

Dvar Torah for Shavuot

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Based on Likutey Moharan I, Lesson #123

“A foolish people, unwise...” (Deuteronomy 32: 6). Onkelos translates:

A nation that accepted the Torah, without exercising wisdom.

A word of caution: What follows may sound extreme, especially to Judaism or Breslov newcomers. I've written some notes to myself, basically an entry into my spiritual diary, if I had one. I think they are instructive and hope they are like all of Rebbe Nachman's teachings, applicable by any person, no matter what his current or prior spiritual level.

For over six weeks now we've prepared ourselves to receive the Torah.

We've done introspection (a lot or a little), greatly anticipated receiving the Torah and/or tried to align our behavior to the day-by-day manifestations of Kabbalistic sefirot that relate to the Omer-Count. We're certainly “better” Jews than we were at the Seder (though we may be hard pressed to explain how), somewhat less flawed, better committed to caring for the Torah and more aware of the preciousness of time.

So are we ready? Rebbe Nachman teaches that a very crucial point in a person's preparation, upon which hinges his entire ability to accept the Torah, is his willingness to fully and totally accept what Moshe teaches. Will you unquestionably accept it when Moshe tells you that right is left and left is right (Sifri, Parshat Shoftim)? Not so easy, huh?

After all, we cherish some ideas and consider others inviolate, ideas about who we are, what's true and what's right, etc. It's quite difficult to let go of my wisdom.

Letting go of it is not like changing a \$10 bill for two fives! Letting go of our wisdom demands that we change how we think about the world, feel about our experiences and what we do. It makes us new people. That's pretty scary. The old me may not be so great, but at least I know who he is!

What's especially difficult for many is the fear of not having the final say. "I'll disappear. I'll become an extension of Moshe, nothing more." Rest assured, dear reader, that you never for a moment abdicate your free will or responsibility for your decisions. At any moment one can decide to give up his entire connection to Torah, God forbid.

(This is why we are warned not to assume that we will automatically choose correctly for the rest of life. See Avot 2:5.)

As for being "merely" an extension of Moshe Rabbeinu, the Mishnah teaches "be the tail of lion, don't be the head of a fox" (Avot 4:20).

The toenail of Moshe Rabbeinu has more going for it than, well, my head. Ouch! That's mighty humbling.

If I insist, for whatever reasons, on holding to my current way of thinking, genius though I might be, all of Moshe's miracles—frogs, hail sea-splitting, you name it—won't make a difference. If I don't put down my ideas, I can't accept Moshe's Torah. Where our ideas disagree, I'll insist on maintaining mine, and where they agree, I'll accept them because they're mine. This you call "receiving the Torah"?

Lastly, I don't know about you, but at Sinai I was at the foot of the mountain, not at the top. I don't really know what God—the Creator, our Liberator—told Moshe Rabbeinu. I only have Moshe's word about Shabbat, usury, the red heifer and the rest of it. I'm going to try my best to "unwise," to lay down all my pre-conceived notions in favor of Moshe's, and pray to God that I'm making the right decision to believe in Moshe.

I'm in.

All who are with me, say, "Naaseh v'nishma! We will do and we will listen!" (Exodus 24:7).

agutn yom tov!

Chag sameach!

Happy holy day!

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