

DIVINE REASON REVEALED

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

There are three essential components to any viable religion: a) Supreme Being; b) Revelation; c) Consequences. These 3 components are a logical progression that starts with the belief that our universe was created by a Supreme, intelligent power for a specific reason. It then follows that this Supreme Being must have, at some point in history, revealed to humankind the rules by which His divine goal can be accomplished. Finally, there must be consequences to following, or not following, the rules which the Supreme Being has revealed regarding His purpose for creating the universe. If we follow His rules we will be rewarded, and if we don't, we will be punished.

The entire focus of the last four Parshios was the first component, establishing the existence of a Supreme Being. "Yes, there is a G-d in the universe. Yes, He is the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yakov. Yes, He cares about us and took us out of Egypt. Yes, He manipulates the forces of nature that He created to save the righteous and punish the wicked!"

This week's Parsha is the 2nd component - Revelation - that moment in history when the Supreme Being revealed His rules for accomplishing His divine reason for creating the world. The giving of the Torah was that singular event when Hashem revealed to the world, and specifically the Jew, what He wanted from us. He presented the Ten Commandments as an ethical framework for the human experience and instructed the Jews to teach those truths to the other nations. In 19:5, Hashem instructed Moshe to tell the nation, "...and now, if you will obey and follow my commandments and protect my covenant... then you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The truths of our Torah, the rules through which humankind can attain divine reason, were meant for all of G-d's children. However, Hashem established a system of teachers and students to transmit those truths. We, the Jewish People, the children of Avraham and Sarah, are the chosen teachers. As Pasuk 19:5 says, "you shall be my special treasure from among all the nations".

The course of study required to be a teacher is far more intense and comprehensive than the lectures to be given by the teacher. It is expected that the teacher know far more than the students. It is expected that the teacher be far more accomplished than the students, and that he has integrated the truths of his lessons into his thought process and life style. The 613 Mitzvot are the graduate course to train those who would be the teachers, and the seven Laws of Noah are the basic course to be taught to all students. It is expected that there will be those students who desire the intensity of becoming a teacher. For those select few, there is the conversion process which provides the opportunity for greater personal advancement and responsibility.

Parshas Yisro begins with Yisro, the father-in-law of Moshe. Yisro was an adventurer who journeyed forth to explore religions, philosophies, and theologies, in search of truth. He desired to be among the teachers, so he joined the Jewish People and converted to be part of the kingdom of priests and holy nation. The remainder of the Parsha is devoted to describing that momentous moment in history when Hashem revealed His purpose to His chosen nation of teachers.

From a very fundamental perspective we can understand why the world judges the Jew by a stricter scale of ideals and expectations. We are supposed to be the teachers! We are supposed to be the role models of G-d's ethical and moral framework for the human experience! We are supposed to live a life style that manifests the integration of divine purpose in our daily existence! When we fail, the nations of the world, our intended students, demand a severe, and often, seemingly irrational accounting! In truth, their severe and critical reaction to our failings legitimizes our claim of being the "treasured ones from among the nations."

It should be noted, that although it appears almost natural to expect more from the teacher, this isn't true according to Torah law. The laws of the Torah, the revealed truths of divine intent and purpose, apply equally to every member of the nation, teacher and student alike.

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