



ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר שמות

פרשת יתרו

SERIES 2: ISSUE 17

HOW “DAYENU” CAN SAY JUST REACHING HAR SINAI WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH

Chapter 19

2) *They traveled on from Rephidim and they came to the Sinai desert; they encamped in the desert and Yisrael encamped there opposite the mountain.*

(ב) וַיִּסְעוּ מִרְפִּידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַּר וַיַּחֲוֶן־שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הַהָר.

3) *And Moshe went up to God and Hashem called to him from the mountain, saying, “So you shall say to the House of Yaakov and you shall recount to Bnei Yisrael.”*

(ג) וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו ה' מִן־הָהָר לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יִעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does verse 2 begin by referring to the Jewish people using the plural וַיַּחֲנוּ (*they encamped*) and then switch to the singular וַיַּחֲוֶן (*he encamped*)?
2. Why does the Torah point out to us the detail that they encamped “*opposite the mountain*”?
3. Why does verse 3 say “*and Moshe went up to God*” by using the words וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה rather than the more common expression, וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה?

The commentators ask the following question: How was it possible that all 600,000 men (not to mention the women) were all able to attain a state of prophecy and hear Hashem’s words directly, while awake, when earlier (12:7-18) the Torah says Moshe Rabbeinu was unique in his ability to receive prophecy *while awake and not in a dream*? Before answering this question, let us first present the following analogy: The relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people is like that of a father and son whose souls are joined together as one. As long as nothing comes between them, they will speak affectionately to each other at all times. But if something happens and an iron wall is built between them, the son will no longer be able to hear his father speaking to him. Yet if at some point in time the son grows stronger, he will be able to tear down the wall. Then they will see each other again and resume their intimate conversation, full of love and affection. So too, the souls of the Jewish people are connected to God’s Heavenly Throne, like a part is connected to its whole. It is thus only logical that Hashem desires to communicate and speak to that part of Himself that is within us. (Indeed, out of His great love for us, Hashem desires to communicate with us far more than we desire to communicate with Him!)

It is only the spiritual impurity (*zuhama*) that the snake injected into us in Gan Eden that gets in the way, for it creates a wall between us and our Father in heaven. But when this spiritual pollution is removed, our souls once again become fully connected to their Divine source above. There is then an outburst of love as

Hashem speaks to us like a father to his beloved son with nothing between them preventing it. This is what our Sages (*Shabbos* 146a) were referring to when they said, “When the Jewish people stood at *Har Sinai* the spiritual pollution of the snake was removed from them.” As a result, there was nothing holding them back from becoming attached to Hashem and hearing Him speak directly to them, just like in the analogy of the father and son above.

When the Torah says *and the people encamped (ויִחַן) there opposite the mountain* in the singular form, it is telling us that the people attained a state of spiritual unity as a result of their proximity to the mountain where Hashem’s Presence appeared. As long as *zuhama* still adhered to their souls, they remained a multitude of separate individuals, since all spiritual impurity has its source in the realm of disunity and separation. And if one part of the Jewish people had been purified of the *zuhama* while another had not, their souls would not have been unified and the Torah could not have referred to them in the singular, as one unified entity. The fact that the Torah refers to them in the singular thus proves that the *zuhama* was removed from all of them, as our Sages have told us. The Torah describes them as “one” since the realm of holiness is intrinsically one and without division. **[This answers Question 1.]** Furthermore, Bnei Yisrael were supposed to attain an even higher level of holiness forty days later when they were to receive the *Luchot*: even their physical bodies would have become spiritual in nature.

We can now understand the statement in the Pesach Haggadah, “If Hashem had brought us before *Har Sinai* and had not given us the Torah, this would have been enough (דַּיִינוּ).” Surely the whole point of coming to *Har Sinai* was to receive the Torah! If so, how could just arriving to the mountain be considered “enough”? But as we have explained, the Jewish people received a tremendous gift just by standing before Hashem’s Presence on *Har Sinai*: they were all purified of their *zuhama* and became worthy of attaining an elevated state of prophecy and spiritual unity. This alone “would have been enough” for thanks to be given to Hashem. **[This answers Question 2.]**

What about Moshe? Whatever level the people attained, Moshe had already reached that level and far more. What additional level could he attain as he stood before the mountain? To answer this question the Torah tells us (verse 3), *וַיַּשָּׁא עֹלָה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים, And Moshe went up to God.* The rest of the people became unified and attained prophecy, while Moshe reached the awesome level of “*went up to God*,” meaning that he could go up to heaven without the assistance of the angels. This is why the Torah wanted to have Moshe’s name come before the verb, so that it would come right after – and be connected to – the preceding phrase: Bnei Yisrael reached **this** level upon reaching Mt. Sinai, *and Moshe* reached a different, **higher** level of holiness and purity. **[This answers Question 3.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 - 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKodosh” (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich’s true greatness.

Please call David Rose on 07833 938 734 for sponsorship opportunities.