

תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

Sefer Bamidbar The Chopp Holdings Edition

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בעזה"ש

פרשת במדבר – שבועות

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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Part I. Voice of Hashem

THE MISHKAN GOES UNDERCOVER

The most remarkable institution that the *Am Yisroel* were privileged to have with them as they journeyed for forty years in the *midbar* was the *Mishkan*. Immediately upon the culmination of the great event of *Matan Torah*, the *Am Yisroel* began to build the home where Hakodosh Boruch Hu would take up residence in the midst of the *Am Yisroel*, and the place where His privileged nation could come to serve Him.

Upon its completion, this small portable *beis hamikdash* became the center of the Universe, and therefore in this week's *parsha* we were commanded to treat it so. Every time the nation traveled, great care was taken by the *kohanim* so that the *aron*, where the Torah was placed, should not be revealed to the public sight - וְכִסּוּ בָהּ אֶת אֲרֹן - הַעֲדָת; it was covered with expensive royal *techeiles* cloth before the nation set out on their journey.

Yet, however much we understand the importance of these commands, we are stunned when we read the punishment for those who might breach the royal protocol. וְלֹא יִמְתּוּ בְּגִשְׁתָּם אֶת קֹדֶשׁ הַקֹּדֶשִׁים - "They shall not come near to touch the holiness *and die*" (Bamidbar

4:19). לֹא יָבֹאוּ לְרִאֲוֹת בְּבִלְעֵ אֶת הַקִּדְּוֹשׁ וּמָתוּ. - “And they shall not come to see when the holiness is being covered *and they will die*” (ibid. 4:20).

HAR SINAI - THE SEQUEL

Now, the attentive listener will note that these *pesukim* remind us of similar admonitions that the *Am Yisroel* had only recently heard. Because at Har Sinai we were similarly warned: “Anyone that **touches** the mountain shall be put to death” (Shemos 19:12). “Warn the people lest they **come near** and break through to Hashem to **look**, and many of them will perish” (ibid. 19:21). And there’s no doubt that the admonitions in our *parsha* were expected to remind the *Am Yisroel* of the similar admonitions at Har Sinai.

And the Ramban says that. He tells us (*Hakdama l’parshas Teruma*) that the unique and unprecedented display of the glory of Hashem that we witnessed when He rested on Har Sinai, didn’t end forever with that *ma’amad*. The *Shechina* didn’t just make its way back up to the *sh’mei shomayim* - instead it now came to rest in the *Mishkan*. That is “the secret of the *Mishkan*,” says the Ramban; that it was expected to be the continuation of Har Sinai.

MATAN TORAH LIVES ON

It’s a remarkable thing what the Ramban is saying - and it’s a tremendous lesson for us. Hashem wants Har Sinai to live forever before our eyes; it’s not just something very important that *happened*; it’s not merely an event that we *remember*. Hashem said that He wants Har Sinai to be re-enacted in the *Mishkan*. The *Mishkan* wasn’t just a *makom avodah*, the place where we brought *korbanos* - it was *Har Sinai!*

And now we can understand that all of those admonitions of coming too close in the *Mishkan*; of touching what shouldn’t be touched, and of seeing what shouldn’t be seen, was primarily because Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants us to know that *Matan Torah* never ended.

And that’s what Dovid Hamelech said in Tehillim (68:18) הַשֵּׁם בָּרָא - “Hashem has settled among the *Am Yisroel*.” And how did He do that? סִינֵי בְקוֹדֶשׁ - “Because *Har Sinai* is now in the *Mishkan*.” Dovid says here that the Giving of the Torah at Har Sinai is now found in the *kodesh kodoshim*. The Sanctuary was the heart of the nation, and it was the word of Hashem, the stone *luchos* and the Torah, that were at the heart of the *Mishkan*.

STORYTELLING ON SHAVUOS

Hashem wants that experience of Har Sinai, the awe that we felt on that greatest day of our history, to remain forever. And actually it's a *mitzvah d'oraisah*. Some people mention it every day after davening: הַשָּׁמַר לְךָ... פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ - "Be careful not to ever forget what you saw on that day," Hashem says (Devarim 4:9). וְהוֹדַעְתֶּם לְבָנֶיךָ - "And you should make known to your children" - now, people ordinarily fall into an error here. They think it refers to the laws of the Torah alone, that you should teach the *laws* of the Torah to your children. But the Rambam says no; *k'pshuto* what it means is that you should make known to your children *what happened at Har Sinai*.

If you take a look at the words of the Rambam in his *Igeres Teiman*, you'll see he explains this mitzvah as follows: וְצִוְנוּ לְלַמֵּד אוֹתוֹ - לְבָנֵינוּ - Hashem commanded us that we should teach about the giving of the Torah to our children. Not only to teach the Torah to our children, but to give it over to them with the experience of *how* the Torah was given.

And that's why the Rambam adds that you have to start when your children are still young - they have to grow up on it. "So that children should grow up thinking about *Matan Torah*" - בְּיָמֵינוּ שֶׁיִּגְדְּלוּ עַל תְּלִמּוּדוֹ. What took place on *Shavuos* should be taught so much to children that we should grow up with this idea always percolating in our minds. וְרָאוּ לָכֵם אֶחָיו - "It is fitting for you, my brothers, שֶׁתִּגְדְּלוּ בְּנֵיכֶם עַל הַמַּעֲמָד הַהוּא הַגָּדוֹל, - you should bring up your children on that great scene." It means you should raise them on that. Like you raise your children on vitamins, you raise them on food - you should raise them up with the picture of Har Sinai so that it should get into their blood and into their bones.

THE ZEIDY'S JOB

And not only to your children! וְלְבָנֵי בָנֶיךָ - "And to your grandchildren as well." You hear that *zeidehs*? You hear what you should be talking to your grandchildren about? Tell him all about *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. At least once in your life fulfill the *p'shuto shel mikra* - tell your grandchildren about יוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַדְתָּ לְפָנֵי הַשָּׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ - "About that day when you stood before Hashem at Har Sinai."

And he'll ask you, "How do you know, *Zeidy*?" So you'll tell him the truth, "Because my *zeideh* told *me*." And when you do that,

the *gemara* says that it's *בְּאֵילוֹ קָבְלוּ מִהָר סיני* - it's as if the child himself was standing at Har Sinai accepting the Torah; because you're not only teaching him Torah, but you're recreating that great event in his little head - and it's Hashem's desire that Har Sinai should live forever in our minds.

INCREASE THE PROPAGANDA

When the Rambam writes that *Ma'amad Har Sinai* is the most important lesson that we should be giving over to our children and that we should make that day greater in our eyes than all other day, he's referring to much more than just the fact that we received the Torah - it's *the experience*, the change that the experience made in their *neshamos* and in their attitudes towards the Torah. The greatest accomplishment of all that they achieved at Har Sinai was that they gained an awe, a *pachad*, for what *Kabolas Hatorah* means for the *Am Yisroel*.

And therefore we have our work cut out for us. We're expected to speak about, to propagate, to propagandize, this great principle of how the Torah was given at Har Sinai in the presence of our forefathers. And actually it's of the utmost necessity for ourselves! It says *וְשָׁמַר נִפְשְׁךָ מְאֹד*, *you be on guard*, *הִשְׁמַר לְךָ*, be very very careful! The most important of all guards you have to create for yourself is to make certain in your mind about what took place that great day. And not just to give lip service to it - but to be imbued with that picture of the whole *Am Yisroel* gathered together at the foot of the mountain.

WHEN WAS THE WORLD CREATED?

And the Rambam says, therefore *וְגִדְלוּ הַמַּעֲמָד הַהוּא עַל כָּל גְּדוּל*, you should make that scene more important than any scene in your life - more important than any scene in the entire history of the world! So although the creation of the world certainly is a very important event - what could leave a person more awestruck than the creation of the world from nothing? - But the scene that our nation witnessed on Har Sinai must be emphasized and aggrandized even more than *briyas ha'olam*.

That's what the *gemara* (Avodah Zarah 3a) says: *וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי* - "And it was evening and it was morning, and it was the sixth day" (Bereishis 1:31). It doesn't say *yom shishi*, like *yom sheini*, *yom shlishi*. It says *yom ha'shishi*, the sixth day, a special sixth day -

that was the sixth of Sivan. וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר - "The creation of day and night," that means the creation of the world, you know when it was? יום הַשְּׁשִׁי - "It was on *yom hashishi*," on the sixth day of Sivan. When the Torah was given *that's* when the world was created.

WAS THE WORLD CREATED FOR BACTERIA?

The world wasn't created so that trillions of bacteria should crawl over the surface of the soil. And it wasn't made so that billions of human beings should live like bacteria and crawl around and live and die. The world was created so that the *Am Yisroel* should stand at Har Sinai and become the *Am Hatorah* - *that* was the purpose of the world!

And therefore, are we going to let that tremendous event recede into the background of our minds, something we celebrate once a year by eating cheesecake?! Of course not, says the Rambam: "You should make that day great above all greatness, *k'mo sh'gidlo Hakodosh Boruch Hu*, the same way Hashem did. *He's* the One who made that day so great, like He told us: כִּי שָׂאֵל נָא לַיָּמִים רַאשֵׁינִים - "You should inquire of the ancient days that were before you, הֲנִהְיָה בְּדָבָר הַזֶּה - הֲגִדוּל הַזֶּה - did such a thing ever happen בְּמֵהוּ אוֹ הֲנִשְׁמַע בְּמֵהוּ - was it ever heard of? Was there ever a nation who heard Hashem speak to them from the midst of a fire, as you heard, and they remained alive?" Hashem is emphasizing to us that we should internalize the greatness of that unique day!

THE GREAT ARGUMENT

And you should speak about that day not only to your children and grandchildren - וַתְּסַפְּרוּ בְּתוֹךְ קְהָל וְעֵדָה - And you should relate the great scene of the *Ma'amad* in gatherings, in meetings. You hear that?! Tell your cousins, your friends and neighbors about it too. Next time you come together with your extended family, next time you're at some gathering, try to speak about *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. Speak about גְּדֻלָּתוֹ, the greatness of that occasion, says the Rambam, וְהַדְדוּר, and how splendid it was, שְׂהוּא עֲמוּד שְׂהֶאֱמִינָה סוֹבְבַת עָלָיו, that's the pillar upon which the whole *emunah* turns, וְהַשְּׁעֵנָה הַמְּבִיאָה לַיָּדַי - and that's the biggest argument of all for the truth of the Torah.

Now, we can bring a lot of arguments - there's no lack of proofs we could bring for the Torah - but here is the most important one. Not just that the Torah was given, and not just that we accepted

the Torah - but that scene of the entire nation looking up at the mountain - thunder and lightning, a mountain that was shaking, with the furnace-like fire burning on top - and then they heard the Voice of Hashem.

ROYALTY, MAJESTY AND TERROR

At that moment when the heavens opened up and they began to hear the words of Hashem, "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*," the words were not what they were expecting - they thought that the words of Hashem would be sweet and noble words - and they were! But they came out of the sky with a *terror*; Matan Torah was not merely poetry, sweet sentiments about righteousness and *ahavas Hashem*. There was a fear to it! Like the *gemara* (Shabbos 88b) says on the *possuk* (Mishlei 8:6): שְׁמָעוּ - "Listen to Me," בִּי נִגִּידִים אֲדַבֵּר - "Because I am speaking royalty." What does that mean that Hashem is speaking words of royalty? So the *gemara* says, מִלְּמֹד שְׁכַל דְּבוּר וְדְבוּר, every word, every utterance of Hakodosh Boruch Hu was crowned with a majestic crown. It wasn't just a word of Hashem - even that would have been too much - but it was a word that was crowned with the majesty of royal bearing.

Let's say a girl was marrying a certain *chossid*; she didn't know his *yichus* but she was told he was a nice young man from a nice family, a *chosson* with good character, so she agreed. But when the time came to go to the *chuppah*, she saw that he was waiting there wearing a royal crown on his head. "I'm marrying a king?! For that I didn't bargain. That's too much *gadlus* for me." Now, our nation was ready for the Torah - we were ready to accept everything! We were ready for *yei'hareig v'al ya'avor* - to let ourselves be killed for the word of Hashem. *Na'aseh v'nishma* - We'll keep *everything* in the Torah. We'll never bow down to an idol no matter what! They *Am Yisroel* was committed to do it all!

But when the words began to issue *m'pi ha'Gevurah*, from the mouth of Hashem, and they saw how scary it was, *that* they weren't expecting. How exactly they felt, it's hard to give over in words - it's something you have to think about; you have to review the scene in your head as often as you can, in order to understand what it was. But one thing is for sure - when they heard the words of Hashem it put a terror into their hearts; it was something they never could have imagined.

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

It was the first time that a nation had such an experience to see that Hashem can speak to a man and live. That's what it says: לֹא יִרְאֵנִי הָאֱלֹהִים וְחָי - you can't see Hashem and remain alive (Shemos 33:20). We're so built that we can stand only a certain amount of excitement. Let's say, someone would suddenly come in here and grab you by the lapel, and say I'm coming as a messenger for this and this law firm to tell you that I just received news that you inherited five million dollars from some great-uncle you weren't even aware of - so we'd have to call out, "Is there a doctor in the audience?" No doubt about it!

Up until now, nobody ever believed that could be; that Hashem should speak to a man is such a trauma, it's so contrary to the organization of his body, to the functions of his body, to his instincts; it's such a shock to the human system that it was unbelievable that they could survive. And actually, they didn't survive.

THE AM YISROEL IS FRIGHTENED TO DEATH

The *possuk* in Shir Hashirim (5:4) describes it: נַפְשִׁי יִצָּאָה בְּדַבְרֵי - "My soul went forth from me when He spoke." They fell into a swoon, a death swoon; their souls passed out of their bodies and they were lying lifeless and had to be revived. And Hakodosh Boruch rained upon them a *tal shel techiyah*, a dew of life - what it was I cannot tell you - but something happened then that restored to them their lives. And the angels were involved as well: מַלְכֵי צְבָאוֹת יִדְדוֹן יִדְדוֹן - there were *malachim* moving among them (Tehillim 68:13). It was a phenomenon that nobody else ever experienced. And it was intended that way by Hashem so that the experience of terror and awe should be so engraved on the souls of the Am Yisroel, that never again could they forget it.

And so when they finally arose on their feet - and they were still wobbly; they weren't steady on their feet yet, and the second *dibur* came out of the mouth of Hashem. They were about to pass out again, and they said, "We can't take it any longer! We won't be able to survive!"

כִּי תֹאכְלֵנוּ הָאֵשׁ הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת - "Why should we die? וְעַתָּה לָמָּה נָמוֹת - "This great fire will consume us." They weren't afraid of an actual conflagration; but it was a Voice that burnt your nerves, a Voice that

destroyed the feelings. אַם יִסְפִּים אֲנַחְנוּ לְשָׁמַע אֶת קוֹל הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ עוֹד וּמָתְנִי – “If we shall continue to hear the Voice of Hashem our G-d any more we shall perish.” They would become numbed from the experience and perish.

Part II. Accepting a Messenger

THE OTHER NA’ASEH V’NISHMA

They were so full of awe for what they had just seen that they made a special request; they said to Moshe Rabeinu, “You speak to Hashem for us! You speak because “We don’t want to die; we won’t survive it.” קָרַב אֵתָּה – “You come close to Hashem, וְשָׁמַע – and listen. You should hear אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ – everything that Hashem will say, אֵלֶיךָ וְאֵת תְּדַבֵּר אֵלֵינוּ אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ – and you’ll tell us all that Hashem spoke to you, וְשָׁמַעְנוּ וְעָשִׂינוּ – and we will listen and we will do. (ibid. 5:24) We promise we’ll accept everything.

That’s similar to the famous *na’aseh v’nishma*; only that you’ll notice that they were talking to Moshe Rabeinu: “We will listen and we will do whatever you *Moshe Rabbeinu* will tell us from now on. Because we already heard Hakodosh Baruch Hu speaking to us through you, and we’re in such awe, such fear, of the *dvar Hashem*, that we accept forever that you are authorized from now to pass on to us the word of Hashem. That’s what the proposition was, that from now on Moshe Rabbeinu should be the go-between, the one we turn to for the continuation of Har Sinai.

THE BATON IS PASSED TO MOSHE RABEINU

Now, the question is, did they do right? Maybe they should have persisted - they should have continued to hear with their own ears the words of Hashem from Har Sinai? Was it an error to back out and have Moshe come in as a go between?

So we look at the next verse and we see that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave His stamp of approval to their request: וַיִּשְׁמַע הַשֵּׁם אֵת – Hashem heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, קוֹל דְּבַרְיִכֶם בְּדַבְּרֵכֶם אֵלַי – and Hashem said to me, I heard the voice of this people, and what they spoke to you, וַיֹּאמֶר הַשֵּׁם אֵלַי – they did well in all that they spoke.” All that they said, Hakadosh Baruch Hu agreed with them. Everything.

And Hashem said, מִי יִתֵּן - "If it would only be, that they should have the same mind to fear me, and to keep all my commandments, all the days of history. Would that they would continue forever in the same frame of mind, לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לָהֶם וּלְבָנֵיהֶם לְעֹלָם - in order it should be good for them and for their children forever" (ibid. 5:25-26).

THE VOICE IN THE MISHKAN

And forever is what we did! Even though they left Har Sinai to continue their wandering in the *midbar*, Har Sinai never left them. Moshe Rabeinu continued learning the *Toras Hashem* in the *Mishkan* in the same way he learned the Torah on top of Har Sinai. Even the Voice of Hashem in all of its thunderous majesty of Sinai was repeated every time Hashem spoke to Moshe from between the two Keruvim: "And Moshe heard *the* Voice speaking to him" (Bamidbar 7:89). "Whenever Moshe entered the Mishkan to hear the Voice of Hashem, he heard that same powerful Voice that he had heard in Har Sinai" (Ramban, ibid.).

The same way that Moshe Rabeinu heard Hashem's words from the midst of the fire on the mountain, וַדְּבַרְיוֹ שָׁמַעַת מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ, that's how Moshe Rabeinu heard Hashem's word in the Mishkan emanating from between the *keruvim* on top of the *aron*. The Ramban says that the *keruvim* were a red-gold for that reason, so that they should correspond to the red-gold fire that the Am Yisroel had witnessed on Har Sinai. Thus Hashem demonstrated that the function of Sinai as the source of the Word of Hashem was now transferred to Moshe Rabeinu and the *Mishkan*.

THE VOICE CONTINUES FOREVER

And later on in our history, the Sanhedrin in the *Lishkas Hagazis*, the Marble Chamber in the Beis Hamikdash, was the successor of Har Sinai: "Ki m'tziyon teitzei Torah - "For from Zion shall go forth Torah" (Yeshayah 2:3). The Rambam writes: "The *Beis Din Hagadol* in the *Lishkas Hagazis* is the source of the Torah we have today... and anyone who believes in Moshe Rabeinu and his Torah is obligated to rely on them for all decisions in Torah, and to lean on them in all matters" (*Hilchos Mamrim* 1:1).

And it didn't end there - the culmination of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* and the moving of Har Sinai to the *Mishkan* and later the *Lishkas Hagazis* meant that a tremendous change was taking place.

From now on the Torah would be transmitted through Moshe and his successors, the unbroken chain of *chachmei hatorah* who until today are our direct line to Har Sinai. And that is the *ratzon Hashem*, that we should accept the *dvar Hashem* as it comes to us through the *chachmei hatorah*. We are to lead all the facets of our lives according to the words of the *gedolei Torah* who are our Har Sinai.

EZRA DOESN'T MAKE ALIYAH

In *Mesichta Megillah* (16b), the *gemara* is bothered by something puzzling. In the days of Ezra the *Am Yisroel* was beginning to build the second *Beis Hamikdash* in *Eretz Yisroel*. Now, to build a *Bais Hamikdash* is a very important event - nothing could be more important, it seems. And so we would think that everybody should have been there - who wouldn't come to Har Sinai for *Matan Torah*!?

But what really happened? Not everybody came; most of the sages didn't come. Most of the *chachmei haTorah* did not come to be present to give advice and to participate in the building of the *Bais Hamikdash*. They stayed in Bavel.

Isn't that a puzzle? Those building the *Beis Hamikdash* should have sent messengers to Bavel to say, "Come join us! What are you staying in *chutz la'aretz* for? We're building the *Bais Hamikdash* and you're still sitting in Bavel!?"

But do you know why they didn't come? Because Ezra didn't go. Ezra, the chief sage, refused to budge! He wouldn't leave Bavel and all of his disciples said, "If Ezra stays, then we stay."

WHERE IS THE SHECHINA REALLY?

The question is, why didn't Ezra budge? So the *gemara* says: *שָׁכַל זְמַן שְׁבַרְיָךְ בֶּן נַרְיָה קָיָם לֹא הִנִּיחוּ עֶזְרָא וְעֵלָה* - as long as his old teacher, Boruch ben Nayriya was still alive, Ezra refused to leave Bavel.

The *Bais Hamikdash* with the *Lishkas Hagazis* and the *Sanhedrin* - that's Har Sinai - was waiting for him, but he had an old *rebbe*; it was a *rebbe* on the verge of death, but he wouldn't leave him, because where his *rebbe* is, that's where the *Shechina* is.

It's true that a few years later, after his *rebbe* passed away, Ezra went to *Eretz Yisroel* and the whole *Anshei K'nesses Hagedolah*, 120 sages, went with him. But before that, Ezra didn't forsake Bavel because Boruch ben Nayriya was still alive! And there is no Har Sinai, like the *rebbe* who lives with Har Sinai.

DON'T PASKEN ON THE COTTAGE CHEESE!

And that's what the Gemara says in Mesichta Kesubos (60b): אֶפְלוּ בֵּיעֵתָא בְּבִתְחָא לָא לִישְׁרֵי בְּמָקוֹם רַבִּיהַּ - If a question comes up - this is how Rashi learns the gemara - an egg fell into a plate full of farmer cheese and the question is, are you permitted to eat the farmer cheese? Not if you're permitted to eat the egg with *fleishigs*, no that's not the question. An egg was cooked in a vessel, in a *parveh* vessel and then it fell into a plate of farmer cheese or cottage cheese, are you permitted to eat the cheese? Now, that's a pretty simple question - of course you can eat the cheese.

But the *gemara* says that if someone asks you that question and you have a *rebbe* nearby, so keep quiet. Say, "I don't *pasken* any *sheilos* when my *rebbe* is living nearby." We'll see soon that there are two reasons for this, but at first sight it seems that this is because of respect for one's *rebbe*; the *gemara* says that it looks like אֶפְקִירִיתָא - like impudence. Even though the question is one which anyone who is competent could answer, nevertheless out of deference to your teacher, you must refer the question to your teacher. Superficially, this seems to be the reason.

TORAH IS NOT WILLY NILLY

What that means is that when it comes to Torah - even the simplest things - that there must be discipline in the matter of rendering decisions; even though you are competent, you yield to the one who is more competent.

That's because we recognize that the guidance of the Torah is not something that can be decided willy-nilly. Every question, every decision, is part of the long chain of *kabolas hatorah*. And the same awe and reverence the Am Yisroel had for Har Sinai and the Mishkan, continued in the *Lishkas Hagazis*, and that same reverence is expected of us today when we approach the Torah.

SELF DECLARED TORAH AUTHORITIES

In the newspapers today, the Jewish newspapers, there are people who are incompetent; writers, half-baked Torah scholars, self declared authorities, who answer every kind of question. Some are dangerous questions, things that could not be discussed in public without harm; things that need a great deal of deliberation. And anybody with a typewriter rushes in where *gedolim* fear to tread, and

they not only offer their opinions, but they publicize them with fanfare, as valid Torah opinions.

Almost every newspaper has a page - sometimes more than one page - for every *ploni almoni* to give his opinion. Who cares what he thinks?! Did he learn Mesillas Yesharim many times?! Did he learn the Chovos Halevavos from cover to cover? *Sha'arei Teshuva l'Rabeinu Yonah*? The *Rambam Hilchos Teshuva*? Who are you to voice an opinion *b'rabim*? It's only the Voice of Hashem that we care about - the Voice we heard at Har Sinai - the same Voice that Moshe Rabeinu heard in the *Mishkan*, and the Voice that we continue to hear from the *ba'alei hamesorah*, the ones who pass down to us the Torah true attitudes and ideals - that's the *only* Voice we want to hear.

Even if someone could quote one authority, but there are many others who may differ with that one *sefer* which he quotes. If we would rely on an individual opinion, we would be in a sorry state. It's only the *gedolim* who are able to collate the different opinions. They're the ones who are competent to choose. Many times, even when one opinion is intrinsically correct, but it has to be weighed carefully. And it's only those who have the fear of Har Sinai in them who can be trusted to make decisions - even those that do not seem significant - for *Klal Yisroel*.

ONLY GEDOLIM HAVE SI'YATTA DISHMAYA

However, the Gemara makes a statement that explains this whole matter in a different light. לֹא מִשּׁוּם דְּמִתְוִי כְּאַפְקִירוּתָא - not because it looks like impudence, meaning not *only* because it looks like impudence, אֲלֵא מִשּׁוּם דְּלֵא מְסַתֵּי עָא מְלִתָּא - but rather because he won't be aided by Hashem to speak correctly. That's an important part of what we're saying here tonight.

The Torah is much more than information; it's much more than *se'ifim* in the *Shulchan Aruch* and *dafim* in *Shas*. What it really is, is Har Sinai all over again! And the same *Shechina* that came to rest in Har Sinai and then moved into the *Mishkan* and the *Lishkas Hagazis*, continues to rest on the *gedolei Yisroel* - and anyone who speaks out of turn, and doesn't consult them for Torah attitudes is turning away from Har Sinai and he is going to stumble and fall into error. Hakodosh Boruch Hu desires that the Jewish people be loyal and humbled toward the *chachmei hatorah*, just like they stood in fear and humility at the foot of Har Sinai.

Part III. We Rely on Them

THE BIG MISSTEP IN LIFE

Now, if we want to understand what this lesson means, what it means that *Matan Torah* is taking place even today, so we'll first make the following statement. It's not something you'll want to hear, but I'll say it anyhow: *One of the biggest missteps a man can make is to use his own judgement to make decisions.* Because to come to a decision in Torah; Torah attitudes, Torah ideals, or a decision in public policy, you must use all the facilities at your disposal, and the most important facility is the direct line to *Matan Torah*.

Suppose a person is lost. He's sitting in his car on the side of a highway lost. So, the common sense procedure is, the first gas station or the first policeman he meets, he asks directions. He can look at a map that he has in the glove compartment; maybe he'll understand it a little bit, but he doesn't know which highway he is on and where he's trying to get. So he must get advice. And to ignore such a simple expedient of going to those who know, means that this man is reckless - and he'll wander the highways all day long thinking he knows what he's doing!

MT. SINAI ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE

Now in Torah matters it's common sense that the great Torah authorities are the ones most competent to guide the people. But here we have to add, not only in Torah matters, but in *all* matters of public policy, the *gedolei yisroel* are the ones most fitted for this function. People don't understand that it's the *gedolei yisroel* who should be making public policy. We're not accustomed to that idea. Oh sure, we recognize a *gadol*. A *gadol* is someone who sits quietly somewhere in his study and when you have a difficult question in *issur v'heter*, a question in *kosher* or *treifeh*, you go to him - that's as far as we understand a *gadol*.

People think, let's say, that Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky in Monsey or Rav Moshe Feinstein on the Lower East Side, they are good for asking a question in halacha, especially when you want a leniency. You call him up and he says, "Yes," so now you can say "Rav Moshe Feinstein said it's *muttar*." That's all you want. But to ask him about a matter of public policy? "It's not necessary," you think, "because my head is as good as his head." You won't say that, but that's what you're thinking.

HIS HEAD IS BIGGER THAN YOUR HEAD

And I'm being generous when I say that because many people think that their heads are better than Rav Yaakov's head or Rav Moshe's head. But it's a fallacy! Because the *gedolei Torah* have tens of thousands of precedents that they are studying. The Torah is full of precedents; the *gemara* is full of precedents. And each precedent teaches a lesson.

And even if they don't think of the source - let's say you ask Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky: Should the State of Israel do this or that, then, even though he doesn't think of the *blatt gemara*, or the chapter that it is, but he has patterns in his mind. The *gadol* has Torah patterns in his mind, established according to the precedents he studies. And when he advises, he's following the patterns in his Torah mind, the ultimate source of wisdom. He is thinking according to that great day on Har Sinai.

Now, it could be when you call him up on the phone you won't hear loud booms of thunder. He's a quiet old man. But if you understand what *Matan Torah* was, you stand in awe of this great man, the same way the *Am Yisroel* were awed when they heard the Voice of Hashem speaking at Har Sinai.

THE SIGHETER RAV VISITS MOUNT SINAI

And it's only when a person has that *yirah*, that awe for *Matan Torah*, that he knows what it means to come to the *chachmei hatorah*. The wise men know that. I once stayed in the country in the summer and I saw how the *Sigheter Rav* - he was a *yungerman* then, a *talmidim chochom* - and I saw how he would stand bent over in front of Rav Moshe Feinstein; he stood there with *hachna'ah*, making sure to catch every word that came out of Rav Moshe's mouth.

Of course, if you want to ask how you can repair your leaking radiator, don't go to the *gadol*. But if you have questions relating to matters of public policy, of behaviors of communities, or of how to deal with people, where to move, when to go out to work, what type of work, what *Beis Yaakov* to choose for your daughter, *shidduchim* - there's so much we need guidance in - so we go to the *gedolim*.

DON'T DRAW UP PLANS

The proper way would be, not that people should initiate the plan and then go to a sage to have it approved. They should ask the sages, "What plans should we initiate?" That's the way to ask. "We

don't know anything," they should be thinking, "What do *you* say?" And really they don't know anything. Because all of the best advice, all the best plans, and the best attitudes for success are found in the Torah. Because it all goes back to the source - Har Sinai.

But what do we see? That the *ba'alei batim* come to *Matan Torah* with all the plans ready to go. You draw up a whole plan, a whole outline, and then you bring it to your sage, and you say, "What do you say to this?" What do you expect from the sages? They see who they're dealing with. "Am I going to fight with you?" They're happy they have Orthodox Jews who are loyal to them - they might even lose these. So they say, "Yes." That's not asking.

Let's say there was an Orthodox organization - they even have a company of sages whom they consult. But they consult them in such a way that the sages see it's the only way. The *ba'alei batim* are saying, "It's our way or the highway." Of course, it's done with *kavod* and *hachna'ah*, but that's really what they're saying in their hearts. And so, when the sages say "Yes," it's like they were forced in one direction.

THE POLITICIANS LEAD US AWAY FROM HAR SINAI

You have to go to them and be explicit, "What do *you* say? What should be done?" Not, "Do you approve of this?" It should be the sages who draw up the plans. And if they don't want to draw up the plans, it means no plans should be drawn up.

It's like people who want to make a day of a demonstration, for a certain cause. So who signs the proclamation? Politicians and District Attorneys, a newspaper man, and a rabbi you never heard of. And there are many Orthodox Jews who become excited. They have to go out and demonstrate! And then after they printed up all the signatures already, some of them go to a *gadol* and say, "What do you say?" And this *gadol* - a kind-hearted man - that's why they picked him out to be a *gadol*! So they go to him with the plan, and he says *farvuss nisht?* - Why not?

Did this *gadol* tell the *talmidim* in his *yeshiva* to go? No! He didn't tell his *yeshiva* to go out and demonstrate. Isn't that the best proof that he doesn't approve of it? But these people are only looking for what they want, so this kind hearted man gives them what they want. That's not called asking from Har Sinai - that's not called *kabolas hatorah*.

SHOULD I GO TO ERETZ YISROEL?

It's not enough to ask, because sometimes asking merely means that you want a confirmation of your own desires. Here's a man who comes to the rabbi, "I'm going on a hunting expedition in the Canadian Rockies; would you give me a *bracha*?" The rabbi sees that this fellow is not going to listen to him anyhow. He sees the man has already bought camping equipment, and he has a big trailer already. He has fur coats, everything; he's only asking out of formality. That's what people do; they go to Har Sinai with their mind made up already. So the rabbi says, "Go." He means, "Go, even though you might get killed." That's what it means. "I'm giving you permission to go and risk your life, because you don't really want to know what the Torah thinks."

And I say the Rockies because at least that maybe you'll understand what I'm saying. But even to Eretz Yisroel; did you ever ask, "Should I fly to Eretz Yisroel for my nephew's wedding?" "Should I take my son to Eretz Yisroel for his *bar-mitzvah*?" No, you don't ask; you do, and do, and do more, and that means you're abrogating the the transmission of Torah from Har Sinai for yourself. You're big enough, you think; you don't need the opinion of Har Sinai. Or even worse, you think that the Torah has nothing important to say about the Canadian Rockies.

SHOULD I LEARN KABALAH?

The person who chooses to make his own way in life, without following the *chachmei hatorah*, will *chas v'shalom* be led further and further away from Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Even if he thinks he's walking on the path that was paved for us at Har Sinai, if he's not subjugated to the *chachomim* who stand in the place of Moshe Rabeinu, if he's not walking the path that the *chachmei hador* want him to walk on, so he'll go lost. There's no such thing as one or two people making a *shittah* that is opposed by the *chachmei Yisroel*.

I'll give you an example. Suppose somebody chooses a *derech* in *avodas Hashem* that none of the *roshei yeshiva*, or that none of the *Chassidisheh Rebbehs* favor - they don't do it. Let's say this man believes in *kabalah*. *Kabalah*; there's no question that there's such a thing as *kabalah*. But the *chachmei hatorah* say that a man has to sit and learn - you have to learn *Shas* and *poskim* - and this man doesn't open a *gemara*; he has no connection to the will of the *chachmei hatorah*. He just sits and learns *kabalah*.

Any *shittah* that a person adopts that is not approved by the *chachmei hador* so he should know that it's *pitui ha'yetzer*. Anybody who sits and learns only *kabalah* and he never made an attempt to learn *Bava Kama*, *Bava Metziah*, *Gittin*, *Kiddushin* - at least the *yeshiva masichtos*, so that person is a failure, no question about it. "All the *gedolim* are mistaken except for I and my little group." This man is being *poreish* from the important principle of *na'aseh v'nishma*. He's choosing his own way in life - and anyone who chooses a different way than the *chachmei hador* do, should know that he's walking further and further away from that great day of *Matan Torah*.

THE BLIND SHEEP LEARN TO SEE

The best way to see things in this world is by means of the eyes of greater people. The *einei ha'eidah*, the eyes of the congregation; that's what the Sanhedrin is called. Because they are the ones who see.

Now, when a modern rabbi hears this, he rebels against it: "What do you mean? Are we blind sheep that others should tell us about what we see with our own eyes?" And the answer is, absolutely. That's *daas Torah*. Seeing the world through the lens of the Torah is the only way to see. And it's the *chachmei hador* who see.

In every generation there are people who are more gifted because of their *yegiah*, their labor, in Torah. And therefore even certain things that are not written openly in the Torah; you don't see it mentioned in *gemara* or the *Shulchan Aruch*, yet they use their minds to create an opinion that ordinary people may not see.

The *einei ha'eidah* is an important subject when we speak about *Matan Torah*. It's not merely a *mashal*, a form of speech. It's a *limud l'maisah*, that we should consider them as our eyes. And we should look through their eyes. And if they tell us that they see this and this and we look and see nothing or we see the opposite of what they tell us, so we should know that we are the ones who can't see.

WE ARE ALL LITTLE CHILDREN

Of course, that needs dedication. It needs what is called *emunas chachomim*. And what's more is that it needs *seichel*. To understand that we are actually shortsighted takes wisdom. It's like children; you know that every little boy and girl think they see everything. They think they see as much as their parents. And really

he sees nothing; he's as blind as could be. Even when he's actually looking at something, he often doesn't see it.

We have to understand that the *hamon am*, that's us, we don't see many things. And many times we see the opposite of what really is. And therefore it's the *einei ha'eidah*, the *chachmei hador*, when they look and they tell us that this is the way to go - not that way, and not the other way, but this way, so it's up to us to understand that we must look through *their* eyes.

DON'T PIPE UP!

And that's why it's so important to be in contact with *gedolei Yisroel* on every phase of our lives - in business, in health, in family affairs; in every matter that we experience in life. Not only because that's how you'll succeed in this world - that's true too, but more than that is because that's what Hashem wanted from us when we stood at Har Sinai; that we should always stand before the *chachmei hatorah* the same way the Am Yisroel stood at Har Sinai, with trepidation, with awe, with *hachna'ah*; subjugation of our thoughts and ideals.

And just like at Har Sinai no one would pipe up while Hashem was thundering His words, "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*," - nobody would pipe up and say, "We'll, maybe it should be like this or that," or "I think that *this* is the right way," That's the way we should approach the Torah today.

THE MISHKAN RECREATES SINAI

And so we come back to the warnings in *Parshas Bamidbar*, the admonitions about how we're expected to approach the Mishkan, and we understand that, among other things, they were intended to create the feeling of Har Sinai. And that's because Hashem insists that the sublime feelings of awe and fear which we gained there should continue always. Although the passage of time tends to blunt the clarity of those feelings, Hashem wants the *Ma'amad Har Sinai* to continue forever - in the *Mishkan*, in the Beis Hamikdash, and then by the *chachmei Yisroel* who continue to be the source of Torah today.

And therefore we approach the *gedolei Yisroel* today with the same reverence and fear that we approached Har Sinai. It's a common misconception that the greatest accomplishment that took place at Har Sinai was that we received the Torah. Although it's true, that's what we came to Har Sinai for - but Hashem had other plans

too. Hakodosh Boruch Hu wanted to instill in us an awe of *Kabolas Hatorah* that would last forever.

And so, *Shavuot* becomes a most important *yomtiv*, because it's the day we relive that experience of *nafshi yatza b'dabro*, and we inscribe in our *neshamos* that great scene of *Kabolas Hatorah* with all of its awe and fear. And we thereby prepare ourselves and our families for the *kabolas hatorah* that we are expected to experience all year long, as we turn to the *chachmei hatorah* in all the details of our lives, attempting to live according to the will of Hashem that He revealed to us at Har Sinai.

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Q&A

With
Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l



Q:

How are we to determine which *talmid chochom* has the right Torah attitudes in order to attach ourselves to the right person? And if he has wrong Torah attitudes what should we do about it?

A:

How are we to determine which Torah teacher has the right Torah attitudes? So the question is – how are we to determine which physician is competent? Let's say you move into a new neighborhood and you want to find a competent doctor. So first you will have to consult the New York State Board of Licensing. If the doctor has a genuine certificate that allows him to practice medicine, that proves that he passed the Board of Licensing tests. In that case, he probably knows something about medicine. Probably he can prescribe medicine, let's say for a headache or something like that.

If you want more competence than that, then you'll have to ask your old family physician to investigate among his peers in your new neighborhood and he'll be able to tell you. If you need to know about a good specialist, you'll have to investigate even further. You'll ask your family doctor and others who know the specialists. You don't just go to a specialist on your own. You have to make sure to have someone recommend a good doctor.

Finding a *talmid chochom* with the right attitudes is at least as important as finding a good doctor. And therefore if you want to know if a *talmid chochom* is competent you should go to the Yeshivas and speak to the Roshei Yeshiva. Speak to them and ask them. Don't be lazy about it. There are Roshei Yeshiva in almost every big place today. You have Roshei Yeshiva in Cleveland. There are Roshei Yeshiva in Chicago, in Toronto, in Montreal, in Baltimore. So you ask them and they'll tell you.

Now, you ask – if you determine that a *talmid chochom* has wrong Torah attitudes what do you do about it? Number one is to have no contact with him. That's most important. And probably you can't do any more than that.

TAPE #119

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