

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Yitro  
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Yitro – Proof that we are the Chosen People

In this week's Parsha of Yitro, Bnei Yisrael stand at the foot of Har Sinai to experience the Divine revelation and receive the Aseret Hadibrot. We will hear the Aseret Hadibrot recited at shule this week as part of the Torah reading. Receiving the Torah at Har Sinai is the real purpose for which the Exodus took place. Moshe didn't just ask Pharaoh to “Let my people go”. He asked Pharaoh to “Let my people go so that they may serve Me”. Thus, we were freed from Mitzrayim so that we could serve Hashem.

The Gemara<sup>1</sup> teaches us the principle of “somech tefillah l'geulah”. We place prayer next to redemption. We see this principle in practice just before the recitation of the Shemoneh Esreh in Shacharit. The last bracha that we recite just before the Shemoneh Esreh is the bracha of “Ga'al Yisrael” – “Blessed are you Hashem, Who redeemed Israel”. We are prohibited from having any interruptions between this bracha and the commencement of Shemoneh Esreh<sup>2</sup>. For instance, many Chazzanim have the custom to recite the words “Ga'al Yisrael” silently, so that the congregation won't have to answer Amen, which would constitute an interruption. This bracha refers to our redemption from Mitzrayim. The prayer of Shemoneh Esreh constitutes our primary form of service to Hashem in the absence of the Bet Hamikdash. Therefore we strive to avoid any break between our mentioning redemption and our service of Hashem. Redemption naturally and immediately flows into service. Ensuring this continuity in our davening is a tangible demonstration that the sole purpose of the redemption is to serve Hashem.

The Rambam<sup>3</sup> states that our belief in Moshe Rabbeinu and the Torah is not reliant on the miracles that Moshe performed. People may entertain a doubt in their heart and believe that the miracles were performed by magic or trickery. There are many people throughout history who have claimed to do miracles. However, these miracles are often revealed as mere trickery. Remarkably, some have even tried to explain the splitting of the sea as a natural occurrence! According to the Rambam, the only reason that we believe in the veracity of Moshe and the Torah is because the entire Jewish nation were present at Har Sinai and they saw and heard the Divine Revelation with their very own senses. The source for this Rambam seems to originate from our Parsha:

*“Hashem said to Moshe: ‘Behold I will come to you in the thickness of the cloud so that the people will hear me speak to you and also so that they will believe in you forever’”.*  
(Shemot 19:9)

But how do we, the subsequent generations, know that the Divine Revelation at Har Sinai actually took place and that we are the Chosen People?<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Lawrence Keleman points out that the revelation at Har Sinai is a unique occurrence in world history. There is no other religion

<sup>1</sup> Brachot 4b.

<sup>2</sup> See page 96 of the standard Artscroll Ashkenazi siddur.

<sup>3</sup> Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, Ch 8.

<sup>4</sup> The following idea appears in the Kuzari by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, as explained by Rabbi Zev Leff and by Rabbi Lawrence Keleman in audio shiurim.

that began with a Divine revelation that was witnessed by an entire nation. Every other religion was initiated by one person (or sometimes two people) that claim to have had a divine revelation. It is possible to fabricate a story that a divine revelation took place to one or two people. However, it is completely implausible to fabricate a story that an entire nation experienced a divine revelation and then convince that nation that the story was true.

Let us explore this idea further. Before Moshe's death, he gathers the entire nation together and reiterates the Divine Revelation at Har Sinai which took place before approximately 3 million people.<sup>5</sup> At that point, not even one person denied that this revelation took place. The story has been passed on from parents to children over many generations. Even the Christians and the Moslems believe in this event (although they try to argue that the covenant between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael no longer applies). Therefore, if one were to argue that the Divine Revelation at Har Sinai was false, one would have to prove the veracity of one of the following points:

1. The generation that left Mitzrayim were tricked into believing that they experienced a Divine Revelation; or
2. The story was fabricated by Moshe or by a charlatan or group of people that wrote the Torah; or
3. A charismatic leader came along many years later and convinced Bnei Yisrael that their ancestors had experienced this event many years ago.

Option 1 lacks veracity because Bnei Yisrael were a nation of approximately 3 million people. It is inconceivable that such a large number of people could be tricked into believing that they themselves had experienced a Divine Revelation.

Option 2 is also extremely difficult to believe. If Bnei Yisrael were presented with a book that contained such a story they would immediately respond: "If my ancestors had experienced a Divine Revelation, why hadn't I heard of this before? Surely something as important as this would be passed down by parents to children." A nation would not accept such a far-fetched story in the absence of an oral tradition that it had actually taken place.

Option 3 is slightly more plausible. Many years later, a charismatic leader could gather together a following and convince them that their ancestors had experienced a Divine Revelation and for some reason the tradition had been lost. People can be very gullible. However, the problem with this possibility is that we have very detailed records of the chain of tradition going all the way back to Moshe. If there was such a person who arose many years after Har Sinai, surely there should be a record of that person in our history books. But there is no record of such a person.

Rabbi Lawrence Keleman asserts that the fabrication of such a momentous historical event that took place before 3 million people is completely and utterly implausible. Bnei Yisrael experienced the Divine Revelation at Har Sinai, and we received the Torah as Hashem's gift to His Chosen People. We must not forget this. Hashem wants us to be His Chosen People, following his Torah in His Holy Land.

Let's try something this week:

1. As we stand up to hear the Aseret Hadibrot (Ten Commandments) at shule this Shabbat, remember that we are re-enacting the Divine Revelation that took place at Har Sinai.
2. Remember how fortunate we are to be part of the Chosen People. Hashem chose all of us to be His special nation. Keeping this in mind can help with our own feelings of self-worth and also help to improve the way that we look at our fellow Jews.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>5</sup> See the beginning of Parshat Vaetchanan.