

Shavuot: Our Personal “Giving of the Torah”

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After many years of bitter bondage in Egypt, the poor Hebrew slaves emerge victorious and triumphant over their Egyptian slave masters. As they make their way through the desert, they approach Mount Sinai and the purpose of Creation, where the lowest of the low rise to become God’s chosen people.

Moses delivers God’s question to the Hebrews: “Will you accept the Torah and thereby become a treasure among the nations?” They answer, “All that God has spoken, we will do.” Moses then brought the people’s reply to God. God then informs Moses that He will appear to him and the people will hear what He says. But then we read one of the most mysterious verses in the Torah: “Moses related the people’s reply to God.” But where was the question, and what was the answer? The Torah does not reveal this to us (see Exodus 19).

In *Likutey Moharan* I, 190, Rebbe Nachman explains what was going on behind the scenes. When the Israelites replied, “All that God has spoken, *we will do*,” they were actually objecting to God’s question. If God outright tells us what to do, how can we possibly maintain our free will? “We will” have to “do” it. Moses brings this question before God.

God replies that He will appear to Moses specifically and address the commandments to him alone; the Jewish people will hear them only as bystanders, thus retaining their

freedom of choice.

But then Moses asks, "What about me and my freedom of choice?" This is the meaning of the second occurrence of "Moses related the people's reply to God," where the question and answer were not recorded by the Torah. Rebbe Nachman reveals that Moses was repeating the Jewish people's objection, but this time about himself!

God responds, "Go to the Jewish people and sanctify them today and tomorrow" (and then the Torah will be given). God did not specify explicitly that three days of preparation were necessary in order to receive the Torah; Moses had to grasp this on his own and command the Jewish people to add the extra day (see *Shabbat* 87a for Moses' calculation). Remarkably, this means that even the giving of the Torah was contingent on Moses' free will.

Where does this leave us? Are we tzaddikim who are on a level where we have both the ability and need to grasp God's hidden will? Reb Noson says, "Yes." Even though the Torah has already been given and the *mitzvot* are known to us, we need good advice and ideas to fulfill the commandments in the best possible way. We also need to find our individual paths within Judaism, and we need to attach ourselves to the proper teacher/Tzaddik. All of this has to be done on our own.

Reb Noson adds that if we concentrate on our eternal purpose, we will discover the hints along the way that lead us to our own personal "giving of the Torah." Amen.

Based on Likutey Halachot Birkhat HaShachar 5