

HUMAN INTERPRETATION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

After all of the tumultuous events of the book of Shmot - the Exodus, the revelation at Sinai and the granting of the Torah, the event of the Golden Calf and of the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle - the Lord calls out, so to speak, to Moshe from the inner recesses of the Mishkan/Tabernacle.

What is the significance of this call? And why does it need to be made at all? Moshe had already ascended the mountain of Sinai and been taught the Torah and its laws previous to this call. And, as Rashi points out to us, this call was personal to Moshe for it was not addressed to the rest of Israel as was the revelation at Sinai itself.

Moshe would then have to transmit the call - the teachings and instructions that were now entrusted to him by God - to the Jewish people and explain and teach them these laws and nuances of the Godly message.

Vayikra teaches us that henceforth Torah would be taught by humans to humans and that the Torah was "no longer in Heaven." That is the significance of God's call to Moshe and to Moshe alone.

The Talmud teaches us that even the holy prophets of Israel were forbidden to construct new systems of halacha. The transmission of Torah, though certainly requiring heavenly aid and inspiration, was now a purely human endeavor.

Moshe heard the Heavenly voice directly in receiving the Torah's laws and instructions but the Jewish people only heard the human voice of Moshe teaching them God's Torah.

In the final chapter of Pirkei Avot (which is not a part of the mishna of Avot itself) called Perek Kinyan Torah - the chapter concerning the acquisition of Torah knowledge - one of the methods of acquiring such Torah knowledge and direction is emunat chachamim - belief in the teachings of the wise Torah scholars of Israel.

Though there are differing interpretations as to the latitude of this concept and whether it applies even to all matters of personal and national life generally, all agree that as far as Torah teaching is concerned it is an applicable and necessary value and belief. The basis for this value is what has been described above in the previous paragraph - ultimate belief of the Jewish people in the divinity of Torah as transmitted to them by Moshe.

The Torah at Sinai was given once. That scene would never be repeated again. Thus the burden of

the transmission and teaching of Torah now rested with human beings - with the Torah scholars of every age and era.

And one of the tests of Jewish life would be the trust and faith that the people as a whole would entrust to the teachings and direction of those scholars - emunat chachamim if you will.

This human relationship of generational trust and teaching is the hallmark of halacha throughout the history of Israel. Moshe still speaks to us even if we are unable to hear the heavenly voice emanating from the Mishkan/Tabernacle itself. This is the basis of Jewish continuity and vitality till today.

Shabat shalom.

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com