

ECHOES OF SINAI

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Sefarim write that in Jewish life there are two cycles that run somewhat independent of one another. We are all familiar with the cycle of time and seasons, through which we experience the Jewish year, its days of joy, its days of mourning, and its days of awe. The second cycle is the one we experience through the weekly Torah reading. When we read the Parshios dealing with the enslavement, we connect with the areas in our own lives in which we are enslaved; we can become "slaves" to our feelings, emotions, whims, desires, etc. When we read the Parshios of redemption, it is an opportunity for us to experience personal redemption. And, this week (and to some extent next week as well), we have the opportunity to experience Kabbalas haTorah, receiving the Torah the way we did more than three thousand years ago amid trembling and awe. May Hashem grant us the wisdom and insight to utilize these powerful resources, and not squander and waste the precious weeks during which we can receive the Torah anew.

The Torah writes regarding Mattan Torah (the giving of the Torah; Devarim 5:19), "These words Hashem spoke to your entire congregation on the mountain, amidst the fire, the cloud, and the intense darkness; a great voice which never ceased." What, asks the Toras Chayim (Bava Metzia 85), does it mean that the "voice" of Mattan Torah never ceased? And even if it didn't, what use is it if we can't hear it?

The Aseres haDibros (the Ten Commandments) are introduced by the words (20:1), "And G-d spoke all of these words, saying..." The Midrash comments (Shemos Rabbah 28:1):

Rabbi Yitzchak said: Everything that was ultimately to be prophesized by the Nevi'im (prophets) was also told by Hashem to Moshe at Sinai. And not only the prophets, but also every Torah scholar, in every generation, received his portion of the Torah at Sinai.

Does this mean that Moshe received, taught, and related at Sinai every Torah thought that was ever to be expounded? Perhaps. Toras Chayim, however, understands it differently. He explains that when the Torah was given - both in written and oral forms - along with it came a tremendous outpouring of wisdom and insight. While the Torah is endlessly deep, and beyond human comprehension, it is through this emanation of G-dly wisdom granted at that time that the student Torah is able to delve into the hidden secrets of the Torah and reveal its treasures.

Nor was this outpouring of insight a one-time occurrence. From the moment that Hashem gave us the Torah, this flow of wisdom began, and continues to avail itself to all who choose to toil in the

Torah for its own sake, spending their days and nights in intense Torah study. This, he says, is the "unceasing voice" to which the pasuk refers. It is not a voice that can be heard by the untrained ear, nor even by the most sophisticated surveillance equipment; only the truly dedicated and faithful can ever hope to hear it. It is to this "voice," that is the potential to tap the hidden wellsprings of the Torah, that the Midrash refers when stating that all future Torah novellae were already received upon Sinai.

The Gemara (Bava Basra 12a) says, "From the time of the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple), prophecy was taken away from the prophets, and given over to the Torah scholars." This does not refer to those who take their Torah study lightly; but those who toil in the Torah for its own sake. They achieve a level of understanding and insight akin to prophecy. When we speak of someone having "da'as Torah," we don't mean he's very smart, nor even that he has acquired a tremendous amount of Torah knowledge. True da'as Torah means having tapped into to the "voice" of Mattan Torah, through which the Almighty continues to communicate to the dedicated few who truly appreciate its value.

The Chasam Sofer writes that we are all given a certain measure of wisdom through which we are capable of finding "our place in the Torah." It is to this we refer when we pray, "And grant us our portion in the Torah!" Some gifts are given with no strings attached. The gift of acquiring our own kinyan Torah, however, is given on condition that we dedicate ourselves to Torah study, each person according to his own level and abilities. ("It is not your responsibility to finish the work; but neither are you absolved from doing as much as you can. (Avos 2:16)") However, when we choose to fill our minds with senseless drivel and empty secular knowledge, we squander that gift, and, G-d forbid, forfeit "our portion" of the Torah. There are some sins which, as the Gemara says, "cannot be rectified."

When we arise each morning, we recite the Birkos haTorah (blessings over the Torah), which concludes, "Baruch ata Hashem, Nosein haTorah - Blessed are You, Hashem, Giver of the Torah." Why do we use the present tense? Should we not say, "Who gave us the Torah?" Receiving the Torah is an ongoing process. The written Torah was given but once; our ability to plumb the depths of the Torah, draw from its wells, and drink from its waters, continues to this day.

"He tells His word to Yaakov, his ordinances and laws to Israel.(Tehillim/Psalms 147:19)" Again, the present tense is used. Hashem continues to communicate with us, through the echoes of Mattan Torah. We only have to be willing to hear "the voice."

Have a good Shabbos.

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