

Geulas Yisrael 152- Shavuot

Torah Will Revolutionize Human Consciousness

Har Sinai was an epic moment in religious history. For close to 2500 years humanity was lost in theological confusion, unable to conceive of One G-d responsible for all creation. Hashem appeared to His nation, delivered His Torah and, finally, there was a human community to represent Him on Earth.

For some odd reason the dramatic story of matan Torah is prefaced by the journey of Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, who arrives in the desert with Moshe's wife and children. During the tense faceoff between Moshe and Pharo, Moshe's family had been safely sequestered in Midyan, out of harm's way. They had been sidelined in Midyan for their own safety, but, currently, they must be reunited with Moshe so that Har Sinai can commence.

Judaism doesn't celebrate celibacy and it therefore crucial that Moshe stand atop the mountain and receive the word of Hashem as a married man, and as a father. Until the family reconvenes, Matan Torah cannot proceed.

Yet, the Torah doesn't merely describe the arrival of Moshe's family. The Torah elaborately details Yitro's meal with Moshe and Aharon, as well as his advice to Moshe about delegating judicial responsibilities to lower courts. Evidently, there is deeper symbolism to Yitro's visit, beyond the practical function of transporting Moshe's family. Yitro symbolizes a larger aspect of matan Torah.

Private or International?

Har Sinai was a legal delivery of 613 mitzvot. At this mountain we transformed into a summoned people, tasked with living a life of commitment and commandment. Additionally, Har Sinai was a private rendezvous between Hashem and his chosen bride. In Shir Hashirim (3:4, 8:2) the bride romanticizes about a private meeting with her husband in her mother's home:

עד שהבאתיו אל בית אמי ואל חדר הורתי

According to Chazal (Shir Hashirim Rabbah parsha 2) the term בית אמי or "mother's home" refers to Har Sinai

עד שהבאתיו אל בית אמי, זה הר סיני

In the private precincts of our "home", Hashem delivered His Torah to his chosen people, and enshrined His covenant with His beloved bride.

Ideally though, matan Torah was meant to be a broader international event. In addition to our private embrace of Torah, Hashem also desired that other nations accept some form of His Torah. Presumably, this international version of Torah would be different from ours and their registry of mitzvot would be less extensive than our detailed list of 613. Yet, Hashem did offer some version of Torah to other nations as well.

Parshat Vezot Haberacha depicts Hashem's arrival at Har Sinai

וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹנֶק מִסִּינֵי בָּא וְזָרַח מִשְׁעִיר לְמוֹ הוֹפִיעַ מֵהַר פָּאֵרָן

implying that He first visited both Se'ir and the mountain of Paran, before finally arriving at Sinai. Chazal interpret these pre-Sinai visits as divine invitations to the children of Yishma'el, who resided in Paran and the descendants of Eisav who had settled in Se'ir. Prior to Har Sinai they were each offered a version of Torah. Unfortunately, neither accepted the divine invitation, leaving our people as the only nation willing to embrace the Torah. What was first intended as an international experience contracted into an exclusively private audience between Hashem and His chosen people.

Yitro's visit symbolizes the narrowing of matan Torah. A philosopher who has studied various world religions, ultimately, Yitro discovered Hashem while acknowledging divine miracles

וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ יְקֹנֶק אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פְּרַעֲה אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶת הָעָם מִתַּחַת יַד מִצְרַיִם:

In theory, Yitro should be the perfect candidate to attend Har Sinai, receive some version of Hashem's word and pass it along to a broader audience. He even displays moral sensitivity in helping Moshe construct an efficient legal system. Though the broader populations of Eisav and Yishma'el rejected a divine invitation perhaps Yitro could still serve as an ambassador of Torah.

Yet, despite this potential, Yitro departs Har Sinai before matan Torah, cancelling any possibility for an international dissemination of Hashem's word. The delivery of Hashem's word to a broader international audience would be deferred to a later point in history.

A Messianic Vision of Torah

Our Nevi'im portray that Messianic future, in which an entire world is exposed to the word of Hashem. Yeshayahu (perek 2) envisions the final assembly of nations in Yerushalayim as they crave Torah inspiration:

וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים כָּבוֹן יְהִיֶה הַר בֵּית יְקֹוֹק בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים וְנִשְׂאָ מִגְבְּעוֹת וְנִהְרֹוּ אֵלָיו
כָּל הַגּוֹיִם: (ג) וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ לָבוּ וְנִעְלָה אֵל הַר יְקֹוֹק אֶל בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וְיִרְנוּ
מִדְרָכָיו וְנִלְכָה בְּאַרְחֻתָיו כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה וְדַבֵּר יְקֹוֹק מִירוּשָׁלַם :

Similarly, in perek 11 he describes an end-of-days scenario in which the entire planet is blanketed with the knowledge of Hashem

כִּי מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ דַּעַה אֶת יְקֹוֹק בְּמִים לַיָּם מְכֹסִים :

Though the international community refused to embrace the word of Hashem in the Sinai desert, they will, one day, access His will through the people who embraced it 3300 years ago and preserved it throughout the travails of history. Hashem's original plan to extend parts of Torah to a broader audience, will, one day, materialize.

A Revolution of Consciousness

We are living through a difficult and confusing period. A deranged world is enraged with hatred against our people. Ignorant of even the basic facts of the region, they blindly support murderers and rapists. All communication has broken down, as we are baselessly accused of false crimes. It has become more and more difficult to believe in humanity and to preserve hope that an ignorant and angry generation will ever awaken to the facts and recover moral conscience. It appears as if humanity has fallen into a moral abyss and there is little we can do to retrieve them.

How will they be repaired and how will their moral conscience be restored? What can possibly heal this lunacy of lies and hatred? How can we preserve our faith in humanity?

One answer is to believe in the capacity of the word of Hashem to change hearts and shift attitudes. The mishnah in Avot D'Rebbe Natan (perek 3) records a debate between Shammai and Hillel regarding teaching Torah to unsuitable students. Shammai refused to teach Torah to anyone who wasn't humble, smart, wealthy, and pedigreed. Shammai's conservative position, though harsh, is compelling. In the absence of financial capacity, Torah may be exploited for profit. Unintelligent students may misrepresent Torah's wisdoms while arrogant talmidim will use Torah study to self-aggrandize. By limiting Torah instruction only to "suitable" talmidim, Shammai aimed to protect Torah from distortion.

Hillel disagreed and extended Torah study to every student. He trusted in the power of the divine word to reform unfit students and to infuse them with moral character. Even those who were not initially suited for Torah study would be morally uplifted by their encounter with the word of Hashem. He trusted the transformative impact of Torah.

In the spirit of Hillel, we must also trust the transformative power of Hashem's word. Through us, one day, all of humanity will be exposed to the word of Hashem. Their confusion will dissipate, their hatred will vanish, and their sanity will return. As bleak as the current landscape seems, we must believe in the power of the word of Hashem to revolutionize human consciousness.

Belief in the eternity of Torah demands that we trust its ability to transform humanity. Minds will change and hearts will turn. The word of Hashem will relandscape our world. Torah is that powerful.