



Yeshivat Ma'alot

Parashat Yitro

Rav Yehoshua Weitzman shlit"a

ישיבת מעלות

פרשת יתרו

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Matan Torah- Where Do I Fit In?

The climax of this week's parasha is when Hashem reveals Himself to Moshe and Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. The Rambam¹ elaborates that Matan Torah is one of the fundamental pillars of our emunah, faith. Bnei Yisrael did not believe Moshe because of the miracles he performed or because of the supernatural events that he brought about. Each and every one of these wonders were not to prove his prophecy, rather each one had a specific goal; the seas split in order to drown the Mitzrayim and set Bnei Yisrael free, manna fell to satiate the hungry nation in the desert, water flowed from the rock to quench their thirst, the land split open in order to put an end to Korach's revolt. The Rambam continues to explain that Bnei Yisrael believed in Moshe because of Ma'amad Har Sinai and Matan Torah. At those moments, *their* eyes saw Moshe ascend to the burning mountain and not the eyes of others, *their* ears heard Hashem call out to him, and not the ears of others. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi makes a similar reference in the Cuzari² as to why Ma'amad Har Sinai is the pinnacle of Am Yisrael's emunah. He explains that Bnei Yisrael witnessed with their own eyes the Godly revelation and the giving of the Torah. So too, the further generations received testimony of these events from those before them, dating all the way back to Matan Torah. This is as if they saw it with their own eyes.

Why is it, that hearing testimony of Ma'amad Har Sinai is compared to actually being there? What does it mean that only Bnei Yisrael saw and heard the wondrous event of Matan Torah? A living nation is like a living body; things that are safeguarded in its memory are not historical facts, rather they are a vibrant part existence. The human body ages and undergoes outward changes as the years progress, yet a person's personality, memories, and thoughts remain intact. So too, within a nation the individuals change yet the collective memory stays the same. Therefore, all of Klal Yisrael was witness to the greatest Godly revelation of all time, Matan Torah. The vision of Moshe's prophecy was one that was seen by all of Klal Yisrael. By relaying it to further generation one is in essence helping to relive the experience that was.

¹ Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 8,1

² Ma'amar 1, 25

This idea is of utmost importance to understand the depth of Matan Torah. The Torah was given to Am Yisrael, not to an individual, not to a group of people, but rather to an entire nation. Only from this perspective can one truly understand what Torah is. The Rambam writes³ that any of the Mitzvot that were commanded before Matan Torah, such as the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach, or Brit Milah, are only valid because they were given again at Har Sinai to all of Kehillat Ya'akov, and not to an individual or group. The obligations of Torah and Mitzvot began from the moment that Bnei Yisrael stood as a nation. Only a commandment to an entire nation can obligate them for all future generations.

A person's individual connection to the Torah stems from the strength of the Klal, from the power of being part Am Yisrael, for it was the entire nation who received the Torah. Only after receiving the Torah as a nation did the Torah move down to the level of individuals. Harav Kook zt"l writes⁴ that there is an inherent holiness which is found in the Klal, a level of holiness which transcends division. Therefore, korbanot tzibur must come from the funds of the tzibur, of Klal Yisrael, because their holiness is rooted in the holiness of the Klal. There is no value of the individual, without being rooted and connected to the Klal.

These lessons were not only applicable at Har Sinai, rather they need to be a guiding light for us every day. Over the past generation the idea of individualism has become prevalent both within Am Yisrael and throughout the world. People or groups have in a sense become more removed from Klal Yisrael. It must be internalized that an individual's power of life stems solely from his connection to the Klal. In limud Torah, as well as in all other areas of life, one doesn't stand as an individual. Only as a member of Am Yisrael can one build his personal life in the most complete way. By living life in such a manner the promise of Hashem will be fulfilled: "And you shall be for Me a kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation."⁵

³ Igrot HaRambam, Mahadurat Harav Shilat, vol. 1, p. 410

⁴ Mishpat Kohen 124, (p. 273)

⁵ Shemot 19, 6