

In this week's *Parashah*, the Torah is given. *Matan Torah* / the Giving of the Torah caused a significant change in *Hashem's* relationship with the world, writes R' Gershon Chanoch Henach Leiner z"l (1839-1890; *Radzhiner Rebbe*, best known for his efforts to reintroduce the *Mitzvah of Techeilet*). In *Tehilim* (Ch.136), the expression, "*Ki l'olam chasdo*" / "For His kindness endures forever" appears 26 times. Our Sages teach that these verses allude to the 26 generations from Creation until *Matan Torah*. Not having the Torah, those generations endured only thanks to *Hashem's* kindness. After the Torah was given, in contrast, another verse in *Tehilim* (128:2) applies: "When you eat the labors of your hands, it is praiseworthy." While we are always dependent to a large degree on *Hashem's* kindness, His desire after *Matan Torah* is that we earn our right to exist by recognizing His "light, knowing of His presence in this world, studying Torah and performing *Mitzvot*. As the well-known *Mishnah* (*Makkot* 3:16) states: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, wished to confer merit upon *Yisrael*; therefore He gave them Torah and *Mitzvot* in abundance."

The *Radzhiner Rebbe* adds: Our *Parashah* relates that the Torah was given amidst a cacophony of sounds--sounds that, until now, were only a whisper. And, the *Zohar* teaches that the sound of the *Shofar* that was heard at *Matan Torah* alludes to the "word" that "emanates from the mouth of *Hashem*, [by which] man lives" (see *Devarim* 8:3). The *Radzhiner Rebbe* explains: Before *Matan Torah*, it was not widely known that the entire world exists only by G-d's word. Part of the revelation at *Har Sinai* was that the world is sustained by His word, which henceforth will emanate from *Hashem* in the merit of our Torah study and our *Mitzvot*. (*Sha'ar Ha'emunah V'yesod Ha'chassidut* p.10-11)

Shabbat

"Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it." (20:8)

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: In the first three of the *Aseret Ha'dibrot*, we are commanded to believe that *Hashem* exists, that He is the Creator, and that He understands everything and is able to do anything; we are commanded to believe that He is the only One with these characteristics and that we should honor Him alone; and we are commanded to respect His Name. Now, in the fourth commandment, we are instructed regarding a constant reminder that He created everything. That reminder is *Shabbat*.

Ramban continues: The commandment to "Remember the Sabbath day" instructs us to remember *Shabbat* at all times, not just on *Shabbat*. In this way, we will remember Creation at all times, and we will acknowledge at all times that the world has a Creator. This, explains *Ramban*, is why the days of the week do not have names in Hebrew, unlike in other languages. Instead, we call them: "The first day of the week," "The second day of the week," etc., which relates them to *Shabbat*. (*Peirush Ha'Ramban Al Ha'Torah*)

R' Zvi Yisrael Thau *shlita* (founder of *Yeshivat Har Ha'mor* in *Yerushalayim*) writes: *Ramban* teaches us that we are obligated to remember *Shabbat* at all times so that its testimony to Creation will accompany us always. In this way, belief in Creation--which *Ramban* calls, "A significant aspect of our belief in G-d"--will also be with us all the time.

- Continued in box inside -

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“Hashem descended upon Har Sinai to the top of the mountain. Hashem summoned Moshe to the top of the mountain, and Moshe ascended.” (19:20)

R' Avraham Zuckerman z"l (1915-2013; *Rosh Ha'yeshiva* of Yeshivat Bnei Akiva in Kfar Ha'roeh, Israel) writes: We understand what it means that Moshe ascended, but what does it mean that *Hashem* descended? The prophet says (*Yeshayah* 6:3), “The entire world is full of His honor.” And the *Zohar* teaches, “There is no place devoid of His Presence.” What does it mean, then, that He descended upon the mountaintop?

R' Zuckerman answers: G-d did not change in any way when He “descended” on to *Har Sinai*. Rather, He permitted us to feel a closeness to Him that we did not feel before. We experienced His revelation in a new way, as if He was closer to us than before. Thus, from our perspective, He descended to the mountaintop. (*Luchot Even*)

“I am Hashem, your Elokim, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.” (20:2)

R' Chaim Dov Cohen z"l (instructor in a branch of the Novardok Yeshiva; later in Israel and New York; died 1976) writes: This commandment--to have *Emunah* / faith in *Hashem*--is the foundation of our Torah. Aside from the fact that it is an independent *Mitzvah*, it also is a component of every other *Mitzvah*. It is impossible to perform a *Mitzvah* completely, writes R' Cohen--even an interpersonal *Mitzvah* between man and his fellow man--without *Emunah*. For example, if one gives charity without an accompanying belief in *Hashem*, then he is doing that good deed for some reason other than because it is G-d's will. As such, it is an incomplete *Mitzvah*.

What is at the root of our *Emunah*? asks R' Cohen. The Exodus from Egypt, as our verse indicates. (*Iyunim Musari'im* p.129)

- Continued from back page -

R' Thau continues: R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) writes that given that the world originates from the Master of everything, Who is perfect, we can be certain that the world itself is perfect as well. Combining these teachings of *Ramban* and R' Kook, continues R' Thau, will help us to look at the world differently. Specifically, when we remember always that the Creator of our world is perfect, that knowledge will impact every interaction we have with any aspect of His world, including our response to every event that occurs. (*Am Mekadshei Shevi'i* p.37)

“Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward Elokim, and they stood at the bottom of the mountain. All of Har Sinai was smoking because Hashem had descended upon it in the fire; its smoke ascended like the smoke of the furnace, and the entire mountain shuddered exceedingly.” (19:17-18)

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 88a) derives from the phrase, “They stood at the bottom of the mountain,” that *Hashem* held *Har Sinai* over *Bnei Yisrael* like a barrel, and threatened, “If you accept the Torah, good! If not, this will be your burial place.” [See below for the continuation of the *Gemara*]

The *Ba'alei Tosafot* (France; 12th - 13th centuries) ask: Why did *Hashem* compel *Bnei Yisrael* to accept the Torah? Had they not already said, “*Na'aseh ve'nishma*” / “We will do and we will listen,” indicating their willing acceptance of the Torah? The *Ba'alei Tosafot* answer: Nevertheless, they might have been scared away by the great fire they saw over *Har Sinai*.

R' Yosef z"l (1601-1696; “*Darshan* of Posen”) observes that *Tosafot's* answer is implied in the juxtaposition of our two verses: “They stood at the bottom of the mountain”--*i.e.*, *Hashem* compelled them to accept the Torah. Why? Because “all of *Har Sinai* was smoking because *Hashem* had descended upon it in the fire . . .” (*Yad Yosef*)

The *Gemara* continues: If our ancestors were compelled to accept the Torah, we have an excellent excuse to exempt ourselves from observing it! No, says the *Gemara*, for our ancestors accepted the Torah again in the days of *Achashveirosh*. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Noach Chaim Levin z"l (Kobrin, Belarus; mid-1800s) writes in the name of R' Yehonatan Eybeschütz z"l (Central Europe; 1690-1764): *Bnei Yisrael's* saying “*Na'aseh ve'nishma*” was only lip service, but they did not mean it in their hearts, as we read (*Tehilim* 78:36), “They sought to beguile Him with their mouth, and they deceived Him with their tongues.” Thus, they had to be compelled to accept the Torah until such time when they would accept it wholeheartedly of their own free will.

He asks: What made the Jewish People accept the Torah more sincerely in the days of *Achashveirosh*?

He explains: Haman came from Amalek, a grandson of Esav. Esav's great merit was that he honored his father Yitzchak. However, that honor was only lip service, as the Torah records (*Bereishit* 25:28), “Yitzchak loved Esav for game was in his mouth,” which a *Midrash* cited by *Rashi* z"l understands to mean: “Esav used to entrap and deceive Yitzchak with his words.” When the Jewish People succeeding in defeating Haman, despite the ostensible merit that his ancestor Esav had, they understood that lip service is not enough. Therefore, they accepted the Torah all over again, this time wholeheartedly. (*Yeshu'ah Gedolah Al Megilat Esther* 9:27)