

# THE DETAILS BEFORE THE ACCEPTANCE

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The full acceptance - the naaseh v'nishma - we will do and we will hearken - of the Torah by the Jewish people appears in this week's parsha rather than in last week's parsha where the actual description of the revelation at Mount Sinai is recorded. We are all quite aware that the maxim that the devil lies in the details is incontrovertibly and unerringly correct. General acceptance of the ideas and values of the Torah is relatively easy to obtain from the people. Acceptance of and commitment to the nitty-gritty details of Torah and Halacha is another more complicated matter entirely.

The Torah does not record for us the full and unconditional acceptance by the Jewish people until this week's parsha, until after many of the details of the Torah have been spelled out and published. Only when details of the covenant are known can there be a true acceptance and agreement between the parties here, so to speak.

Moshe, here, serves as the true advocate and attorney for Israel in explaining, teaching and clarifying the laws of the Torah to the people. We are witness on a daily basis of how general agreement on issues in commerce, diplomacy and social relationships break down when put to the detailed test of practical enforcement and behavior.

Everyone is in favor of peace, equal opportunity for all, tranquility at home and in the family, national unity and other such noble ideas and values. It is the details of practicality that are the cause of these goals being unfulfilled for many people and nations. The Torah therefore advances these details first before there can be a full acceptance of naaseh v'nishma by the people of Israel.

This idea goes to the heart of the discussion regarding conversions to Judaism. Merely proclaiming that one wishes to be a Jew, without realizing what that really entails, is pretty much of a sham. What are the details of this covenant that one now wishes to enter into? Is it merely a warm hearted, even sincere, embrace of very general principles of monotheism and morality without knowledge of or commitment to the halachic details that govern daily Jewish living?

Halacha does not demand that the prospective convert know everything about Judaism before being accepted into the fold of Israel. But it does demand that the prospective convert know a great deal about Jewish law and life. Just being a "good person" or serving in the Israeli army, noble as these accomplishments truly are, do not yet qualify for one to be easily converted. Without knowing the details inherent in becoming a Jew, how can one enter into an eternal agreement with binding commitments that remain irrevocable?

The conversion process, which is a tactical and bureaucratic, and which certainly can be improved upon, is a matter of acceptance, sincerity, devotion and honest commitment. It should not be subverted by political pressures, demographic considerations or misplaced compassion. Only in knowledge and adherence to the details of the covenant of Sinai can the survival and growth of the Jewish people and its spiritual advancement be guaranteed.

Shabat shalom

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