

Choosing To Be Chosen

Yisro is the portion in which the Children of Israel arrive at their spiritual, intellectual, and moral destination. It is the portion in which the former Hebrew slaves choose to become the Chosen People, choosing the responsibilities of 613 mitzvos and all their accountability. This week the Jews accept the Torah at Mount Sinai.

It does not come easy. Hashem prefaces the offering with an overpowering charge. He sends Moshe to speak to both the men and women. "You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Accepting the Torah included the responsibilities of a holy nation -- a new moral divining rod for a world fraught with immorality. But they were up to the challenge and they responded as such.

They did not murmur their response nor did they mumble their acceptance. The Jews affirmed their agreement in unison with words that resound throughout history as the battle cry of Jewish faith. They shouted in unison, "All that Hashem has commanded, we shall do!" (Exodus 19:8). The response, declaring total submission to Torah dictates, was proudly noted by the Almighty, handing the Jews a most chosen nation status through all their ordeals.

But Moshe did not look up to heaven with a content smile, as if he was a proud brother sharing nachas with a father who was watching from the bleachers. The Torah tells us, "and Moshe related the words of the people to Hashem" (Exodus 19:9). He returned to the Master of the Universe and reported the good news. He repeated the response, verbatim, to Hashem.

The question is obvious. Moshe knew, perhaps better than any mortal being, that every action, gesture, and thought of any inhabitant of this planet is duly recorded by the Almighty. Why, then, did he report back the response? Hashem was well aware of the enthusiasm and willing acceptance of the people. Furthermore, by telling us that Moshe went back to Hashem, isn't the Torah opening a Pandora's box? Could one possibly infer that Hashem needed Moshe to find out the response? Obviously there is a deeper lesson to be learned...

Moshe knew that Hashem heard the answer of the Jewish nation as loud, if not louder, than he did. But he was sent on a mission and he had a responsibility to convey the good news. But he wanted to send the Jewish people a message as well. He taught his people that before one can receive the Torah one must be a good messenger. Everything that we study - everything we do on this earth is but a message that must be accounted to for Hashem. Even if Hashem knows what we are doing, we must return with a report of accomplishment. And Moshe taught us that Derech Eretz must not only precede the learning of the Torah, it must precede the giving of it as well.

(Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky)