



EDUCATION THROUGH INSPIRATION, NOT INTIMIDATION

An oft-cited yet troubling Gemara (*Shabbos* 88a) regarding kabbalas HaTorah relates to the pasuk, “they stood at the foot of the mountain” (*Shemos* 19:17). Rav Avdimi bar Chama explains that we learn from here that Hashem held the mountain over the Jewish people like a barrel. He says: if you accept the Torah, good, but if not, there will be your burial place. Rav **Acha** bar Yaakov says that this gives rise to a defense against the enforceability of the Torah. Rashi explains that upon reaching the *beis din shel maalah* (heavenly court), the Jews could claim that because we were coerced into accepting the Torah



altogether, we are not accountable for violating it! Rava responds that this is no longer a concern because we reaccepted the Torah in the days of Achashveirosh, as it says “*kiymu vikiblu,*” *kiymu ma sh’kiblu kvar*

(they fulfilled that which they had previously accepted).

This passage poses several striking questions: (1) If we already said “*naasseh v’nishma,*” why was any coercion necessary? (2) What’s the significance of the imagery employed: a barrel hanging over our heads? (3) Shouldn’t the Gemara state, “here will be your burial place” not “there?” (4) Why does Rava refer to the days of Achashveirosh and not the days of Esther or Mordechai? While these questions are valid, most relevant to Purim is: How were we forced to accept the Torah? How did we reaccept the Torah? And what does this mean for us?

To understand, let us take a look at a seemingly benign Rashi. The Torah (Bereishis 2:15) says that “Hashem placed man in the garden, to work it and guard it.” Rashi (ibid.) notes that when the pasuk says “Hashem took man,” it means Hashem persuaded Adam to enter Gan Eden.

Why would Rashi abandon the simple *pshat* of the pasuk? He could have said that Hashem simply took — or placed — Adam there. Why the need for persuasion? After all, *vayikach* means to take, not to persuade. Moreover, Hashem does as He pleases. He doesn’t need to convince anyone of anything — He can create and place man wherever He wants! Perhaps most challenging, if you look a few psukim prior, the Torah (2:8) tells us that “Hashem planted a Garden and placed man there!”

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The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh*, Bereishis 2:32) says Rashi is compelled to interpret *vayikach* to mean persuade, since the Torah already told us that Adam was placed in Gan Eden. The Maharal expands and explains that “*l’adam lo shayach lekicha*,” you can never take a person, because the essence of a person is his intellect and his ability to be a deliberating, thinking being. You may be able to physically move a person from one place to another, but by doing so, you have not necessarily moved his will, or his attitude. A relocation of

the body does not generally cause a relocation of the mind. You cannot “take” a person’s intellect, reasoning, or predilections. You may succeed in forcing a person to do something, but because of that person’s free will, you can’t force him or her to think something. That’s why, says the Maharal, Rashi teaches that Hashem took Adam with words, that is, He persuaded him.¹

Based on Rashi’s explanation, the Maharal develops the idea that even though you can force people to be physically present, you cannot expect them to be engaged or captivated unless you motivate them. A person’s mind is not subject to your coercion. If this is true regarding God and Adam, it is certainly true for any human in a position of authority — employer and employee, parent and

child, teacher and student. If a teacher educates through intimidation or pressure, a child might sit quietly in class, but that method will not be the most effective in cultivating a life of dedicated and inspired *avodas Hashem*. On the other hand, if the child’s *chinuch* is developed in a pleasant and constructive way, it has a much greater chance of having a lasting impact. Years before Rashi and Maharal, Shlomo HaMelech taught this lesson: (Mishlei 22:6) “Educate a child according to his way, so that he will not go astray in his later years.”

When our educational methods consist not of imposition of will or intimidation, but of motivation, inspiration, and encouragement, they are more likely to have a lasting impact.

This distinction relates to the halachic sanctity of Eretz Yisrael. The Rambam² discusses why the Land of Israel needed to be sanctified twice. He writes that although we sanctified the land in the days of Yehoshua, it lost its *kedusha* upon our expulsion. The Rambam explains that because the land achieved its *kedusha* through conquest, the sanctification was temporary. Once the *Olei Bavel* (the who came from Babylonia) arrived in Eretz Yisrael, however, they acquired, and thereby sanctified the Land of Israel through *chazaka*. R. Ahron Soloveichik zt”l³ describes this sanctification as a slow, consistent, constructive development of the land. A methodical sanctification like this would last eternally. The difference between the sanctifications was that the first was accomplished through conquest and force while the second was achieved through organic, orderly growth.

Perhaps this distinction of accomplishing through intimidation and conquest as opposed to accomplishing through inspiration and motivation will help us understand the Gemara in Shabbos. Despite the fanfare with which the Torah was given, we were not quite willing participants. The Gemara paints a frightening picture of the nature of Matan Torah. We had very little choice in the matter. R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (*Meshech Chochma*, Shemos 19:17) goes as far as saying that Hashem’s Glory was so powerful and His Presence so acute that we had

no choice in the matter. Such clarity effectively removed our *bechira* (free will). He observes that even though we didn't have free will, it was still a wholehearted acceptance, a *kabbalah b'lev shaleim*.⁴ Either way we look at it, coercion or compulsion, we didn't choose to accept the Torah at Har Sinai.

The kabbalas HaTorah at the end of the Megillah, however, was fundamentally different. Purim was a time of *hester panim*; that is, Hashem's Divine Providence was not abundantly clear to us. We were scattered and fragmented, intimidated and broken. We were on the brink of annihilation. And yet, when it seemed like there was no hope for the Jewish people, we realized Hashem had been subtly orchestrating our salvation through Vashti's execution, the selection of Esther, Mordechai's overhearing Bigson and Seresh, Achashveirosh not being able to sleep, Haman's "falling" on top of Esther. Hashem was in the background, quietly setting the stage for our salvation. On the 14th of Adar when we celebrated throughout the kingdom, we saw Hashem in a different light than at Har Sinai. This time, we internalized that Hashem was not an intimidating, frightening God but one who unconditionally loves and cares for the Jewish people. Motivated by this realization, we reaccepted the Torah and reaffirmed our commitment to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Internalizing Redemption

איתא בגמרא אורה זו תורה. שמחה יום טוב. ששון מילה. ויקר תפילין. וצריך ביאור. ומה שינה הכתוב את טעמו ולא פירש ליהודים ה' תורה וי"ט ומילה ותפילין. אבל הענין הוא שזה עצמו היה הגאולה והישועה שהרגישו בנ"י זאת בנפשותם. כי התורה היא האורה. והמילה ששון. כי בוודאי אותו הדור שזכו לנסים בכח התשובה. בוודאי נתעלו נפשותם. ובאו לאמונת התורה. ונתמלאו אורה בכח התורה. וששון בכח המילה כו' וזה עצמו מה שדרשו חז"ל הדר קבלוה בימי אחשורוש. פרש"י מאהבת הנס. שמקודם היו בבחי' אמונה כמ"ש כפה עליהם ההר כו'. ועתה הבינו בעצמם חיבת התורה ומצות. וז"ש קיימו מה שקבלו כבר שמקודם ה' בחי' קבלה ואמונה ועתה נתגלה להם בפועל בנפשותם.

שפת אמת פורים תרמ"ח

The Gemara [commenting on the verse "The Jews had light, happiness, joy and honor"] states light (*orah*) refers to Torah, happiness (*simcha*) refers to festival, joy (*sason*) refers to circumcision and honor (*yekar*) refers to tefillin. This requires explanation. Why did the verse change the wording? Why not simply state "The Jews had Torah, festival, circumcision and tefillin? The idea is that that the verse is describing how the Jewish people internalized their redemption and salvation. They saw the Torah as light and circumcision as joy, because that generation merited miracles as a result of their repentance. They elevated themselves and came to believe in the Torah and they were filled with the light of the Torah. They were filled with joy as a result of circumcision etc. This is what our rabbis taught "they accepted the Torah again in the time of Achashverosh." Rashi adds "from the love of the miracle." Beforehand, everything was a result of faith, as our rabbis taught, "He placed the mountain over them like a barrel." Now, they realized on their own a love for Torah and mitzvot. That is what our rabbis said "they fulfilled what they already accepted." Beforehand, their acceptance was based on faith. Now, something internal was revealed.

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Endnotes

1. See also *Gur Aryeh*, Tzav 8:2, *Korach* 16:2, *Chukas* 20:18.

2. *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* 6:16, *Hilchos Terumah* 1:6. The sanctity of the Land of Israel gives rise to the ability to perform the mitzvos dependent on the land.

3. *Logic of the Heart, Logic of the Mind*, pg. 167-8.

4. See inside for further elaboration. See also responsa *Kanfei Yonah*, #29.



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