

משפטים

NA'ASEH VENISHMA

At *Kabalas Hatorah*, *Klal Yisrael* uttered their now famous acceptance of the covenant with Hashem, with the spontaneous cry of “*Na’aseh Venishma*” — “We will do, and we will listen” (*Shemos* 24:7). This was twice preceded by *Klal Yisrael’s* promise to Hashem of “*Na’aseh*” — “We will do” (*ibid.* 19:8, 24:3). So profound was this proclamation that Hashem asked:

מי גילה לבני רז זה, שמלאכי השרת משתמשין בו?

“Who revealed this secret to my children, [an expression only] used by the ministering angels?” (*Shabbos* 88•)

Humans, ordinarily, must listen to something before they can accept it; while angels, who are not bound by mundane restrictions, are capable of simultaneously accepting and listening. Angels, spiritual beings uncircumscribed by time, i.e. the past and the future, are capable of understanding a proposal even before it is presented. Hashem asked how *Klal Yisrael* had achieved this power. In actuality, *Klal Yisrael* were human, not supernatural beings; they sought to express their zeal and enthusiasm for Hashem and His Torah by adopting the conduct of angels. It must be understood that the words “*Na’aseh Venishma*” were vastly more profound than a declaration of ardor and eagerness. It demonstrated *Klal Yisrael’s* deep perception of the purpose of creation and life itself.

The expression “*Na’aseh Venishma*” did indeed intrigue Hashem, and not necessarily for its supernatural connotation. It was a demonstration of the keen insight that *Klal Yisrael* possessed. *Klal Yisrael’s* motive in unreservedly declaring “we will do” was an attempt on their part to align their current behavior with Hashem’s intentions at creation. At the conclusion of the Torah’s narration of the creation, the Torah states:

ויברך אלקים את יום השביעי ויקדש אתו כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלקים לעשות
And Hashem blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because in it He rested
from all His work which was created by Hashem to do (*Bereishis* 2:3).

The words “to do” seem superfluous; the *pasuk* would have made perfect sense if it had ended with the phrase “because in it He rested from all His work which was created by Hashem.” What necessity is there for the concluding phrase “to do”? What purpose does it serve?

The *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 11:6) points out that

כל מה שנברא בששת ימי בראשית צריכין עשייה

All that which was created in the six days of creation require doing.

This means that Hashem created a perfect world, but in a sense this perfect world required further work by man. Man's role in *Olam Hazei* is to improve this world, to raise it to a higher state of perfection. The *Midrash* continues:

אפילו אדם צריך תיקון

Even man requires improvement (ibid.).

Man is mandated to refine and advance himself to the point where he reaches ultimate perfection.

The point is further emphasized by *Chazal* in their interpretation of the *pasuk*:

ושמרתם את דברי הברית הזאת, ועשיתם אותם

Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them (*Devarim* 29:8).

The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 99:) redefines the word “*osam*” — “them” — to “*atem*” — “you”. The *pasuk* is now qualified:

“Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do yourselves.”

This implies that man must constantly be vigilant in reworking himself and in training himself so that he may achieve ultimate perfection. The demand made on man is to perfect Hashem's world.

Now the statement of *Chazal*:

כל המתפלל בע"ש ואומר ויכולו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו נעשה שותף להקב"ה

He who utters the prayer *Vayechulu* on *Erev Shabbos* is considered by the *pasuk* to become a partner with Hashem [in creation] (*Shabbos* 119:),

takes on an added dimension. Man is invested with the power to enhance his environment and himself. *Vayechulu*, which concludes with the seemingly superfluous word “to do” is actually a charge to Man to improve upon Hashem's creation.

Now the profundity of “*Na'aseh venishma*” becomes apparent. By using *na'aseh*, the “to do” word, *Klal Yisrael* declared its intention of becoming a full partner with Hashem in the continued creation of this world. They recognized that their mandate was to enhance Hashem's creation and in so doing, to improve Hashem's primary work, Man himself. Hashem's rhetorical question, “who revealed this secret to My children?” was actually an expression of His satisfaction and pride in them.

Self-improvement in Man involves extensive training, training unlike that of any other creature. The lion, for instance, is created to exert his powerful influence over the jungle. His natural abilities and instincts proclaim him the preeminent predator. Yet he can be trained to become a docile, obedient house pet, something completely contrary to his nature. Similarly, training of all animals involves the learned repudiation of their natural instincts. The training of Man, on the other hand, is totally different. Regarding the creation of Man, the Torah states:

ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים

And [Hashem] breathed into his [Man's] nostrils the breath of life (*Bereishis* 2:7).

Among many other things, this “breath of life” involved the imparting of wisdom from Hashem to Man (Ramban ibid.). Hence, Man is endowed with fathomless, unending, innate wisdom. This

wisdom is ever present in Man's unconscious mind (*Nidah* 30:); always available to Man with a minimum of striving.

מים עמקים עצה בלב איש

Counsel in the heart of Man is like deep water (*Mishlei* 20:5).

Every man possesses the potential for the greatest wisdom; it is up to him to **evoke** that wisdom from within. The training of Man does not involve teaching him anything alien to his nature, it involves the evoking of wisdom already present. The "*asiyah*" — the doing — of Man involves a continuation of the initial work of Hashem. Therein lies the partnership.

Immediately after *Kabalas Hatorah, Klal Yisrael* was conspicuous in its determination to achieve perfection through self-improvement. They established a severe system of self-examination and castigation.

ויתן אתם ראשים על העם שרי אלפים, שרי מאות, שרי חמשים, ושרי עשרת

And appointed them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens (*Shemos* 18:25).

They so wanted to refine their characters that they instituted a system of *mashgichim* over every ten individuals to insure that no individual stepped out of bounds. The scrutiny was so intense that they could not avoid achieving their goal. This was their intention in shouting "*Na'aseh venishma*" [that they would go to any lengths to fulfill Hashem's will.] They were so successful that the *Dor Hamidbar* has gone down in history as our greatest and holiest generation.

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