּעֲשֵׂה כִּי יָדוּ לֹא תִקְצַר:

perspective on the central role that Moshe plays in the giving of the Torah. Rambam² is of the opinion that “The first of the positive commandments is the mitzvah to know that there is a God, as [Exodus 20:2] states: "I am God, your Lord." Rambam’s focus is on the beginning of the verse and does not connect it to the latter part of the verse that states that Hashem took us out of Egypt. Smag, on the other hand, believes the mitzvah to be³ the unconditional understanding that G-d, gave us the Torah at Mt Sinai through Moshe, and is the One who took us out from Egypt. On the surface, Smag’s understanding makes sense when looking at the totality of the verse. The question is why did Rambam parse the verse and only focus on the beginning. Maybe the answer is based on the context of the event. The Talmud in Zevachim 116a describes how at the time of the revelation at Sinai the nations of the world thought the world was being destroyed. They came to Balaam and asked him “**What is the tumultuous sound, i.e., the loud noise, that we have heard? Perhaps a flood is coming to destroy the world.**” **Balaam said to them: He has a good and precious item in His treasury, that was hidden away with Him for 974 generations before the world was created, and He seeks to give it to his children, as it is stated: “The Lord will give strength to His people”** (Psalms 29:11). The description in Talmud Zevachim conveys the magnitude and global nature of the revelation at Sinai.⁴

We have numerous accounts of the gravity and awesomeness of the revelation. The Torah describes the sound and light show experience. The awesomeness of the event that affected the entire world is perhaps what influenced Rambam’s thought that the belief in Hashem as the reality of the world is not limited to the exodus. We see this explained in more depth in Hilchot Yesodi Hatorah Chapter 1⁵. It is with this in mind that we can explain the depth of Hashem’s

²Mishneh Torah, Positive Mitzvot 1

(מצוה ראשונה ממצוות עשה, לידע שיש שם אלוה, שנאמר: "אנכי ה' אלהיך" (שמות כב, דברים ה' ו

³ Sefer Mitzvot Gadol

, Positive Commandments 1

המצוה הראשונה מצות עשה (א) להאמין כי אותו שנתן לנו את התורה בהר סיני על ידי משה רבינו הוא יי אלהים שהוציאנו ממצרים וזהו מה שאמר בשעה שנתן את התורה אנכי יי אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים:

⁴ Maharal points this out in Gur Aryeh beginning of Parshat Yitro

⁵ Halacha 1: “The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being. Halacha 5 This entity is the God of the world and the Lord of the entire earth. He controls the sphere with infinite and unbounded power. This power [continues] without interruption, because the sphere is constantly revolving, and it is impossible for it to revolve without someone causing it to revolve. [That one is] He, blessed be He, who causes it to revolve without a hand or any [other] corporeal dimension. Halacha 6 The knowledge of this concept is a positive commandment, as [implied by Exodus 20:2]: "I am God, your Lord..."Anyone who presumes that there is another god transgresses a negative commandment, as [Exodus 20:3] states: "You shall have no other gods before Me" and denies a fundamental principle [of faith], because this is the great principle [of faith] upon which all depends.

answer to Moshe at the bush. Moshe asked "who am I"? Hashem's answer was that you are special, and your uniqueness will become apparent when the children of Israel return to this place, Mt Sinai. It will be here that your prophetic abilities will become apparent to the children of Israel. Rambam describes this in Yesodi HaTorah Chapter 8 Halacha 1-2.⁶ It was not the

משה רבנו לא האמינו בו ישראל מפני האותות שעשה. שהמאמין על פי האותות יש בלבבו דפי שאפשר שיעשה האות בלשון וכשוף. אלא כל האותות שעשה משה במדבר לפי הצורך עשאו. לא להביא ראיה על הנבואה. הנה צריך להשיקיע את המצריים קרע את הים והצילין בתוכו. צרכנו למזון הוריד לנו את המן. צמאו בקע להן את האבן. כפרו בו עדת קרח בלעה אותן הארץ. וכן שאר כל האותות. ובמה האמינו בו. במעמד הר סיני שעיינו ראו ולא זר ואנחנו שמעו ולא אחר האש והקולות והלפידים והוא נגש אל הערפל והקול מדבר אלינו ואנו שומעים משה משה לה אמר להן כה וכה. וכן הוא אומר (דברים ה ד) "פנים בפנים דבר ה' עמכם". ונאמר (דברים ה ג) "לא את אבותינו ברת ה' את הברית הזאת". ומנין שמעמד הר סיני לבדו היא הראיה לנבואתו שהיא אמת שאין בו דפי שצאמר (שמות יט ט) "הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן בעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך וגם בך ואמינו לעולם". מקלל שקדם דבר זה לא האמינו בו נאמנות שהיא עומדת לעולם אלא נאמנות שיש אחריה הרהור ומחשבה:

The Jews did not believe in Moses, our teacher, because of the wonders that he performed. Whenever anyone's belief is based on wonders, [the commitment of] his heart has shortcomings, because it is possible to perform a wonder through magic or sorcery. All the wonders performed by Moses in the desert were not intended to serve as proof [of the legitimacy] of his prophecy, but rather were performed for a purpose. It was necessary to drown the Egyptians, so he split the sea and sank them in it. We needed food, so he provided us with manna. We were thirsty, so he split the rock [providing us with water]. Korach's band mutinied against him, so the earth swallowed them up. The same applies to the other wonders. What is the source of our belief in him? The [revelation] at Mount Sinai. Our eyes saw, and not a stranger's. Our ears heard, and not another's. There was fire, thunder, and lightning. He entered the thick clouds; the Voice spoke to him and we heard, "Moses, Moses, go tell them the following:...." Thus, [Deuteronomy 5:4] relates: "Face to face, God spoke to you," and [Deuteronomy 5:3] states: "God did not make this covenant with our fathers, [but with us, who are all here alive today]." How is it known that the [revelation] at Mount Sinai alone is proof of the truth of Moses' prophecy that leaves no shortcoming? [Exodus 19:9] states: "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people will hear Me speaking to you, [so that] they will believe in you forever." It appears that before this happened, they did not believe in him with a faith that would last forever, but rather with a faith that allowed for suspicions and doubts.

נמצאו אלו ששולח להן הם העדים על נבואתו שהיא אמת ואינו צריך לעשות להן אות אחר. שהם והוא עדים בדבר פשני עדים שראו דבר אחד ביחד שכל אחד מהן עד להברו שהוא אומר אמת ואין אחד מהן צריך להביא ראיה להברו. כה משה רבנו כל ישראל עדים לו אחר מעמד הר סיני ואינו צריך לעשות להם אות. והוא שאמר לו להקדוש ברוך הוא בתחלת נבואתו בעת שננתן לו האותות לעשותן במצרים ואמר לו (שמות ג יח) "ושמעו לקולך". ידע משה רבנו שהמאמין על פי האותות יש בלבבו דפי ומתקרה ומחשב והנה נשמט מלידה ואמר (שמות ד א) "והן לא האמינו לי". עד שהודיעו הקדוש ברוך הוא שאלו האותות אינן אלא עד שיצאו ממצרים ואחר שיצאו יעמדו על החר הנה יסתלק הרהור שמהרהרין אחריו שאני נותן לה כן את שידעו שאני שלחתיך באמת מתחלה ולא ישאר בלבם הרהור. והוא שהכתוב אומר (שמות ג יב) "וזה לה האות פי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאתך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים על החר הנה". נמצאת אומר שכל נביא שיעמד אחר משה רבנו אין אנו מאמינים בו מפני האות לבדו כפי שנאמר אם יעשה אות נשמע לו לכל מה שיאמר. אלא מפני המצוה שצוה משה בתורה ואמר אם נתן אות (דברים יח טו) "אליו תשמעו". כמו שצונו לתתך הדבר על פי שנים עדים ואף על פי שאין אנו יודעים אם העידו אמת אם שקר. כה מצוה לשמע מזה הנביא אף על פי שאין אנו יודעים אם האות אמת או בכשוף ולט:

Thus, those to whom [Moses] was sent witnessed [his appointment] as a prophet, and it was not necessary to perform another wonder for them. He and they were witnesses, like two witnesses who observed the same event together. Each one serves as a witness to his colleague that he is telling the truth, and neither has to bring any other proof to his colleague. Similarly, all Israel were witnesses to [the appointment of] Moses, our teacher, at the [revelation] at Mount Sinai, and it was unnecessary for him to perform any further wonders for them. This concept [is alluded to in the interchange between God and Moses at the revelation of the burning bush]. At the beginning of his prophecy, the Holy One, blessed be He, gave him the signs [and wonders] to perform in Egypt and told him [Exodus 3:18], "And they will listen to your voice." Moses, our teacher, knew that one who believes [in another person] because of signs has apprehension in his heart; he has doubts and suspicions. Therefore, he sought to be released from the mission, saying: "They will not believe me" [Exodus 4:1], until the Holy One, blessed be He, informed him that these wonders [were intended only as a temporary measure,] until they left Egypt. After they would leave, they would stand on this mountain and all doubts which they had about him would be removed. [God told him:] Here, I will give you a sign so that they will know that I truly sent you from the outset, and thus, no doubts will remain in their hearts. This is what is meant by [Exodus 3:12]: "This will be your sign that I sent you: When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain." Thus, we do not believe in any prophet who arises after Moses, our teacher, because of the wonder [he performs] alone, as if to say: If he performs a

miracles that Moshe performed, but rather it was the revelation at Sinai where the people witnessed firsthand Moshe's abilities as prophet that made them believe in him. What we sometimes forget is how powerful an event the revelation at Sinai was. How does an unlimited, all powerful, nonphysical, creator communicate with a group of mere human beings? We, the children of Israel, experienced something at Sinai but it is not clear what we actually heard. With a close examination of the ten commandments, we discern an interesting shift. The first two commandments are stated in first person, but then change over to third person. Chazal explain that the people came to Moshe after the first two commandments and complained that they could not handle hearing the commandments directly from Hashem. The last eight commandments were conveyed from G-d to Moshe and then directly to the people. It is for this reason that the latter eight commandments are stated in third person. This indicates that they heard them through Moshe. What is most important is that we appreciate who Moshe our teacher was. He was a true gift, a direct conduit between the people of Israel and our Father in heaven. Moshe, with his tremendous humility and unique prophetic abilities, was able to suspend his personal interests to allow Hashem to speak with clarity through him. As Rambam lays out in his thirteen principles of faith⁷, the Torah we have is from Hashem through our special prophet Moshe Rabbenu (our teacher). Moshe the greatest of all prophets was able to convey Hashem's Torah with a clarity that was the highest expression of the word of G-d. With this appreciation, may we merit the ability to learn Torat Moshe with clarity and in turn grow and connect to Hashem in the most meaningful of ways.

wonder we will listen to everything he says. Rather, [we believe him] because it is a mitzvah which we were commanded by Moses who said: If he performs a wonder, listen to him.

Just as we are commanded to render a [legal] judgment based on the testimony of two witnesses, even though we do not know if they are testifying truthfully or falsely, similarly, it is a mitzvah to listen to this prophet even though we do not know whether the wonder is true or performed by magic or sorcery.

אני מאמין בַּאֲמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה שְׁנִבְוֵאת מֹשֶׁה רַבְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם הִתְהַ אֲמַתִּית וְשֶׁהוּא הָיָה אָב לְבָיִאִים לְקוֹדְמִים לְפָנָיו וְלְבָאִים אַחֲרָיו ⁷

7. I believe with complete faith that the prophecy of our teacher, Moses, may he rest in peace, was true, and that he was the father of all prophets, —of those who preceded him, and of those who followed him.

אני מאמין בַּאֲמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה שְׁכָל הַתּוֹרָה הַמְצוּיָה עִתָּה בְּיָדֵינוּ הִיא הַתּוֹרָה הַנִּתְּוֶנָה לְמֹשֶׁה רַבְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם:

8. I believe with complete faith that the entire Torah which is now in our possession, is the very one that was given to our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace.

אני מאמין בַּאֲמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה שְׁזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה לֹא תֵהָא מְחֻלָּפֶת וְלֹא תֵהָא תּוֹרָה אַחֲרַת מֵאֵת הַבּוֹרָא יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמוֹ:

9. I believe with complete faith that this Torah will not be exchanged, and that no additional Torah [will be given] by the Creator, blessed is His Name.