

Meshech Chochmah Parshas Yisro

Naaseh and Naaseh Ve'Nishma

וַיַּעֲנוּ כָּל הָעָם יַחְדָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה

The entire people responded together and said, "Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do." (19:8)

The Jewish People's response expressing their preparedness to receive the Torah is mentioned twice in these parshiyos. The first time is in our pasuk. The second time is written in the end of Parshas Mishpatim,¹ in the section known as "*Bris Torah*" – the Covenant of the Torah:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע

They [the people] said, "Everything that Hashem has spoken we will do and we will listen"

We note that the response on these two occasions is not exactly the same:

- In our pasuk, the people said "We will do (נעשה),"
- In Mishpatim, they said, "We will do and we will listen (נעשה ונשמע)."

What is behind these two differing responses?

In fact, there is another difference between these two pesukim:

- In our pasuk it says that "the entire people" (כל העם) responded.
- In Mishpatim it says that "they responded," referring to "the people" (העם) mentioned earlier in that pasuk, but does not emphasize that the entire people responded.

¹ Shemos 24:7.

The Meshech Chochmah explains that these two points of difference are related. The Torah contains six hundred and thirteen (*taryag*) mitzvos, yet we will quickly realize that no one individual can fulfill all of them:

- Certain mitzvos apply specifically to the kohanim.
- Other mitzvos apply specifically to Leviim
- Still other mitzvos apply to the king.

And so on.

The question thus arises: Is there any way in which the individual Jew can have a role in the fulfillment of all the *taryag* mitzvos?

In fact, says Meshech Chochmah, there are two ways, and they are reflected in the two pesukim we have quoted.

First Idea: The Body Israel

The first way relates to the fact that all of the Jewish People are considered as one. This, says Meshech Chochmah, is the intent of the pasuk in Yechezkel² which states that Yisrael are called “Adam – man,” i.e., the entire nation are considered as one man. Thus, we find that tzaddikim are referred to as “the heart of Israel,”³ while the members of the Sanhedrin are called “the heads of the assembly”⁴ and “the eyes of the assembly”⁵ etc. This idea expresses itself practically in the halachah which states that “all of Yisrael are responsible for one another,”⁶ i.e. they are responsible to see that others perform the mitzvos which apply to them. This responsibility derives from the principle that every individual Jew – as part of the “Adam” called Yisrael – has a part in the fulfillment of the mitzvos of all Yisrael.

Second Idea: Learning and Practicing

This brings us to the second way in which a person can connect with those mitzvos whose practical performance is not applicable to him. The Gemara⁷ states

² 34:31.

³ Eichah Rabbasi, Pesicha sec. 16.

⁴ Bamidbar 31:26.

⁵ Ibid. 15:24.

⁶ Shavuos 39a.

⁷ Menachos 110a.

that “Anyone who engages in the study of korbanos, it is as if he has offered a korban.” This teaches us that a certain level of fulfillment of any mitzvah can be achieved through learning the parts of Torah that relate to that mitzvah.⁸ Thus, in this way, too, every individual can be involved with all of the *taryag* mitzvos.⁹

With the above in mind, let us return to our pesukim and see the two ideas reflected in the two responses of Bnei Yisrael:

- Our pasuk states that “the entire people answered together and said, ‘All that Hashem has spoken we will do’”. The entire nation is indeed capable of practically fulfilling all the mitzvos of the Torah, and when they are together, each person has a share in that fulfillment.
- The pasuk in Mishpatim says “They [the people] answered... ‘We will do and we will listen.’” This response reflects their status as individuals, whereby practical fulfillment of all the mitzvos is not possible. However, in addition to saying “we will do,” they also said “we will listen,” referring to engaging in understanding the mitzvos through Torah study.” Through the combination of performing the mitzvos that are applicable to him, as well as learning about those which are not, each individual can indeed undertake to fulfill “all that Hashem has spoken”!

Enclosing Holiness

וְהִגְבַּלְתָּ אֶת הָעַם סָבִיב לְאֹמֶר

You shall set boundaries for the people, roundabout (19:12)

This pasuk is commonly understood as instructing that boundaries are to be set for the people, ensuring that they do not come too close to the mountain. The Meshech Chochmah has a stunningly different interpretation.

⁸ In quoting this Gemara as representative of all mitzvos, the Meshech Chochmah indicates that he does not consider that teaching to be restricted specifically to Torah study in the area of korbanos.

⁹ The Meshech Chochmah bridges between these two ideas with the word “לכן – therefore,” indicating that they are not two distinct ideas, but rather, two elements within the broader concept of each individual relating to all of the mitzvos.

The situation at Har Sinai paralleled that of the Mishkan and the Beis Hamikdash, where the kedushah of the Sanctuary itself was surrounded by an area – the Courtyard – which was itself enclosed by partitions. At Har Sinai, the epicenter where the kedushah was present was the mountain itself, with the area surrounding it serving as the courtyard. What then served as the partitions enclosing the “courtyard”? The answer is, the Bnei Yisrael who surrounded that area!

The Hebrew word “את” typically has no translation, and serves merely to accompany an object. If this is so in our pasuk, then the object in question is the people (אֶת הָעָם), for whom the boundaries are set (וְהִגְבַּלְתָּ). However, this word can also mean “with”, and that is how Meshech Chochmah explains it is to be taken here, in which case, the words “וְהִגְבַּלְתָּ אֶת הָעָם” mean “set a boundary *with the people*,” i.e., the people themselves are the boundary that is to be set for the mountain!

The Original Mishkan

The full significance of this idea is that Bnei Yisrael themselves were the “Original Mishkan,” even before being told to construct the Mishkan. This gives us new insight into the pasuk which states, “וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשֹׁכְנֵתִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם – They shall make for Me a Sanctuary and I shall dwell in their midst.”¹⁰ The mefarshim point out that Hashem does not say that He will dwell in “it’s midst,” i.e. the Mishkan, but rather, in “their midst,” referring to the Bnei Yisrael. The deeper meaning here is that, having attained the status of the Mishkan, it is the Bnei Yisrael themselves who are ultimately the dwelling place for the Shechinah. This idea is expressed in the pasuk in the navi regarding Bnei Yisrael, which states,¹¹ “הִיכַל ה' – הֵמָּה – they are a Sanctuary of Hashem.”

The Meshech Chochmah proceeds to explain that the effect of this status which Bnei Yisrael attained at Har Sinai was extended far beyond that setting. The halachah states that whenever the Mishkan would move, the area in which it had stood lost its kedushah and reverted to its original status, while the component parts of the mishkan itself retained their kedushah, even when in transit. It is likewise fascinating to note that Har Sinai – as the location of kedushah – lost its

¹⁰ Shemos 25:8.

¹¹ Yirmiyahu 7:4.

sanctified status immediately upon the sounding of the shofar at the end of the *Aseres Hadibros*.¹² In contrast, the Bnei Yisrael – as the “partitions” of the Mishkan – retained their status even as they journeyed from Sinai. Indeed, the sanctity that they attained stayed with them wherever they subsequently travelled – including the lands to which they were exiled. Thus, the Gemara states,¹³ “כל מקום שגלו ישראל גלתה שכינה עמהם” – To every place that Yisrael were exiled, the Shechinah was exiled with them!”

May we soon witness the ingathering of all the pieces which make up the “partitions of holiness” from their places of exile, so that they once again may enclose the Sanctuary and form a dwelling place for the Shechinah in their midst.

¹² Shemos 19:13.

¹³ Megillah 29a.