

SHAVUOS

תשפ"ד

This week is kabbolas haTorah.

Kabbolas haTorah is the defining moment of Klal Yisroel. Hashem said that this day is when we become a people – defined as a mamleches kohanim and goy kodosh. Ma'amad Har Sinai included a mass geirus of Klal Yisroel when all of us together became one Jewish nation. Yetzias Mitzrayim did not accomplish this entirely. It was the beginning of a process that culminated with kabbolas haTorah 49 days later.

We are superior to all other nations. We are a nation of kings. What makes us kings? We serve Hashem, represent Hashem, and bring His message to the world.

Hashem prepared Klal Yisroel for kabbolas haTorah a year prior with the 10 makkos. As we discussed many times, it was a process of education for Klal Yisroel and Pharaoh about the reality of Hashem's existence, His absolute knowledge and absolute power over nature. Egypt was the most advanced and sophisticated culture of the world and Hashem showed the world Who He is.

On the night of makkas bechoros there was a gilui Shechinoh that, had Klal Yisroel not been prepared for it in advance with all the prior makkos, it would have been completely ignored. I often say that the world today isn't really prepared to take Hashem's messages seriously – even if He would speak to us openly and directly! Imagine if Hashem would proclaim at midnight אלוֹקֵךְ ה' אֲנֹכִי ה', most people would just turn over and go back to sleep. One has to prepare one's self to be open and willing to receive Hashem's messages, otherwise, they will go right past him. Each makkoh had its message, and the Jews were freed from slavery that entire year to allow them to accept these messages. Then they could be sensitive to the gilui Shechinoh of makkas bechoros and appreciate the ruchniyus.

At kriyas Yam Suf and while moving through the midbor with the annanei kovod, they are constantly upgrading their sensitivity to ruchniyus and Hashem's close hashgocho over them. They reached the level of nevi'im that the Rambam says lasted the entire 40 years Klal Yisroel were in the midbor. But at ma'amad Har Sinai, that level of nevuah was increased to an incredible degree. The Torah says Moshe Rabbeinu's nevuah was qualitatively higher than all other nevi'im. Other nevi'im saw a symbolic vision while lying on the ground in a trance. Moshe was fully conscious and received direct communication from Hashem without symbols that needed interpretation. The Rambam says that at Har Sinai, all of Klal Yisroel were able to receive nevuah one level lower than Moshe Rabbeinu. They were fully conscious, and they heard a voice communicating the Aseres Hadibros to Moshe Rabbeinu.

This level of nevuah given to all Klal Yisroel is what established the unshakable truth of Hashem and the Torah as coming from Hashem directly. If we faithfully transmit this clear experience to our descendants, it can never be doubted or replaced by any future claims. Rav Yehudah Halevi in the Kuzari writes that all other religions got started by an individual who convinced a group of people about what he experienced in private. They had to completely trust this individual and had no way of corroborating it for themselves. By contrast, our mesorah is based on the unique fact that we claim an entire nation experienced this open, public revelation. For this claim to be false, it would require an entire nation to conspire to tell a fabricated story of a mass Divine revelation to the next generation. No such thing has ever happened in history and it would be ridiculous to even try to do such a thing. No-one knowingly tells a complete lie to their children.

Klal Yisroel were mekabbel the Torah with absolute clarity. Hashem is in complete control of the physical world and the moral world. What does that mean? There is an important gemara in Kiddushin 31 which says the nations of the world heard אלוֹקֵךְ ה' אֲנֹכִי ה' of Ma'amad Har Sinai, and at first assumed Hashem is merely demanding honor. When they heard the rest of the dibros, they realized this is absolute truth:

דרש עולא רבה אפיתחא דבי נשיאה מאי דכתיב (תהילים קלח-ד) יודוך ה' כל מלכי ארץ כי שמעו אמרי פיך, מאמר פיך לא נאמר אלא אמרי פיך, בשעה שאמר הקב"ה (שמות כ-ב) אֲנֹכִי וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֲמֵרוֹת וְאֲמֵרוֹת הָעוֹלָם לִכְבוֹד עֲצֻמוֹ הוּא דוֹרֵשׁ, כִּיּוֹן שֶׁאִמַר (שְׁמוֹת כ-יב) כַּבֵּד אֶת אֲבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ חֲזְרוּ וְהוֹדוּ לְמֵאמְרוֹת הָרִאשׁוֹנוֹת, רַבָּא אָמַר מֵהֵכָא (תהילים קיט-קס) רֵאשׁ דְּבִרְךָ אֲמַת, רֵאשׁ דְּבִרְךָ וְלֹא סוּף דְּבִרְךָ, אֲלֵא מְסוּף דְּבִרְךָ נִיכַר שְׂרָאשׁ דְּבִרְךָ אֲמַת:

There is a Tosefta in Shevuos which gives insight to this gemara. It says a person doesn't steal and deny his theft to his fellow human being without also denying the theft to Hashem Himself. It means all notions of morality and ethical behavior in human society are based on Hashem, Who established universal moral law. Avimelech was the king of Gerar and he set up a society with its' moral rules and norms. He saw Soroh and desired her, so he kidnapped her and tried to rape her. Hashem sent malochim to prevent him and he was warned not to approach Soroh. The next day, Avimelech has all kinds of complaints against Avrohom for not being honest with him by telling him Soroh was his sister and not his wife – he was not being ethical! Avrohom responded that he had to lie in order to save his life.

Avrohom realized that there is no yiras shomayim in this place – it is all man-made morality. And if it is man-made and isn't based on Hashem's absolute moral law, it can be twisted and changed to accommodate all kinds of immoral behavior for your convenience. He says, my life was in danger because you are capable of making some kind of excuse to murder me in order to take my wife for yourself.

And this isn't just in the ancient world. Just go back 85 years ago. Germany had been the greatest intellectual center of the world. The greatest artists, musicians, poets, thinkers etc. They had the most influential ethical philosophers who designed the most sublime and noble system of ethics and morals for human society. But then Hitler came to power, and overnight, the universities changed all their ethics and morals to support Hitler's philosophy.

On to more recent events, during the pandemic there were riots all over the U.S. They were allegedly about the preciousness of human life – destroying businesses and looting property in the process. Someone wearing a MAGA hat stood up to protest all the looting and destruction and was shot to death. A professor at Brown University came to defend the killing, explaining why it was just. When Hashem is not behind absolute morality in this world, then there is no morality. You aren't capable of stealing if you believe in Hashem. This is why the gemara in Kiddushin explains the morality of the Aseres Hadibros starts with אֲנֹכִי ה' אֲלֹקֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. Hashem illustrated that He is the creator of both the physical universe who controls nature, and the moral universe, and they cannot be separated.

All the various human-based morality proved to be empty and worthless – from Avimelech on till today. The insanity of the universities defending and justifying what Hamas did on October 7th shows how bankrupt and hollow their morality is.

There is an order to the Aseres Hadibros. The first two establish the truth of Hashem and the sheker of avodo zoro. The third is about

taking an improper shevuah in the Name of Hashem. The problem is comparing a statement that is false or trivial with the truth of Hashem. It means you have used Hashem's Name to support something false or trivial. It negates the absolute truth and morality that Hashem's name represents.

Then we have Shabbos. Why is Shabbos singled out for mentioning in the Aseres Hadibros and no other Yom Tov? There is a critical halacha that someone who publicly desecrates Shabbos in particular is treated like an idol worshipper and gets the status of a non-Jew in many areas. The Rambam explains he is denying the bris with Hashem to declare that Hashem created the world. We make this declaration in speech and in action – by pulling back from the world and showing that Hashem is in control and that He created the universe in six days. Hashem was יוצר בראשית – It was a process that gave rise to the world in a guided and directed manner. This belief is so central – that everything that exists comes from Hashem alone with nothing helping Him – because it gives the foundation to the Torah. Hashem created the Torah and through it the world and human beings. Everything about us and the world around us was designed from the very beginning through the Torah in order to fit with the Torah.

So Shabbos is a central mitzvah to everything else in the Torah – we have to testify that Hashem created everything in six days.

Then is Kibbud Av V'Eim. There is an important difference between the two versions of this mitzvah in the Aseres Hadibros. In Yisro it says:

(יב) כִּבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמֶּךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּ יְמֵיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

But in Vo'eschanon, it references the fact that Shabbos was commanded already before-hand:

(טז) כִּבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמֶּךָ כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוּ יְמֵיךָ וְלִמְעַן

יֵיטֵב לָךְ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

Chazal tell us that certain mitzvos were given in Moroh: Choshen Mishpot, Poroh Adumoh, Kibbud Av V'Eim and Shabbos. The mon demonstrated that Hashem has made Shabbos built-in to the week. We can understand why Shabbos was so central. But why was Kibbud Av V'Eim given earlier in Moroh? Because it is essential to have this mitzvah in place in order to have a more meaningful kabbolas haTorah and a more meaningful relationship with Hashem.

Yiddishkeit is built on a deep sense of mesorah – of continuity from generation to generation – where fathers pass vital lessons to their children. In addition, my recognition of what Hashem has given me is based on recognizing the hakoras hatov we need to have for our parents. We owe them everything – even if they didn't raise us, they gave us life.

So too, Hashem begins Aseres Hadibros with yetzias Mitzrayim. We owe Hashem everything because of what He did for us and we owe Him an unpayable debt of gratitude. Without this recognition, the rest of the Torah doesn't work.

This is the first half of the luchos – you don't get to bein odom l'chaveiro unless you have established bein odom l'mokom firmly. Without understanding who Hashem is and how everything is dependent on Him – in both the physical universe and the moral universe – we have no way of functioning in a stable society. Without Hashem as the source of absolute morality, we can justify the most vile inhumane actions in human history. The more intellectual you are, the easier it is to twist your mind into pretzels to justify the unjustifiable and make murder into a mitzvah.

It all comes from the first mitzvah of מארץ מוצאתיך אשר ה' אלוךך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים.