

CONFUSION!

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

In just a few days we begin the holiday of Shavuot. Hashem's descent onto Har [Mount] Sinai and His speaking to the entire nation would probably be considered the most earth-shattering event that has occurred since creation.

Man has a thirst for spirituality--a vacuum that longs to be filled. The clear feeling that there is more to life than our physical, earthly existence. We know that there is something more but there is confusion... How does one connect to it...

Without clear bearings we go off on some pretty desperate forays. The cults with their gurus and swamis prey on this desperate, confused emptiness that gnaws away at a person's complacency. Sweet, innocent people get led off on pretty confused paths...

We adherents of Torah have no such confusion... One time in the history of man the heavens opened up. The intimate connection between the physical and the spiritual--the way to touch the heavens while treading on earth--was revealed. The manual providing the instructions for that connection was transmitted.

Each year, on Shavuot, we try to re-live and re-experience that event, its feelings and what it imparted to us. But we feel somewhat detached. Although the souls of every Jew and every future convert were there at Sinai, we have no conscious memory of that awe-inspiring event. We feel that if only we had been there, we would be much stronger, more focused and better able to serve Hashem. We feel that those generations were connected to Hashem, whereas our service is probably not nearly as dear...

However, we find that it can be viewed very differently. Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon] taught in Mishlei: "Sheker ha'chein [Charm is false] v'hevel ha'yofee [and beauty is vain], ishah yir'as Hashem hee tis'hallel [a woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised]. [Proverbs 31:29]"

The Talmud reveals the deeper level on which this passuk [verse] can be understood. "Charm is false" refers to the generation of Moshe; "and beauty is vain" refers to the generation of Yehoshua [Joshua]; "a woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised" refers to the generation of King Chizkiyahu. [Sanhedrin 20A]

Incredible! The extraordinary generations of Moshe and Yehoshua were, in a certain way, false and vain. The later generations, those far removed from Sinai earned the praise of being compared to "a

woman who fears Hashem."

How can we understand this?

The Ben Ish Chai offers a brilliant and illuminating explanation. People in every generation are lured with temptations to throw themselves after the physical. They know what's right but find it difficult to constantly maintain those standards. The pleasures of this world can be so tempting. The mission of man is to see through that illusory smoke screen and recognize the true bankruptcy of the temptations and pleasures that beckon. But, as we'd readily agree, it can be an extremely difficult task.

"Sheker ha'chein [Charm is false]" refers to the generation of Moshe.

'Chein' [charm or grace] indicates that there is not an inherent beauty. It is the way that it's represented that creates a certain allure. The generation of Moshe had stood at the foot of Sinai and had experienced Hashem's revelation. They had seen the real thing. After experiencing the intimate, deep pleasure of connecting to Hashem, the temptations of the world were not beautiful. It was at best 'chein' and they were able to see how even that chein was sheker [false]. After all that they had experienced, they couldn't be crowned with the accolade of true fear of Hashem.

"V'hevel ha'yofee [and beauty is vain]" refers to the generation of Yehoshua [Joshua].

The next generation, as it began the inexorable march through history and away from Sinai, began the move away from that clarity. It still had carry-over members from the generation of Moshe but it was living in a different world.

The temptations, which had been seen as 'chein' [charm], had now transformed into 'yo'fee' [beauty]. It seemed to be quite beautiful. Yet, they were still close enough to Sinai to clearly recognize that that apparent 'yo'fee' was actually vain, empty. They too didn't earn the praise of being compared to "a woman who fears Hashem."

"Ishah yir'as Hashem hee tis'hallal [a woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised]" refers to the generation of King Chizkiyahu.

The generation of King Chizkiyahu was far down the road that stretched from Sinai. They hadn't experienced it themselves nor did they know anyone who had. The clarity was long gone and as such, the temptations were great. Yet, their devotion to the study of Torah was incredible. In that generation, young boys and girls were all proficient even in the intricate laws of tum'ah and taharah [ritual purity].

That generation, not those that preceded it, was praised by the comparison to "a woman who fears Hashem."

We've traveled that much further down the road. The temptations and our confusion are that much greater. Shavuot is the time for us to connect to Sinai and connect to the Torah.

We have the capacity to earn praises that were beyond the reach of the generations of Moshe and Yehoshua.

Wishing you a good Shabbos and a joyous and meaningful holiday of Shavuot,

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