

PROPHECY REQUIRES PREPARATION

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Shabbat's Learning:

Yoma 1:2-3

Orach Chaim 301:46-48

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 72

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 21

The special offering brought in the Bet Hamikdash on Shavuot was the "Korban Shte Ha'lechem"/"The Offering of Two Loaves of Bread." This offering was brought from wheat.

The gemara (Menachot 69b as explained by Rashi) asks: If a ship carrying wheat was lifted by a storm and the wheat rained down from heaven somewhere else, may that wheat be used for the sacrifice? When the Torah (Vaykira 23:17) required that this sacrifice be brought "from your dwelling places," did it mean to exclude wheat that came from outside of Eretz Yizrael or even wheat that was grown in Eretz Yisrael, but that most recently came from the heavens?

Why does the gemara even ask these questions? R' Avraham Shimon Halevi Ish-Horowitz z"l (1877-approx.1942; mashgiach of Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin) wonders. Such an occurrence is far-fetched at

best. Why does the gemara, in general, discuss many far-fetched situations?

He explains: In fact, much of the halachic material in the Talmud deals with situations that never have and never will occur. However, the nature of Torah study is to investigate what Hashem's Will would be in every conceivable situation. When one studies the Torah, his physical mind attaches itself to the Will of G-d. Whether one is studying the laws of the animal or flour sacrifices, the laws of bailments and torts, or the laws of ritual purity and impurity, it is all the Will of Hashem. Studying these laws elevates a Jew higher and higher without limit, whether or not he will ever have an opportunity to practice what he has learned. (Naharei Eish: Likutei Dibburim No. 86)

R' Meir Leibush Malbim z"l (19th century rabbi of Bucharest and other cities) writes:

Rambam writes in Moreh Nevachim ("Guide to the Perplexed") that there are three views regarding the origin of the world. Some believe that it is very ancient, having formed itself at some time in the past when conditions were ripe. A second group believes that some higher being created the world, but did so with matter that existed previously. The Torah view, in contrast, is that G-d formed the world "yesh mai'ayin" / "something out of nothing," not because any outside conditions required it, but simply because He so chose.

Rambam also cites three views regarding the nature of prophecy. Some believe that a person need only prepare himself, and prophecy will come on its own. Others believe that even after one has prepared himself, prophecy will come only if and when G-d chooses. Finally, there are those who believe that no preparation is required, for G-d alone determines who His prophets will be. Note how each view of prophecy roughly parallels one of the views of creation in regard to whether G-d acts alone, circumstances act alone, or the two act in combination.

Interestingly, while the Torah's view is that G-d created the world from nothing, needing and receiving no help from any other source, the Torah's view of prophecy is that "G-d does not reveal his presence except on one who is wise, rich, brave, and humble" (Nedarim 38a). In other words, prophecy requires preparation. Why?

Although Hashem created the world from nothing, He decreed that never again would such a miracle occur. Henceforth, He would work through nature. Thus Chazal tell us that such miracles as the splitting of the Red Sea were ordained at the time of creation (see Chazal's comment on Shemot 14:27.) Why? Because if Hashem would repeatedly change creation it would call into question creation's perfection and (G-d forbid) that of G-d himself.

One time in history, prophecy was given to those who were not prepared for it, i.e., when Hashem appeared to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. A new creation was brought into being for their benefit: Prophecy without prerequisites. Why?

Chazal say that Hashem did leave one aspect of creation imperfect. As Rashi (Bereishit 1:31) explains,

G-d made the world's permanent existence contingent on one thing. If Bnei Yisrael had not accepted the Torah when it was offered at Har Sinai, the world would have returned to its state before creation. Without Torah, the world cannot exist. It turns out, therefore, that not until the great revelation at Har Sinai was the work of creation finished. It is therefore fitting that just as the world was created by Hashem without preparation, so, when Bnei Yisrael brought it to completion, they should merit a similarly miraculous gift. (Eretz Chemdah: Drush L'Chag Shavuot)

In the prayers and in kiddush, we refer to Shavuot as "Zman Matan Toratenu"/"The time of the giving of our Torah." But is it really? It is generally accepted that the Torah was given on the seventh day of Sivan, while the first day of Shavuot - the only day in Israel - falls on the sixth of Sivan! How then can we call the sixth day, "The time of the giving of our Torah"?

R' Yerachmiel Zeltser shlita has collected 100 answers to this question, three of which are presented here:

#69. The work Divrei Nechemiah explains: "Zman" does not mean "day," it means "time." The sixth day of Sivan may not be the day when the Torah was actually given, but it is the "time" that is propitious for receiving the Torah anew each year. This is because Hashem would have given the Torah on the sixth of Sivan if Moshe had not asked Him to delay one day (as related in the gemara, Shabbat 87a).

What makes the sixth of Sivan a good time for receiving the Torah is the fact that it is the "fiftieth day" of the Omer. The days of the Omer represent the first 49 of the 50 "Gates of Understanding," and after we have ascended through those 49 gates we are ready to receive the Torah. The proof that the "time" for receiving the Torah is determined by the Omer count and not by the calendar date is the fact that before we had a fixed calendar (i.e., during the era when the new month was announced based on witnesses' sighting of the new moon), Shavuot could fall on the fifth, sixth or seventh day of Sivan.

#41. R' Avraham Mordechai Alter z"l (the "Gerrer Rebbe"; died 1948) explains similarly that our practice is based on the rule, "That which Heaven gives It does not take away." Thus, once Hashem planned to give the Torah on the sixth of Sivan, the resulting spiritual aura became a permanent feature of that day, even though the Torah was not given then.

#86. Chazal teach that the soul of every Jew who would later be born was present at the giving of the Torah. Indeed, those disembodied souls far outnumbered the living people who were present.

Based on this we can answer: True, the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan, but that detail is irrelevant to us (the embodiment of those souls) because souls exist "above" time. As far as the soul is concerned, what determines when the Torah should be given is not the calendar date, but one's preparedness to receive the Torah. This, as noted above, is determined by the completion of the

Omer count. (Ner L'meah: Shavuot)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (died 1935) writes: Often a person wants to learn Torah, but he finds that, whatever he is learning, he would rather be learning something else. One should know that this feeling comes from the fact that the soul wants to soar and to encompass everything. The soul does not want to be limited in any way.

Of course one must deal with this feeling, which, after all, prevents a person from learning. However, one should not deal with those "faults" which originate from his good side in the same way that he tries to completely uproot those faults which originate from bad. (Orpalei Tohar p.57)

The following letter was written by R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (the "Klausenberger Rebbe"; died 1994) just before Shavuot 5719 (1959). As is apparent from the letter, the author was traveling from Israel to his home (Union City, New Jersey) when he wrote the letter.

The letter is printed in Michtavei Torah, Volume II, page 248 (letter 137). In the first paragraph, the author appears to compare the pleasant weather that he had left in Israel with the weather he found in Switzerland, concluding that one would expect to find unpleasant weather when one is distanced from the Land over which G-d watches. He then relates this point to Shavuot. We have arrived in Zurich in peace, thank G-d. Our trip passed well, thank G-d; may He allow us to continue on for a good life and in peace to our home until we can return to our Holy Land, amen, may it be His Will. Here, the rain has passed, and we have fallen [in the words of a Talmudic phrase] "from a high summit to a deep pit." I now understand that which we say (in the Yom Tov musaf), "Because of our sins we were distanced from our Land," as Chazal have said, "Why is it called 'Eretz'/'Land'? Because it wants/'ratzah' to do the Will of its Creator." This refers to our Holy Land, and is a result of its spirituality. "We were distanced from our Land," i.e., from the "Land that flows with milk and honey."

The Bach (R' Yoel Sirkes z"l; 1560-1640) writes in chapter 208 regarding the words [in the berachah which is said after eating one of the Seven Species], "And satiate us from its [i.e., Eretz Yisrael's] goodness," that the fruits of Eretz Yisrael have in them holiness, whereas in the Diaspora [in the words of Devarim 31:20], "You will eat, be sated, and grow fat, and turn to the gods of others." . . . This is why we are obligated by halachah to have a remembrance of the destruction of the Temple [and the resulting exile] during every meal. [See Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 560:2]

This is why [in the words of Pesachim 68b], "All agree that Shavuot must be partially 'For you'" [i.e., one must have good food on Shavuot, whereas some sages hold that this is not required on other holidays]. This represents our understanding that through receiving the Torah one merits to eat from the table of our Father. Maybe this is why we eat dairy on Shavuot, to show that in the merit of accepting the Torah we earn the Land that flows with milk and honey.

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