



REVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION

REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION? THESE TWO BUZZ WORDS exercise the minds of historians and social scientists in their quest to understand the directions of human life. There always seems to be two ways of doing things. On the one hand, the sudden, all embracing, revolutionary transformation, and on the other: the gradual, growth orientated, developmental approach.

Are these two approaches found in the world of Torah too? In fact they are. Let us see how.

This week’s Sedra¹ is focused on the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai in the presence of the entire Jewish people, over 3300 years ago. At that time there was thunder and lightning, the sound of a great Shofar, and fear and trembling gripped the people. This was a truly intense experience, a revolution in human consciousness! It was a one-off event that would change the lives of everyone.

At the same time there is also a developmental aspect to the Giving of the Torah.

This is shown by examining the blessings on the Torah. These blessings are in the daily prayers to be recited every morning by both men and women. Similar blessings are also said when called up to the reading of the Torah in the Synagogue.

One blessing ends with the words “...Blessed are You o G-d, Who teaches Torah to His people Israel”. Another blessing ends with the words “...Blessed are You o G-d, Who gives the Torah.”

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These blessings are in the present tense. Take the second blessing. Surely it should say “Who gave the Torah” since it was a one-off historical event?

In fact, the text of these blessings is very precise. They are telling us that there is a dynamic and on-going revelation of Torah throughout time: since Torah is infinite, there are always deeper and broader aspects of Torah waiting to be revealed².

The Sages tell us that when learning Torah we should have a tremendous feeling of Awe, as well as delight. For G-d Himself is present in these teachings. Whenever we study Torah, in a sense it is a repetition of the Giving of the Torah. Just as then there was a sense of awe, so now when we study there should be a sense of awe. At the same time, our awareness of how remarkable and beautiful this experience is, imparts a feeling of delight... For G-d is present and actually rejoicing in His Torah, every time that we pick up a Torah book and study a few lines, attend a Torah lecture, or (not on Shabbat) find some Torah teachings online.

This means that not only our knowledge of Torah but also the way we experience it is gradually increasing and developing all the way through our lives. We can learn the same passage hundreds of times, yet always with greater depth and meaning. And in the course of history, our Sages have revealed further dimensions of Torah, whether as Halachah (Law) applied to a new situation, or fresh perspectives in spiritual guidance.

All of these teachings were present in the original Revolution, the one-time giving of the Torah, waiting to be revealed. This takes place gradually, over the generations, as the Sages explain the interface of Divine Torah with daily life. In this way Revolution combines with Evolution, great changes with step-by-step development of our appreciation and experience of Torah. This double approach to the Torah will bring about the ultimate revolution: that of the Messiah, when the world and all aspects of life will be seen as expressing the Oneness of the Divine.

1. Exodus chs.18-20. 2. See R. Shneur Zalman's *Likkutei Torah* Tazria 23a and the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Anochi* 5749 #2 and *Sefer HaSichot* 5752 vol. 2 507-8 .

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SEDRA YITRO

VOICES

Beccy was sitting in the waiting room of her dentist. She smiled happily when she saw it was almost her turn. Most people did not like to go to the dentist; but Beccy looked forward to her dentist visits. First of all, her dentist was a Jewish man, who usually sat next to her father in synagogue, so it was always nice to see him. Secondly, she got to miss school, so what could be better than that?!

“Aaaah....aaaah.” Dr. Bernstein was looking inside her mouth, and Beccy was trying to open as wide as possible.

“Wider please - it is will be just another minute...”

“I can’t, Dr. Bernstien. I can’t go any wider! I only have one mouth with one voice, and it’s just not working!”

Dr. Bernstein put down his shiny instruments for a minute, with a thoughtful look on his face. “Beccy - you just reminded me of this week’s Torah portion!”

“I did?”

“Yes - I’m sure you know what happened in this week’s portion - it is one of the most famous!”

“Sure, it is Sedra Yitro. My teacher just taught us that this portion talks about the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai to the Jewish Nation.”

“Correct!” Dr. Bernstein scratched his chin. “Did your teacher talk about the different miracles that went on during the Giving of the Torah?”

“Sure! We learned that Mount Sinai was covered in pretty flowers, and all the Jews stood on the bottom, behind a fence, while Moses went up to receive the two Tablets of the Law. There was the blowing of the shofar, thunder and lightning, and then the whole entire world stood in silence, as we heard the Ten Commandments.”

Dr. Bernstein looked at the clock on his wall. “Oh my! Our time is almost up, but I still have to tell you why I thought of Sedra Yitro when you said ‘aah.’ There was G-d’s voice, the voice of thunder and the voice of lightning - because at Mount Sinai the Jews heard the lightning! - and twice mentioning of the voice of the shofar, how many times does the Torah mention the word voice?”

“...Five?”

“Yes! A voice reveals what’s hidden - the thoughts of a person. When the five voices were revealed on Mount Sinai, it symbolized the four spiritual worlds being revealed, along with G-d Himself!”

Beccy looked impressed. “Everything was being revealed? Even G-d Himself?”

“Indeed! And every time we study G-d’s Torah or do His Mitzvot, we draw down that revelation once again!”

Beccy smiled, opened her mouth, and said ‘aaaaaah’ for all she was worth.

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