

This week's parsha has two parts. We just had Parshas Yisro describing ma'amad Har Sinai and then in this week's parsha we have a long series of halachos. At the end of the parsha we go back to ma'amad Har Sinai. This arrangement teaches us an important yesod.

Yisro came to Klal Yisroel in the desert. Some say it was before mattan Torah and some say it was after. He sees how Moshe Rabbeinu is busy from morning to evening settling the arguments between all the people. Yisro is puzzled. Moshe is the leader of all Klal Yisroel. Why is he dealing with everyone's petty problems personally? Moshe Rabbeinu responded that Klal Yisroel come to me with all their sheilos because they need to know what the will of Hashem is in all their affairs – including monetary matters. This is how Hashem wants His nation to conduct their lives.

After krias Yam Suf, the Jews came to Moroh where they accepted a number of mitzvos and dinim of Choshen Mishpat. It is very important that immediately after the conclusion of yetzias Mitzrayim, Klal Yisroel receive dinei mommonos. Why? There is a clear message being sent: All your financial matters have to be decided by the Torah.

Klal Yisroel received the aseres hadibros with a tremendous Gilui Shechinoh, and Moshe went up to receive the rest of the Torah. But what are the first things he is taught? The seemingly very mundane topics of nezikin and mommonos. How does this fit with all the lofty spiritual concepts and the most overwhelming supernatural experience in the history of humanity? The answer is that the end result of all the amazing spiritual experiences is to bring Hashem's instructions for living into all aspects of your life. It is just as important to know how you are supposed to deal with other people and respect their property. Hashem cares about the way you run your day-to-day affairs. This is part of kabbolas haTorah.

One might easily think that there are more important things for a religion to focus on – Shabbos, Yomim Tovim, kashrus, etc. But those mitzvos are kept for last. The first thing Klal Yisroel receive is to know how to conduct your financial matters through the Torah. Then we get back to ma'amad Har Sinai. These halachos of mommonos are sandwiched by the two stages of ma'amad Har Sinai to show us how important they are. Even Moshe Rabbeinu didn't feel it was beneath him to occupy himself all day with resolving dinei mommonos issues through the Torah.

Then we come to a new topic.

Sometimes people are afraid of moving too high in ruchniyus. They hesitate to maintain a lofty level that they are not used to. They don't want to adjust to a standard of kedushoh that they are uncomfortable with. Klal Yisroel had been rising from level to level from the first makkoh till the climax. They hear the aseres hadibros from Hashem Himself! But now they complain to Moshe that it is too much. It's too intense. We need to go back down to the level we used to be on and you tell us the rest.

Some people want to push themselves to see how much potential they really have. Others are afraid that they really have more potential, but they don't want to go to that higher level. They are afraid to obligate themselves to live on a higher standard. But this attitude is dangerous. Because in life, one either goes ahead or moves backwards. Human beings are mehalchim – dynamic – constantly on the move. Only malochim are omdim. There is no static situation for a human being in his level of ruchniyus.

So the moment Klal Yisroel decline to push themselves higher, Hashem realizes that they will ultimately fail and go down in ruchniyus. So Hashem had to prepare for this and told them He will have to pull back His level of interaction. He will have to send a maloch to guide them through the desert instead of being actively with them. They will be living under the forces of nature. This maloch has no independent power. He works with very strict rules of reward and punishment and cannot show any undeserved mercy like Hashem can.

Everyone needs to act in a way that is appropriate for their current spiritual level. This is why Moshe is allowed to go all the way to the top of the mountain, but Aharon and his sons are on a lower level and the Sanhedrin are on an even lower level. Each height on the mountain corresponds to a different level of nevuoh and Gilui Shechinoh. The rest of Klal Yisroel cannot even touch the mountain at all.

At first, they committed themselves to do all the mitzvos even though they don't know what they would be. This is 'naaseh'. At the next stage, Moshe gave Klal Yisroel a text for them to learn from – a sefer habris. There is now the possibility for a geirus with korbonos and teviloh in a mikveh. They accept this Torah with a kirasas bris and now there is an extra dimension of kabbolas haTorah – 'naaseh ve'nishmah'.

The Beis HaLevi makes an important point. 'Naaseh' already includes a large amount of limud Torah. It presumes all the Torah knowledge necessary to know in order to properly fulfill all the mitzvos. So what is left for 'nishmah'? It must be accepting to achieve another level of understanding – all the depth and intricate ideas behind all the mitzvos. This is a whole other level of limud.

These two aspects are reflected in the siddur in the bracha of Ahavoh Rabboh.

Hashem taught our fathers all the chukei chayim – how to live their lives. We also need to know how to live our lives with Torah. This is the level of 'naaseh'. Then we go further and say we want more. We ask to be given understanding in our hearts. Not to just fulfill the halachos, but to fulfill the halachos with a deep understanding of what they are based on. Then there is a third level. It is the level of merging our very being with the Torah – deveikus to mitzvos and yichud halev to love and fear Hashem which transforms our whole experience of the mitzvos.

We don't achieve these lofty levels of ahavoh and yiroh by just reading a sefer. We start to have an experience of ahavoh and yiroh through gaining deeper and deeper levels of understanding. Yichud halev – having one focus and one goal – comes from immersing our minds in Torah and being occupied in it all the time.

We aren't talking about organizing information and mastering text. We are talking about connecting our mind with the mind of Hashem. This is the only way possible to connect ourselves to Hashem Himself who is far above our physical existence. This is why limud Torah in depth is the key to reaching a level of ahavas and yiras Hashem. The more you understand, the more it causes you to think about Hashem and His Torah every moment of the day. There are two mitzvos of Talmud Torah – learning in order to fulfill and learning to gain a deep understanding. This is 'naaseh' and 'nishmah'.

Moshe Rabbeinu gave them a sefer Torah with the parshiyos from Bereishis through Yisro. Now that we have something to learn and immerse our minds in, we can undergo geirus – a complete

transformation – and say ‘naaseh ve’nishmah’.

Different people occupied different levels on the mountain and it reflected different levels of nevuoh. Then the verse says they gazed at the vision and were eating and drinking. There are two different explanations to what this was. One says the experience of spirituality was so intense and ecstatic that it was just like eating at a royal banquet. The Midrash quoted by Rashi and other Rishonim gives another explanation. They were sitting and eating a korbon, and even as they are moving to higher and higher degrees of nevuoh, they kept on eating. They didn’t appreciate that their elevation in spirituality should make physical enjoyment less and less relevant. They should have stopped eating in order to focus on the nevuoh they were experiencing. They didn’t get it.

Because of this, the midrash says the members Sanhedrin were supposed to die on the spot. But Hashem delayed the punishment in order to not mar the celebration of kabbolas haTorah. They all died later in the desert when they left Har Sinai in Parshas Behaalos’cho when Moshe picked a new set of 70 people to replace them.

A person has to appreciate what connecting with Hashem means. When Hashem makes Himself available to us when we daven we must realize we are able to talk to Hashem. Do we act like we are having a

meeting with the Creator of the entire Universe? We wouldn’t pull out a sandwich and munch on it if we were meeting with the President of the United States! They would throw you right out! Why do we sit with a cup of coffee in the morning when we daven to Hashem? We don’t get what it’s all about.

Hashem picked these 70 people at ma’amad Har Sinai up to a tremendous level of nevuoh and they are still busy eating their steak. They didn’t appreciate the opportunity they were given and they were lost.

We have been through a tremendously disruptive period over the past year. But Hashem gave us the merit to continue learning His Torah in a totally regular and normal way – as if nothing was happening. We have to stop and appreciate this special gift that Hashem gave us this past year. We said earlier in Parshas Beshalach that when we don’t appreciate a gift, Hashem takes it back. We should continue to have this merit, but we have to appreciate it.

We live in times where luxury and wealth are abundant in the Jewish community. It is so easy to sit and learn and people have taken their yiddishkeit for granted. Suddenly the shuls and yeshivos started closing. Why? Perhaps Hashem was sending us a message – don’t take these gifts for granted.