



**Borehamwood
& Elstree Synagogue**
Our Community

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A collection of Divrei Torah to share over Shavuot

Revelation is the cornerstone of faith, upon which all of Judaism rests. As Rambam points out, it is not simply a “proof” of faith but rather the perception of the Divine in the most direct way possible. While other miracles served to prove Divine existence, Revelation was the experience of the Divine itself. For one brief moment in time the curtain separating the heavens from the earth were drawn aside and the rays of Godliness in all its brightness shone onto the earth.

The Revelation of Sinai provided a basis and a foundation for all time for our nation to saturate itself in the faith of our forefathers. For not in every generation will the Almighty reveal himself overtly for all to see. In fact, many times the darkness of history will obscure the light of the Divine and we need to gaze deep into its appearance to see the hand of Hashem.

The Torah states *“And there has not risen a prophet since in Israel like Moshe Whom knew Hashem face to face”* (Devarim 34:10)

Rambam upon setting out the foundational principles of our faith states the Seventh principle that is to believe in the Prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu.. (Laws of Yesodai Hatorah 7) There Rambam, sets out that integral to our faith system is that Moshe was the most elevated of all prophets and that all prophets before and since as well as that shall ever be were are and shall be beneath him in ability and greatness.

Rav Kook explains that this is so crucial because with out this principle there could be a possibility that another could arise who would change the words of the holy Torah or contradict it, and this could never be. For the words of Torah are eternal and forever accordingly the two go hand in hand, thus Moshes prophecy is the highest level of communication that can be achieved with G-d.

However here I wish to point out the following: It is not that Moshe is greater than other prophets but rather that Moshe is something

else altogether. The use of the word prophet regarding Moshe is probably only due to the fact that we don't have another term to describe this level of communication with G-d. However we can say that his prophecy was as different to other prophets in clarity level and significance in fact in every single way as the prophets such as Isaiah Jeremiah or Yechezkel are from ourselves. (See Moreh Nevuchim 2:35)

The Talmud Yevamot 49:b describes Moshe's prophecy in terms of the sun and the others in terms of the moon. Interestingly we call the prophecy of Moshe "Torah" whereas the prophecy of other prophets is defined by the term "Divrei Kabbalah" words of acceptance. Torah being permanent and forever whereas other prophecies were dependant on need time and events.

Once a year on Shavuot we commemorate the event that made us who we are. We reaffirm our commitment and unwavering connection to our Father in Heaven. We do so by delving in his word. The word of truth that transcends time and space. How? Is it not beyond us? Is it not too far reaching?

The answer is Moshe. The Torah describes him as Moshe Ha'ish, Moshe was first and foremost a Man, a human being like me and you. Yes the "Shechinah medaberet mitoch grono" the divine presence spoke through him but when we go back to basics he was flesh and

blood.

Often, we can mistakenly say to ourselves, this is not for us this is for other people greater people angels perhaps. The Torah was not given to angels it was given to flesh and blood. The Torah was given through a man of flesh and blood like ourselves to teach us that it is relevant it is accessible and is there for all who wish to do so to reach out and grasp as humans as people with our frailties drawbacks and weaknesses. This Torah is for you and me.

Chag Sameach

Rabbi Chaim Kanterovitz
Senior Rav BES

Shavuot and the Imperative of Torah

Rabbi Alex Chapper

It's a well-known Gemara that describes the scene at Har Sinai. The Jewish people stood "underneath the mountain". Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chisdah said: This teaches that G-d held the mountain over their heads like a barrel and said to them: "If you accept the Torah, good and if not, your burial place will be there."

Tosafot asks the question: G-d held the mountain over their heads like a barrel yet they had already committed to accept when they declared "Na'ase v'nismha - We will do and we will hear".

So why was it necessary to force them to do something to which they had already agreed?

Tosafot answers that G-d was worried that they might retract their agreement after seeing the strong fire - the immense power of the Torah, which consumes those who violate it.

However, the Maharal is uneasy with this response. He asserts that the merit of having willingly accepted the Torah has never ceased throughout the generations, remaining as an eternal merit for the Jewish people. Yet, what merit exists in such a forced acceptance? Furthermore, if there was concern that they might retract their acceptance, then let G-d hold the mountain over their heads when they would attempt to retract, rather than doing it in the beginning.

Therefore the Maharal offers an entirely different approach to why G-d forced acceptance of the Torah, despite the fact that there was willing acceptance. The reason that G-d held the mountain over their heads - forcing their acceptance of the Torah - was so that the Jewish people would not say that the Torah was accepted at their discretion, implying that if they wouldn't have wanted to, they wouldn't have had to accept it.

Given the nature and greatness of the Torah, it would have been inappropriate that its acceptance be at the discretion of the Jewish people. Since the existence of the entire world is dependent on the Torah, for without Torah the entire world would return to primordial chaos, it is not appropriate for

the Torah to be dependent on the choice of the Jewish people. G-d compelled and required acceptance of the Torah, since the continued existence of the world depends on the Torah. Without acceptance of the Torah, the world would return to primordial chaos.

Just because they had already declared "We will do and we will listen," don't think that it was unnecessary for G-d to hold the mountain over their heads! Certainly the main purpose was not to prevent retraction of their agreement to accept the Torah. Why should they retract after their declaration "We will do and we will listen?" Rather, the element of compulsion was an inherent necessity. An optional Torah which would be in the world simply because the Jewish people happened to choose it is a very different Torah than one that was in the world as an inherent imperative for the existence of the world. Therefore, G-d held the mountain over their heads as a barrel, for if they did not accept the Torah, the foundation of all existence, the world could not continue, and the barrel would turn into their grave.

Chazal tell us that G-d looked into the Torah and created the world which means that the Torah is the essential blueprint for the existence of the world. On Shavuot, we look into the Torah and realise that our acceptance of its teachings is equally essential for the world's continued existence.

Shavuot Short Vorts

We know that the Torah was given on Shavuot. But all the Torah says about this amazing day is *“You shall proclaim on this very day a holy occasion it shall be for you; you shall not perform any type of work. This is an eternal law in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.”* (Vayikra 23:21) Reference is made to the completion of the counting and the offering of two loaves. But why did the Torah not say that it was on this day that we received the holy Torah, a theme which is central to our celebration of Shavuot?

The Akedat Yizchak explains that the commemoration of the giving of the Torah cannot be limited to a particular time like other matters connected with the festivals because it applies at all hours and at all times as it is written: *“This book of the Law shall not move from your mouth, you shall meditate in it day and night.”* (Yehoshua 1:8)

Even though the Torah was given over 3000 years ago, every day we are commanded that the Torah should be as fresh and special to us as on the day that it was given.

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The Midrash relates that before Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He demanded guarantors who would ensure its preservation. The Jews suggested many great people who were all rejected by Hashem. Finally they declared, *“Our children will be our guarantors”* – the generations to

come will continue to observe and cherish the Torah. Hashem immediately accepted these guarantors and agreed to give the Torah to the Jewish people.

Why are children the guarantors of the Torah?

When a child is taught Torah from an early age, they acquire a taste for it, a love of study that accompanies them throughout their life. They will study Torah in adulthood, and in turn pass it on to their own children.

Furthermore, when a child studies Torah they repeat what they learn to their family members, which creates an environment of Torah in the home.

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The Torah records that during their 40 years of travelling through the desert, the Jewish people complained and argued a number of times. This all changed at the moment of Matan Torah – the giving of the Torah.

On the first of the month of Sivan, five days before the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people arrived and camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. This was the only time that the encampment of the Jews is referred to in the Torah the singular: *“It camped,”* and not *“They camped.”* Our sages learn from this that the Jewish People encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai *“as one man, with one heart.”* They all shared the same love for Hashem, to the point that they considered themselves limbs of one extended body, with one heart

beating for all of them. Hashem was so pleased at this display of unity that He said: "This is the moment in which I will give you the Torah."

The fact that Hashem tied the giving of the Torah to the unity of the people indicates that our unity is not only a nice behaviour, but an essential part of accepting the Torah.

Fear and Faith **The Goals of Ma'amad** **Har Sinai**

Rabbi Taragin

I) Introduction - The Ultimate Goal

Although the Sinaitic revelation was employed as the venue for the transmittal of the Torah, G-d's first words to Moshe delineate a distinctly different goal-

*"Atem Re'item asher asiti l'Mitzraim. Va'esa etchem al kanfei n'sharim va'avi etchem eilay. V'ata im shamo'a t'shmau b'koli ush'martem et briti vih'yitem li s'gula mikol ha'amim ki li kol ha'aretz. V'atem t'hiyu li mamlechet Kohanim v'goi kadosh..." (19:4-6)*¹

On the heels of the exodus' climax at Yam Suf, G-d looked to consecrate at Har Sinai the eternal "brit" (bond/ relationship) between He and the B'nei Yisrael.

Despite this first heavenly

declaration, the actual brit takes place a full five chapters later- in Chapter 24- at the conclusion of the Sinai experience. Rashi², indeed, claims that the brit depicted in Chapter 24 actually occurred earlier- in Chapter 19. The Ramban and Ibn Ezra, though, associate the order of the events with that of the chapters. Notwithstanding which approach one takes regarding the historical issue, one wonders why the brit was not depicted/ did not occur right away?

This article will try to show how the experience of Sinaitic revelation was a necessary pre-requisite to the brit.

II) The Goals of the Ma'amad

Two similar verses, strategically situated before and after the ma'amad, define its goals.

A) Yir'at Elokim

Moshe responds to B'nei Yisrael's fearful retreat from Har Sinai- *"al tira'u, ki l'va'avur nasot etchem ba ha'Elokim, u'va'avur tih'ye yirato al p'neichem l'vilitti secheta'u."* (20:17) The Ramban links the term "nisayon" which appears in the first part of the verse to the yirat ha'Elokim described afterwards. G-d orchestrated the intimidating presentation at Har Sinai to fortify B'nei Yisrael's faith in Him. Moshe challenges B'nei Yisrael to preserve the fear, palpable then, as a

¹ Linguistically this verse parallels the forth "promise" made to B'nei Yisrael (6:5-6) - "V'heiveiti etchem el ha'aretz asher **nasati** et yadi."

² 24:1 based on Chazal (Shabbat 78a).

safeguard against future sin.³

B) Faith in Moshe

Before His descent, G-d presents an additional goal- "*hinei anochi ba eilecha b'av he'anan ba'avur⁴ y'shma ha'am b'dabri imach v'gam b'cha ya'aminu l'olam.*" (19:9)

Ma'amad Har Sinai transformed the relationship, not only between the people and G-d, but also between them and Moshe.

The reference to Jewish faith in Moshe reminds us of the Torah's assertion after Yam Suf that "*vaya'aminu ba'Hashem u'vMoshe avdo.*" (14:31) Ibn Ezra and Ramban differ as to how Har Sinai supplemented the faith that had been established already at Yam Suf. Ibn Ezra understands Har Sinai to have had a quantitative effect- the faith that after Yam Suf had characterized only a fraction of the nation, after Sinai spread to its entirety. The Ramban, though, asserts that Har Sinai had a qualitative effect- it added a new dimension to the people's faith. In Mizraim and then at Yam Suf the people saw the fulfillment of Moshe's prophecies; at Sinai

they personally observed and experienced the actual prophecy⁵.

This second goal accounts for the redundancy at the end of Chapter 19. Verse 19 seemingly completes the preparations for the commandments- Moshe tells B'nei Yisrael what must be executed in anticipation of G-d's descent (10-15), G-d descends (16), and B'nei Yisrael draw near to His presence. Although the conclusion of verse 19- "*Moshe yidabeir v'haElokim ya'anenu v'kol-*" could have served as the introduction to the commandments, verses 20-24 separate between the two⁶.

In addition to having been inappropriately placed, the verses themselves, in which G-d commands Moshe to inform the B'nei Yisrael of the prohibition against ascending the mount, seem to be redundant. Although Moshe's reply questions this redundancy, G-d does not explain; instead He repeats the command and dismisses Moshe. Although numerous exegetes attempt to identify some novel nuance within G-d's second warning⁷, most see it

3 The parallel between "al tira'u" and "yir'ato" signifies Moshe's redirection of B'nei Yisrael's fear from what caused them to distance themselves from G-d's presence to what should cause them to distance themselves from sin.

4 The two verses which describe the revelation's goals both use the term "ba'avur" in doing so.

5 See D'varim 5:4 which describes B'nei Yisrael's having met G-d "panim b'panim."

6 These verses are cordoned off as an independent unit by their similar opening and conclusion- "Vayered Hashem"= "Vayered Moshe."

7 See Ibn Ezra, S'forno, and Chizkuni.

as intentionally repetitive⁸.

Based on the Ramban's understanding of verse 19, we can offer an explanation for the redundancy and placement of these verses⁹. As opposed to the Mechilta, which sees the verse as an introduction to the ten commandments, the Ramban links it to the ensuing verses. The discussion described by these verses aimed to exhibit Moshe's prophetic status with all B'nei Yisrael as witnesses.

Those who might have doubted Moshe's prophecy prohibiting ascent to the mountain, heard his words reconfirmed by G-d. At Sinai B'nei Yisrael were personally exposed to the basis of Moshe's prophecy- G-d's direct command- in order to fortify their faith in him as G-d's prophet.

III) The Goals as Pre-Requisites to The Brit

Both objectives of the ma'amad prepared B'nei Yisrael for the brit with G-d. The first objective- the fortification of the people's faith- is the absolutely essential base of a proper man- G-d relationship. The experience of G-d's ascent and "face to face" commandments gave the people the feeling of

cautious closeness G-d wanted the brit to confirm.

Examination of the brit ceremony justifies the significance of Sinai's second objective- completing the people's faith in Moshe:

"Vayikach Moshe chatzi hadam vayasem ba'aganot vachatzi hadam zarak al ham'zbe'ach.

Vayikach sefer hab'rit vayikra b'aznei ha'am. Vayom'ru 'kol asher diber Hashem na'aseh v'nishma.'

Vayikach Moshe et hadham vayizrok al ham'zbe'ach vayomer hinei dam hab'rit asher karat Hashem i'machem al kol ad'varim ha'eile." (24:6-8)

The reading of the sefer hab'rit in between the preparation and sprinkling of the symbolic ceremonial blood signified the centrality of G-d's commandments as the brit's basis. The brit consecrated, not a mere general commitment, but rather, one that accepted actual mitzvot.

The placement of the brit at the end of Parshat Mishpatim implies that the sefer hab'rit included the mitzvot mentioned in the parsha¹⁰. Did the B'nei Yisrael wholly believe that these mitzvot, that were told to them by Moshe in G-d's name, were, indeed, of such origin? In

8 See S'hmot Rabbah (28:3) and Rashbam as primary examples.

9 See also Rambam (Yesodei HaTorah 8:1) whose assertion might be based on this verse. (See alternatively Chapter 21).

10 So explain Ibn Ezra and Ramban. The parallel between the first verse of the "mishpatim" unit (20:19) and the key verse that depicts the ultimate goal (19:4) reinforces their position. Alternatively, see Mechilta (Chodesh 3) which quotes other possibilities. Clearly, though, the sefer hab'rit included mitzvot.

order to allow the b'rit to be rooted in commandments of an assured godly origin, Ma'amad Har Sinai preceded Moshe's ascent of the mount to receive these commandments.

IV) The Eternal Significance

Forty years after Har Sinai, Moshe warns a new generation to commemorate the Sinaitic revelation:

"Rak hishamer licha u'sh'mor nafsh'cha m'odpen tishkach et had'varim asher ra'u einecha u'fen yasuru mi'l'vavecha kol y'mei chayecha v'hodatam l'vanecha v'livnei vanecha yom asher amadta lifnei Hashem elokecha b'Choreiv be'emor Hashem eilay 'hakhel li et ha'am v'ashmi'em et d'varay asher yilm'dun l'yir'a oti kol hayamim asher heim chayim al ha'adama v'et b'neihem y'lameidun'." (D'varim 4:9-10)

The Sinaitic revelation serves as the base for the yir'at shamayim of all future generations. Both general service of G-d and particularly the study of Torah, received at Sinai, need to be infused by and reflect the atmosphere within which the Torah was given¹¹.

In Chapter 5 Moshe relates to the revelation's second aim—fortification of the people's faith

in him as prophet. Although the chapter introduces the mitzva speech, which follows the historical summation of the first four chapters, it first focuses on the Sinaitic revelation. Moshe uses the revelation as an introduction to his mitzva speech because, before mentioning the mitzvot, he needs to remind B'nei Yisrael of the basis of their faith in him as a faithful transmitter of G-d's commandments.

Moshe reminds the people that his presentation of the mitzvot merely completes a process they themselves initiated. B'nei Yisrael, intimidated by the overwhelming Sinaitic revelation and impressed by Moshe's comfortable access to the mount and G-d's word, begged Moshe to spare them the continued face to face contact by acting as G-d's intermediary.

After forty years Moshe applied the precedent of him having acted as intermediary set at Sinai to the rest of G-d's commandments. This precedent applies to Torah study of future generations as well. Future generations learn like the one that actually received the Torah; they too learn of G-d's commandments through the medium of a rebbe. The importance and reliability of the mesorah were established as part of the revelation.

¹¹ This idea is expressed best by the gemara in B'rachot- "Just as the Sinaitic revelation caused fear and trembling, so should future generations' study (22b)." This point is already implied within the Torah itself. See D'varim 5:25.