

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

By Ozer Bergman

Do you know what we Jews answered when God asked us, “Do you want to receive My Torah?” We didn’t say, “No” and we didn’t ask, “What does it say?” We didn’t even say, “Yes!” We said, “*Na’aseh v’nishma*—we will do and we will listen” (Exodus 24:7). The uniqueness of this curious reply is already pointed out by our Sages, of blessed memory:

Rabbi Elazar said, “When the Israelites gave precedence to ‘we will do’ over ‘we will listen,’ a Heavenly voice went forth and exclaimed to them, ‘Who revealed to My children this secret, which the ministering angels use?’ as it is written, ‘Bless the Lord, you angels of His, you mighty of strength, that fulfill His word, that hear the voice of His word’ (Psalms 103:20). First they fulfill and then they hearken?” (*Shabbat* 88a).

That’s right—it’s hard to do something before you know what it is you’re supposed to do. So what did we mean by *na’aseh v’nishma*? What didn’t we mean? We didn’t promise to be perfect (whew!)—what human being could? We didn’t make a generic commitment to rote or begrudging obedience. Nor did we say *na’aseh v’nishma* for lack of a better option—the Hammurabi Code was taken, so we took this. The angelic secret of *na’aseh v’nishma* is alluded to in this episode:

A gentile saw Rava engrossed in his studies while his fingers were under his legs. Rava was grinding them till his fingers were bleeding. The gentile exclaimed, “You impulsive people! You put your mouth before your ears—and you’re still impulsive! First you should have listened; if you thought you could keep the Torah, accept it; if not, not.” Rava said to him, “About us who walked in integrity, it is written, ‘The integrity of the upright will guide them’” (Proverbs 11:3; *Shabbat* 88a).

What sort of commitment can make a person oblivious to discomfort, pain and bleeding over himself? Certainly not a commitment to a book. *Na’aseh v’nishma* was—and is—a passionate commitment to being in a passionate relationship with God. Being in love calls forth impulsive, supra-rational

answers and behavior.* *Na’aseh* means we will do our best to live by the Torah as we understand it *now*. *Nishma* means we want to hear more, we want perpetual Torah revelation, to get to the next level of Divine wisdom, living and awareness. *Na’aseh v’nishma* was—and is—a clarion cry that we are dedicated to a constant pursuit of personal progress and national improvement in doing God’s will, and are not acting merely for our own spiritual well-being.

Creation has a purpose—namely, that every member of mankind be fully aware of God’s existence, greatness and kindness. The Giving of the Torah was a revelation of those qualities. The Torah herself teaches us how to constantly and continuously reveal deeper and richer levels of God’s greatness and kindness. Our ancestors—and we—made a commitment to live by the Torah so that God’s will would be done.

How is it possible to keep this commitment? What about the challenges from the outside world? What about the weaknesses of the body and of the will? It’s one thing to not be perfect; it’s another to be an abject failure. The secret is what Rebbe Nachman calls *azut*, toughness. One expression of this toughness is *tefilah*, prayer.

A Jew needs to be able to tell God, “I could do better at my *na’aseh*. But I will not bow to outer obstacles or my inner incompetence. It’s like the darkness before the dawn, a descent before ascending to *nishma*. *I am not giving up*. I will keep Your Torah, but You must help me!” When a Jew is persistent in such *azut*, his *nishma* becomes *na’aseh*—and he starts all over again.

* About attending a very crowded class Rebbe Nachman gave, Reb Noson remarked, “I don’t know where my body was, but I put my head as near to the Rebbe as I could!”

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Matanah 5,
Rashei Perakim* (Outline)

SIDEPATH

Reb Noson wrote many discourses on the topic of truth and true leadership. However, you are mistaken if you think that it is easy to find the truth. Reb Noson said of Mashiach, in whose time the Ultimate Truth will be revealed: Mashiach will have more difficulty convincing the chassidim of his identity, than the atheists. He will perform one miracle and all the atheists will believe in him, but the chassidim ... (*Siach Sarfei Kodesh* 1-525). Reb Noson implies that we all have so much “truth” and “faith” in our own way of life that we might never accept the Mashiach if he were to tell us that the truth lies elsewhere.

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

25:6 The Shabbat-produce of the Land will be food for you

Shabbat Brings Blessing

Shabbat brings blessing. This is true of both the weekly Shabbat and the Sabbatical year. When you keep Shabbat, it “will be food for you.” Shabbat brings blessing and abundance to you and to the entire universe (LM I, 58:4).

25:14 When you sell something to a fellow Jew or buy something from him, do not cheat one another

Buying From And Selling To Jews Reveals The Supernal Colors

If you sell, sell to a fellow Jew. If you buy, buy from a fellow Jew (*Sifra, Behar*).

All monies reflect the Supernal Colors, the revelation of the beauty of God. By trading within the nation, those lights are revealed by each Jew and the greatness of God is manifest. Dishonesty, on the other hand, blemishes these lights.

These laws are presented in the Torah portion that speaks about the *Yovel* (Jubilee year), because *Yovel* represents a level that is beyond time. It is the goal of all business to elevate things from this world—which is constrained by the limitations of time—to the upper levels, which transcend time. For on

those levels, Godliness is always manifest and the lights of wealth can be revealed (LH IV, p. 366).

Do Not Cheat Yourself Out Of A Connection With The Tzaddik

If the wrongful price is less than one-sixth of the value of the object, the sale is considered final. If the wrongful price is one-sixth of the true value, the overpayment must be returned, or the buyer can return the merchandise. But if the buyer is cheated by more than one-sixth of the rightful price, the sale is void and the seller must return the money (see *Bava Metzia* 49b).

One who tries to draw close to the tzaddik, but cheats himself by not fulfilling the teachings of the tzaddik and therefore does not serve God according to his abilities, has cheated himself less than one-sixth. Since he is still attached to the tzaddik, his devotions count and he will receive his full reward.

One who is not bound to the tzaddik, even if he does not oppose the tzaddik, is in constant danger. He might overcome his evil inclination and end up serving God despite the fact that he lacks direction from the tzaddik. But he might also succumb to his evil inclination. Thus, his "overpayment" can be returned or the "merchandise" might be returned.

One who opposes the tzaddik loses his connection to the tzaddik altogether. He has blemished the "one-sixth" and his transactions—all the Torah and *mitzvot* he amassed during his lifetime—are void and must be returned to be rectified anew (LH VII, p. 450-226a).

25:36 Do not charge him interest or accrued interest

The Borrower Indebts His Soul To The Lender

In effect, one who borrows money mortgages his soul to the lender. Therefore, during the time that the lender holds the mortgage, all the bounty destined for the borrower is channeled to the lender. Since the lender benefits from this bounty, he must not charge the borrower interest at the same time (LH IV, p. 188a).

We Must Be Patient For Our Eternal Reward

Observe the commandments, the statutes and the laws that I am commanding you today, to do them (Deuteronomy 7:11).

"Today, to do them"—and tomorrow, in the World to Come, to receive the reward for them (Rashi).

One can expect reward for his *mitzvot*, but he must exercise patience for what is coming to him. He must have faith in the enduring reward of the World to Come without collecting a temporary reward here in this world. For in truth, time does not really exist. The life of this world is fleeting, while the main life is the eternal life that transcends all concepts of time.

The prohibition against charging interest reflects this understanding. Interest is money one receives while he waits for the repayment of his money. It is as if he collects his reward *now*; he lacks the faith to wait for the proper moment. Thus, our Sages teach: "He who charges interest is considered as one who denies the entire Torah" (*Yerushalmi, Bava Metzia* 5:8)—since he reveals his lack of faith in God and in the Ultimate Reward (LH IV, p. 192a).

25:42 For they are My servants whom I took out of the land of Egypt. They must not be sold in the manner of slaves

We Are Both Servants And Sons Of God

Sometimes the Torah refers to the Jewish people as God's servants; other times they are referred to as God's sons—e.g., "My firstborn son, Israel" (Exodus 4:22), and "You are sons to God your Lord" (Deuteronomy 14:1). One level leads to the next. A person cannot truly attain the level of "son" unless he first passes through the level of "servant." First he must serve God as a servant would his master, without always knowing why or for what purpose. If he persists, he will eventually experience the true satisfaction of serving God, and rejoice in it as a son who willingly serves his father (LH I, p. 116a).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

12 — "A song of praise of David" (Psalms 145:1) (continued)

7. This is why it is good to study the Codes with the notations of the *Be'er HaGolah* [a commentary which cites the source of each

law brought down in the *Shulchan Arukh*], so that [the student will be able] to mention the name of the *Tanna* or codifier who originated the decision he is studying. Thus, he will be able to bind his spirit to the spirit of the tzaddik who originated that teaching.

8. Know that when this learned individual speaks evil about the tzaddik, this is precisely the way God intends it. For the Holy One, Blessed be He, will cast a great tzaddik down into the mouth of this learned individual in order for the tzaddik to extract the Divine Presence—which is the Oral Law—from its exile in the learned one's mouth. For the greatest and choicest tzaddikim know which laws were turned into evil speech against the tzaddikim [at the hands of the learned individual], and they elevate these words and rearrange them back into laws, thereby accomplishing great and wondrous spiritual unifications (see more in this lesson in *Likutey Moharan*).

9. Through being happy in one's suffering (*Shabbat* 88b) and by lovingly accepting the humiliation dealt out by one's enemies, a person elevates the Divine presence to the level of "embracing."

10. When a learned individual who is worthy studies the teachings of the *Tanna*, he brings the *Tanna's* soul back into his body.



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