

## דרכים בשנה סכות



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The Gemara in Maseches Rosh Hashanah (11a) discusses the date of Yitzchok's birth. The Gemara says that the *Malachim* came to visit Avraham and Sarah on Pesach, and Yitzchok was born on the following Pesach. This is proven from the fact that Avraham was making *ugos* – a reference to *matzah* – at the time. However, the Gemara also brings another lesser-known opinion that maintains that although the birth was on Pesach, the date of the initial visit was actually on Sukkos. בפסח נולד יצחק, מנלן כדכתיב: "למועד אשוב אליך" אימת קאי וכו' אלא דקאי בחג וקאמר לה בניסן – *It was taught in the baraisa: On Pesach, Yitzchok was born. The Gemara asks: From where do we learn this? As it is written that the Malach who informed Sarah that she would bear a son told Avraham: "At the appointed time [mo'ed] I will return to you, at this season, and Sarah shall have a son" (Bereishis 18:14). This is understood to mean: At the time of the next Yom Tov [mo'ed]. When did the Malach say this?... Rather, you must say that it was Sukkos, and he spoke about the Yom Tov that occurs in the month of Nissan, i.e., Pesach.*

Some (see Rav Chaim Kanievsky *zt"l* in Ta'ama De'kra on our *pasuk*) bring a

proof to this Gemara based on the Midrash Rabbah (Bamidbar Rabbah 12:2): באברהם כתיב והשענו תחת העץ, שעשה להם סוכה והקדוש ברוך הוא עשה סכות לבניו ביציאתם ממצרים כי *And he reclined them under the tree, i.e. he made for them a Sukkah, and in this merit, Hashem made Sukkos for His children when they left Mitzrayim, as it says: I made the Bnei Yisroel live in Sukkos when I brought them out of the land of Mitzrayim.*

The question on this Midrash is obvious: If we understand that the tree that they sat under refers to the Sukkah, this would be problematic because as we know, the Mishna (Sukkah 1:2) teaches: העושה סוכתו – תחת האילן, כאילו עשאה בתוך הבית – a Sukkah that is directly beneath a tree is considered as if it is inside of a house, rendering it *pasul*. The reason for this is because the Sukkah must be covered with *s'chach* that is not *mechubar le'karka* (connected to the ground).

There are different answers that have been offered. (The Ostrovtzer *zt"l* has a fascinating answer based on the rules of *bittul* and how it pertains to a *goy* – ומובא בגליון מתורת הג"ר נחום נבנצל שליט"א בשם הגאון מאוסטרובצ'ה זיע"א שביאר דבזוה"ק איתא שאסור להכניס גוי לסוכה, ואמנם אאע"ה קיים כה"ת כולה אבל לא היה לו דין ישראל לקולא – ולכן לא היה לו מותר לישב בסוכה סתם, ולכן לקח אילן המחובר לקרקע וביטלו ברוב ענפים תלושים ע"י סוכה יא, א ובכה"ג יצא ידי חובה לכל הצדדים כידוע מהפרמ"ג דאין דין ביטול ברוב בעכו"ם, וא"כ (לצד שהוא עכו"ם הסוכה פסולה ולא ישב בסוכה).

Rav Menachem Mendel Hager *zt"l* (the Tzemach Tzaddik of Vizhnitz) offered the following idea. After Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we are all elevated and now have the ability to leave the *gashmiyus*, the materialism of this world, raising ourselves a little bit higher. The way we accomplish this is by leaving our homes and entering into the Sukkah, thus disconnecting from the *artziyus* – no longer being grounded into the earth, raising ourselves towards the Heavens. Avraham Avinu did not need to undergo this *avodah* to accomplish this goal. Avraham was able to do this on his own, as he was never really connected to the *gashmiyus* of this world in the first place. He was a heavenly person and had already achieved this goal of disconnecting from below and raising himself up above. As a result, his Sukkah was allowed to be *מחובר לקרקע* – connected to the ground.<sup>1</sup>

I once heard a beautiful story about a *heiligh* group of Yidden who were in Auschwitz with their Rav, Rabbi Eliyahu Munk of Paris. It was the Yom Tov of Sukkos, and the Rav and his followers did not want the *mitzvah* of Sukkah to be forgotten. Although it is halachically unfit for a Sukkah, the group sat under a tree during Sukkos – right there in the middle of Auschwitz – as a commemoration of the *mitzvah*, as if to say: “Ribono shel Olam, this year we are under a tree – but

we ask that next year we will once again merit to fulfill the *mitzvah* properly in a kosher Sukkah.”

It occurred to me that according to the aforementioned Tzemach Tzaddik, these holy Yidden in Auschwitz – who were totally detached from even the tiniest drop of *gashmiyus* – fulfilled the *mitzvah* of Sukkah in the exact same manner as Avraham Avinu.

The same Mishnah continues: *סכה על גבי סכה, העליונה כשרה והתחתונה פסולה. רבי יהודה אומר, אם אין דיורין בעליונה התחתונה כשרה* – *If one built a Sukkah atop another Sukkah, the upper Sukkah is kosher and the lower Sukkah is pasul. Rabi Yehuda says: If there is no one living in the upper Sukkah, the lower Sukkah is kosher.*

According to what we said, we can explain this Mishnah as follows: The goal of Sukkos is to detach ourselves from this lower world and move ourselves upwards. If we remain in the “lower Sukkah” – i.e., down below, attached to the ground – we have not fulfilled the *mitzvah*. Rabi Yehuda replied that the reality is that people live in the world down below; they don’t dwell in the Heavens. So, what then is the deciding factor? *אם אין דיורין בעליונה* – “If there is no one living in the upper Sukkah, then the lower Sukkah is kosher.” We may in fact be down here below, but do we have other things taking up our head-space above us that cause a

<sup>1</sup> (The *seforim hakedoshim* teach us that one of the reasons why *rikudim*/dancing is so important is because as we lift up our feet off of the ground, we

are doing the same thing: detaching from the ground and lifting ourselves heavenwards.)

separation between us and *Avinu she'bashamayim*?

The Yom Tov of Sukkos is our opportunity to enter a time and space that is clear of all earthly connections, and truly become one with Hashem. May we be *zoche* this Yom Tov to bask in the *Shechinah*, fully giving ourselves over to Hashem.

### זמן שמחתנו

While the Yom Tov of Sukkos has three different names (Chag, Asif and Sukkos), the Yom Tov is also referred to as “Zman Simchaseinu.” Sukkos is synonymous with joy and happiness. A mere look at the calendar and the timing of the Yom Tov couldn't possibly be better. After the Yamim Nora'im, who would not be able to appreciate such joy?

But how are we to understand the way in which we observe the *simcha* of our Yom Tov? Imagine having a conversation with a neighbor and telling him that you've been through some trying times recently and now you plan on taking a well-deserved vacation. Naturally, he asks what you have planned, and you go on to explain that you will be temporarily relocating to a frail hut in your backyard. “Uh... That's how you Jews celebrate happiness?” he will surely be wondering. And if that's not enough, in the middle of Yom Tov we read the words of Koheles 2:2 “ולשמחה מה זה עשה” “*And of joy – what does it accomplish?*” This is difficult to

understand; are we meant to be happy or not?

Dovid Hamelech writes in Tehillim (16:11): תודיעני ארה חיים שבע שמחות את פניך – *You will reveal to me the path of life, the fullness of joy in Your presence.* The Midrash explains that the Yamim Nora'im teach us the “way of life,” and the “fullness of joy” is shown to us through the observance of Sukkos. Chazal are teaching us that there is a cause-and-effect association between Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur and Sukkos. *Lehavdil*, just as one can have a much greater appreciation for a vacation after working through a very hard season, Chazal are telling us that Sukkos will be enjoyed that much more after we experience the Yamim Nora'im.

Rav Dessler takes the aforementioned *pasuk* in Tehillim one step further, linking the months of Tammuz, Av and Elul to these words as well. First we go through days of despair, recalling the *Churban*, and in general feeling displaced and far from home in the world around us. At that point, we are no longer disillusioned with the security that the world may appear to offer us. Continuing through time, we arrive at Elul. It is because of the realization that our true security is in the hands of the *Eibishter* and no one else that we are able to come to Him with thoughts of *teshuvah* and renewal. Continuing our odyssey, we are now prepared to arrive at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The

final stop in this journey will be Sukkos, the *zman* of *simcha*.

This authentic *simcha* that the Torah talks about can only be achieved after all of our illusions have been purged. Once we recognize that it is only Hashem that gives us our protection, can we now enter even a flimsy hut and feel secure in our knowledge that He watches over us. This frail, temporary home suddenly takes on a whole new meaning. We now realize that we are in the most secure environment possible.

If we take a closer look at the words of *L'Dovid Hashem Ori* (Tehillim 27:5) that we recite from the beginning of Elul until Simchas Torah, we can glean a better understanding of why we have the custom to recite this prayer. *כי יצפוני בסכה – ביום רעה* – *In the day of trouble He will hide me in His shelter (Sukkah)*. Hashem will hide us – where? In a Sukkah! Not in a large house, not in Fort Knox... but in a Sukkah. Similarly, when we ask Hashem to spread over us His protection of peace, we ask for *Sukkas shlomecha*; Hashem's children understand that true protection is not by the strength and power of man's might, but rather by Hashem Himself. This is what the Sukkah symbolizes.

In the *bentching* of *Sukkos*, we add in an additional “*harachaman*” – asking Hashem to erect the fallen Sukkah of Dovid. The Maharal explains this with the same approach that we are discussing. We don't ask for the House of Dovid to be

rebuilt – but rather his Sukkah. A kingdom is often called a “house” in order to indicate its power and strength. Dovid's kingdom, however, does not rely on this. It is referred to as “*Sukkas Dovid*” because Dovid fully understood that the protection of his kingdom was completely in Hashem's hands.

We now understand why we read *Koheles* on Sukkos. It is to remind us that true happiness is not when the harvest has been reaped and our barns are filled to capacity, but rather when we place our full faith only in Hashem. *שבע שמחה* – “*the fullness of joy*” can only be realized if and when it is *את פניך* – in Hashem's presence.

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The Gemara in Maseches Yoma (86b) points out the following *stirah*/contradiction. On the one hand, we find that *teshuvah* is so great that it can transform one's intentional sins into unintentional ones. Yet, in another comment of the Gemara, we find that when one does *teshuvah*, his intentional sins become like merits. The Gemara resolves this by explaining that it depends if the *teshuvah* was done *me'ahava* – out of love for Hashem, or *mi'yirah* – out of fear of Hashem.

After working on ourselves for so long now, it may be quite difficult to read yet another *vort* on *teshuvah*, but let's take another look – this time through the Yom Tov of Sukkos. When taking the right

approach, one can achieve *teshuvah me'ahava*.

From a look at our calendar, it's obvious that Sukkos follows Yom Kippur so closely because it is necessary for the completion of our *teshuvah*. In the middle of Yom Tov, we have Hoshanah Rabbah – which is known as *chosam b'soch chosam*, as this is the final leg in the *teshuvah* journey. But what exactly is the *teshuvah* of Sukkos?

I heard a *mashal* that can help explain this. The king needed to pass through a certain town. All the residents – men, women and children – came out waving their banners and cheering for their king. Suddenly, there was a great silence. A man had hurled a stone directly at the king's head; he began bleeding profusely. He was immediately rushed away to be treated, and the assailant was seized.

No one knew what to say or do. The people were stunned. How could one even *think* of hurting their beloved king – let alone actually act upon that thought? The man was taken to be hung. During the hanging, the king suddenly cried out: “STOP! Release him!” The executioner and the crowd were silent. What could possibly be the explanation behind the king's sudden change of heart? The king's attacker was brought to him, and he said: “I would like to appoint you as one of my advisors.” The king went on to say that from now on, this assailant would live within the royal palace with his family, dressing in the finest and eating only the

best, never having another financial worry.

At first, the man was elated by the king's words – but, at the same time, he was completely dumbfounded. His guilt for his previous action was too strong to bear; yet, the king was showering him with gift after gift. From that moment on, he truly regretted his shameful behavior, and began to revere and service the great king that showed him such continuous unadulterated love.

On Erev Yom Kippur we are told to eat a large *seudah*. However, *halachah* tells us that this meal should be eaten after *Mincha*, so that we first recite *viduy*. Can one that has proper *kavanah* during this *Mincha* possibly have an appetite to eat afterwards? Yet we are told to eat a lavish feast. After Yom Kippur, we are urged “*lech echol b'simcha*” – “Go, eat in happiness.” Next, we are told to enter the Sukkah. One cannot help but look around the table at his beautiful family, dressed in their Yom Tov finest – not to mention the creative decorations, the first class tableware, delicious foods and lively *nigunim* – all graced with the presence of none other than the *heiliger Ushpizin*. It is right there in the Sukkah, under the *tzilah demehemnusa* (shade of faith), that we can easily ask ourselves if we are worthy of all the *chesed* that the *Eibeshter* gives us after the year we have turned in. It is in the Sukkah that we feel the strong *ahavah* that Hashem shows us. It is there that we can come to reciprocate to our Father Above

by finally returning to Him with *Teshuvah Me'ahavah*!

One of the major focuses of the Yom Tov is the concept of *ahavah v'reyus*. This is shown when the *aravah* – that has no taste or smell – is joined together with the other three species. The midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12) tells us that this hints to the concept of all the Yidden joining together no matter what stripe or type for the purpose of showing true love for one another.

Another place that this can be seen is from Rabi Eliezer's opinion (Sukkah 11b) that the Sukkos that we sat inside of in the *midbar* were actually the *ananei hakavod*/clouds of glory. It is well known that the great character trait of Aharon Hakohein was *אוהב שלום ורודף שלום אוהב* – he had a deep love for all of Klal Yisroel. He would chase down any opportunity to keep people together and preserve unity. It is no wonder that when he died, the *ananei hakavod* left as well.

Aside from the numerous *halachos* governing how to make a proper Sukkah, what is kosher for *s'chach*, and how high the walls must be, there are also *halachos* that dictate the proper behavior one must adhere to while inside a Sukkah. For example, after bringing the food into the Sukkah, the empty or dirty dishes must be removed. The Sukkah may not contain any garbage; it must be kept as clean and tidy as possible. And, just as one may not

keep any physical waste inside the Sukkah – one may also not talk *lashon hara* inside the Sukkah. Of course, it is never permitted, but one must be that much more careful inside the *tzilah d'mehemnusah*.

If we take a closer look at the prohibition of *lashon hara*, we can find a strong connection to the *ananei hakavod* – and why it is so detrimental to speaking negatively of other Yidden in the Sukkah.

One of the consequences of the *tzora's* that comes from speaking *lashon hara* is the requirement to dwell in isolation; the *metzora* must be sent *chutz lamachaneh*. Chazal explain that this is *midah k'neged midah*: by speaking badly about others, we are creating divisiveness between people, causing people to be alienated from their friends. The Torah wants this person to experience the same loneliness and isolation that he caused with his words by sending him out of the camp.

The Rizhiner Rebbe *zt"l* shared a tremendous insight into understanding the *ananei hakavod*. What connection does *kavod* (glory) have with these clouds? The simple *p'shat*, of course, is that these clouds gave honor to Klal Yisroel by surrounding them.

The Rebbe offered a novel *p'shat* based on the way clouds are formed.

(Here's some science 101: Air can hold just so much moisture before it becomes saturated. Once humidity hits 100%, the water will begin to condense out of the air into droplets or crystals of ice, depending

on the temperature. Warm air can hold more water vapor than cold air can. As the air cools, water is visibly squeezed out into the air. This can be seen in the wintertime when we speak outside and you can actually see your breath. The warm, moist air that we've breathed out is suddenly cooled, and it can no longer hold the moisture, so the water condenses out of the air into the vapor that we see. A small amount of vapor from our breath will quickly disperse into the air surrounding, and on a much more massive scale, clouds can be formed.)

The Rebbe explains that the clouds surrounding Klal Yisroel were created by the collective breaths of the Yidden! This happened when the breaths would fuse together, forming great clouds. However, when people don't get along, their vapors cannot fuse and become one. It is only through *achdus* that *ananim* come to be.

We now understand why they were called *ananei hakavod*. There was no greater honor for *Klal Yisroel* than the fact that 600,000 Yidden demonstrated such a high level of love for one another. Furthermore, not only did these clouds give *kavod*, they were actually created as a direct result of the mutual *kavod* that they had for one another – מפני שנהגו כבוד זה לזה.

One who speaks *lashon hara* must be removed from within the *machaneh*, the place of unity under the *ananim*. These very clouds that were created by unity

cannot tolerate one that can destroy it from within.

Inside the Sukkah, we are supposed to focus on the reasons why we are sitting there. If we had the clouds because we spoke positively about the next person, it goes without saying that the proper respect for a Sukkah is to adhere to the *halachos* of *lashon hara* and to be extra careful with our speech.

### הושענא רבה

During the *hakafos* of Hoshana Rabba, we circle the *bimah* seven times. The Yerushalmi comments that this is done זכר ליריחו – in memory of the seven times that Yericho was circled. We also make mention of Yericho in the *tefillos* that we say on Hoshana Rabba.

The connection between the two can be explained as follows: Just as the seven circuits around Yericho had the power of causing the mighty walls to come crashing down, our *tefillos* and *hakafos* as well can also cause the mightiest walls and barriers to collapse and come crashing down.

There are many types of walls that get erected during the course of the year, but the toughest of them all are the inner walls that we erect between us and Hashem. Rav Elazar comments in Maseches Brachos (32b) that from the time of the *churban* and onwards, there is a wall of iron that has been erected between Klal Yisroel and Hashem. Furthermore, the

gates of *tefillah* have been locked making it that much more difficult to connect. Hoshana Rabbah is an incredible opportunity to break down even those walls through *tefillah* and proper *teshuvah*.

The story is told of the time that the daughter of the great Baron Rothchild got engaged to the son of the local tailor, one of the poorest men in town. Prior to announcing the engagement, the Baron sat down with his prospective *mechutan* to discuss the young couple's finances. "I will give the couple a mansion here and a summer home there, a full staff of servants and, of course, unlimited access to my bank accounts for all their needs," said the Baron. "And what will you be giving?" The poor tailor replied that he didn't have the resources to give anything of the sort. The Baron clarified that while he wasn't expecting an equal partnership, he did expect that the tailor should do his share – which the Baron estimated as a minimum of 10,000 shilling. The tailor once again replied that even if he would mend every ripped sock in town, he wouldn't be able to come close to those funds. "Then borrow the money," the Baron challenged. With no choice, the tailor agreed and exited the meeting. A few minutes later, there was a knock at the Baron's door; the tailor was back. "Baron Rothchild, I am here to request a loan of 10,000 shilling to marry off my son!"

The *seforim* explain that during the Yamim Nora'im, many of us make

promises to Hashem as part of our bargaining for a sweet year. Now is the time to ask Hashem to give us the wherewithal to make good on those promises.

### שמחת תורה

וימת שם משה עבד ה' בארץ מואב על פי ה' (לד:ה) "So Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there, in the land of Moav, by the mouth of Hashem" (34:5)

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שכל התורה המצויה עתה – בידינו היא הנתונה למשה רבנו עליו השלום – *I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that is now in our possession is the same that was given to Moshe Rabbeinu* ע"ה. The Mishna in Sanhedrin (90a) includes the belief in the divinity of the Torah – meaning that it was dictated by Hashem to Moshe – as an essential element of Yiddishkeit. The Gemara (ibid. 99a) goes on to say that this means that even if a person were to say that a single *pasuk* in all the Torah was written by Moshe on his own, and not dictated by Hashem, he lacks this essential belief.

The Gemara in Maseches Menachos (30a) discusses the question of who wrote the final eight *pesukim* of the Torah. The *pasuk* states וימת שם משה – *and Moshe died there*. Can it be that Moshe wrote these words if he was still alive at the time? If so, then at that moment, the words were not true!



The Gemara gives two answers: The first answer is that indeed, the final eight *pesukim* were authored by Yehoshua and *not* Moshe. The second answer is that Moshe wrote them – and if you will ask how these words weren't considered as a lie, the Gemara answers that Moshe wrote them “*b'dema*” – with his tears. (To avoid any question, the Zohar offers yet a third answer: Moshe had already died, and Hashem brought him back to life to finish writing these last eight *pesukim*. (Based on this, the Malbim says a beautiful *pshat* on the *pasuk* “*Toras Hashem temima*,” the Torah is complete, “*meshivas nafesh*” – because Hashem brought back the *nefesh* of Moshe to complete the last eight *pesukim*.)

The Baal Shem Tov offers a most fascinating insight into this Gemara which literally sheds new light on the entire Torah. The word *b'dema* does not necessarily mean tears. In the terminology of the Gemara, “*dema*” can mean “mixture.” Accordingly, the Gemara is answering that the last eight *pesukim* were in fact written by Moshe, but as a mixture. Hashem gave Moshe the letters to write. When they were written by Moshe, they had no meaning. Posthumously, they were rearranged to read *Vayomos Shom Moshe*. The Torah is so vast that one can read it and re-read it over and over again, and still find a novelty each and every time. The Rishonim tell us that the Torah has no *nekudos* (vowels) because this would constrict it to the literal reading; in reality,

it can be rearranged in an endless array of ways which can be interpreted on multiple levels.

This brings us to a new understanding of a well-known Gemara in Maseches Shabbos. A prospective convert approached Hillel asking to be converted on the basis of his accepting only the *Torah Shebichsav* (written Torah) but not the *Torah Shebal Peh* (Oral Torah). Hillel accepted him and began to teach him. The Gemara relates that on day one, he taught him the *Aleph Beis*. On the following day, he switched around the order and first taught him the final letter *taf* and continued until *aleph*. The convert questioned this method: “But yesterday you taught it to me the opposite way?” to which Hillel replied: “Yesterday, you accepted it based on my say so, so accept today's as well.” In the end, the convert accepted the entire Torah.

What is the give and take of this story? We can attempt to explain this as follows: The convert was willing to accept the written Torah because he saw it in front of him. But when it came to the Oral Torah, he questioned its validity. “Where is this written; says who?” Hillel proceeded to teach him the *Aleph Beis*, implying that if you read the letters in the traditional manner, you are right; the Torah seems to be missing a lot of information. But the next day, Hillel showed him how to turn the letters around, how to reconfigure the letters of the Torah to give brand new meanings and open up entire new worlds.

Upon seeing and understanding this, the convert was able to see that all was contained within the Torah and he was now willing to accept the entire Torah; he recognized that without the Oral Torah, it would be impossible to grasp the simplest reading of the texts.

When we hear people say that so-and-so “knows the entire Torah backwards and forwards,” this does not merely mean that he knows the Torah clearly. It means that any which way you show it to him, there is a new *chiddush* to be gleaned. As Chazal say: “*Hafoch bah vehafoch bah, dikula bah*” – keep on turning it over again and again; it’s all there. (We can now also understand why upon the completion of the Torah, we lift it backwards for all to see.)

וזאת הברכה אשר ברך משה איש האלקים את  
בני ישראל לפני מותו. ויאמר ה' מסיני בא וזרה  
משעיר למו הופיע מהר פארן ואתה מרבבת קדש  
מימינו אשדת למו (לג:א-ב)

*And this is the brocha with which Moshe, the man of God, blessed the Bnei Yisroel before his death. He said: "HaShem came from Sinai and shone forth from Seir to them; He appeared from Har Paran and came with some of the holy myriads; from His right hand He presented the fiery Torah for them (34:1-2)*

Prior to giving Klal Yisroel the brochos before his death, Moshe Rabbeinu begins

by praising HaShem and recalling the zechusim that made Klal Yisroel worthy of receiving HaShem’s brocha. The *passuk* tells us how HaShem had awesomely revealed Himself at Har Sinai. Furthermore, HaShem *came* to Klal Yisroel as a chosson would come to greet his kallah, thus demonstrating HaShem’s “desire” for Klal Yisroel as His people.

The *passuk* carries on, relating how HaShem first went to Seir and Paran (Esav’s decendant’s) offering them the Torah, but they did not accept it. The *gemara* in *Mesechta Avoda Zara* (2b) elaborates that HaShem actually first offered the Torah to each and every nation and every tongue. They all asked for a sampling of what is written in the Torah, and after hearing that this would mean not being able to steal, murder, and a host of other items, they declined. Not one nation was willing to accept it, until He came to Bnei Yisroel. HaShem’s chosen people accepted the Torah without even asking about its contents. They said straight up, בעשה ונשמע.

Although this is meant to sound like praise for Klal Yisroel because we accepted the Torah whereas everyone rejected it, this sounds like we were not HaShem’s very first choice, and not even His 69<sup>th</sup> choice. Don’t we say every morning the bracha of אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את התורה? Can this really be called “being chosen from all other nations”, when they were all offered the Torah and they rejected it? If anything, it sounds like it was us that

chose HaShem, and not the other way around!

Another question that must be asked is that when the other nations inquired about the contents, HaShem told them about prohibitions that they were in any event already obligated to keep as required by the *מצוות בני נח*, so in truth HaShem was not really offering them something that they did not already know.

Rav Shimon Schwab writes in Ma'ayan Beis Hasho'evah that without any doubt, from the very beginning of the *briah*, HaShem's intention was always for Klal Yisroel to be the recipients of the Torah. As Rashi writes on the very first *passuk* in Chumash, the Torah is called *ראשית דרכו*, and the Yidden are called *ראשית תבואתה*.

What then was the great *הר סני*? Was it just an event where we received more mitzvos than those which had already been given? Was the great declaration of *נעשה ונשמע* really necessary if we were already keeping the mitzvos and it was already slated to come to us? Can this really be called a great *matanah*?

Rav Schwab explains that when Klal Yisroel proclaimed *נעשה ונשמע*, they were prepared to have the Torah penetrate into the inner recesses of their souls. The great gift that Klal Yisroel received at Har Sinai was that all of the mitzvos would now be internalized. The Torah would now become part and parcel of a Yid, thus defining the Yid's essence. No longer would Torah be considered an external body of law that is followed because “an

authority” has thus commanded us. The Torah was now the life support of a Yid's neshama.

The *gemara* in *Mesechta Brochos* (17a) tells how Rav Alexandri would conclude his davening with the words *רבון העולמים* *our will is to do Your will*. The *ratzon* of a Yid is completely subordinate to the will of HaShem. Famously, the Rambam even takes this a step further and says that in certain instances, Beis Din may even beat someone, forcing them to make the right choice. Why is this so? Because the inner *ratzon* of a Yid really is to do the *ratzon HaShem*. Where does this inner *ratzon* to do the right thing stem from? As we have explained, this is the very *matanah* that we received on Har Sinai.

Before approaching the Yidden, HaShem offered the other nations the chance to an inner *ratzon* instilled in them for their *נח*. *מצוות בני נח*. If they would have accepted HaShem's offering, their approach to the *נח מצוות בני נח* would have been completely different. They would only have a desire to do the right thing. However, Esav had zero interest in eliminating the *tayva* for murder. Amon and Moav would not part from their immorality, and Yishmael could not imagine a life without stealing.

After Mattan Torah, the difference between the way a Yid fulfills mitzvas is completely different than the way a *goy* does. When we do mitzvos, we are acting on our own “G-d given” desires. We are fulfilling mitzvos not only because

HaShem commanded us to, but because we want to. However, when a *goy* observes a mitzvah, he is not acting with his inner will. He feels like he is being forced to do it. This is not the way of the Torah.

We can add a final thought here. The *passuk* in *Mishlei* (3:17) tells us דרכיה דרכי דרך - נעים וכל נתיבותיה שלום - *Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace*. The Torah is called pleasant and its paths are paths of truth. If one looks at all the mitzvos and sees them as a burden, and sees only *machlokes* stemming from the Torah, it is a *siman* that his approach to the Torah is flawed. Would someone call running after a life's passion a burden? If you have two people that are truly passionate about their cause, would you not expect them to have an honest fight for their beliefs? All the spectator sees is a fight which he does not, and quite frankly cannot, even begin to fathom. He is unable to identify a *machlokes l'sheim shomayim*, which has the power of bringing everyone closer to the truth, and in the end promotes even more love, as Chazal tell us שונעים אוהבים זו לזו. It is this same spectator that will always seek out the easiest way to perform a mitzvah "just to get it off his hands" because he just can't wait to recite a proverbial ברוך שפטרני. Instead of allowing the feeling of mitzvah to imbue him with a sense of godliness, basking in its glory and feeling the awesomeness that HaShem actually

allows us to feel, this person runs away the very first second he is able to.

Why does he lack this discernment and passion for mitzvos? Simple; he does not allow the Torah to become a part of him. טעמו וראו כי טוב ה' אשרי - Torah is the heartbeat of a Yid, without which the Yid cannot exist! So how does one change this approach? Dovid HaMelech writes in Tehillim (34:9) ה' אלהי יצא וטעמו וראו כי טוב ה' אשרי - go out and taste it! Stop being a spectator! No one looks at a man in the ocean with wonder, "How can that person manage to carry millions of gallons of water on his shoulders?" When you are inside of it, it is not a load that is being carried, so you won't feel it. If we throw ourselves into the Torah, our entire outlook will become changed.

Matan Torah wasn't just a one-time thing. כל יום יהיו בעיניך כחדשים - The Torah is constantly being regiven to us, and the opportunity to embrace it and allow it to change us is always there. Let us take advantage of this precious *matanah* that HaShem gave us at Har Sinai. Not only is the Torah eternal, but it also is internal!

**Good Yom Tov**

**מרדכי אפפול**