

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

ד"ה וקבל היהודים תשל"ב בלתי מוגה

Published for Shabbat Sedra Tetzaveh

11 Adar 5783, 4 March 2023¹

REALLY RECEIVING THE TORAH

THE TALMUD TELLS US THAT THE JEWISH PEOPLE RATIFIED THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF THE TORAH during the time of Ahasuerus and the Purim story². At Sinai, centuries earlier, they had been in some sense forced to accept the Torah from G-d. The discourse explains that at Sinai there were surrounded by miracles. It was such an intense atmosphere they could not refuse. By contrast, in ancient Persia in the time of Haman, the Jews dedicated themselves to the observance of the Mitzvot, at the risk of their lives. This ratified their earlier acceptance of the Torah at Sinai.

To prove this point, the Talmud quotes the verse 'The Jews upheld and accepted..' (Est. 9:27), which is explained as meaning they now, in the time of Ahasuerus, upheld the Torah which they had received earlier at Sinai. Chassidic teachings also cite another similar verse, 'And the Jews accepted that which they had begun to do' (Est.9:23) ויקבל היהודים את אשר החלו לעשות which is explained as meaning that they accepted, in the time of Ahasuerus, what they had begun to do when they first received the Torah at Sinai³.

This latter verse is unusual because the word *vekibel*, [they] accepted, is actually in the singular, even though the next word *hayehudim*, 'the Jews', is in the plural. The Rebbe compares this to the verse ויהן שם ישראל נגד ההר 'And Israel camped there opposite the mountain' (Yitro, Ex.19:2) referring to the Jews

¹ Maamar Vekibel Hayehudim 5732 (1972). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Sedra Tetzaveh 5783. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Shabbat 88a.

³ The 'simple', *pshat* meaning of both these verses refers to the Jews accepting the annual celebration of Purim as a festival. The Talmudic and Chassidic explanations expound the verses on another level.

camping near Mount Sinai in preparation for receiving the Torah. In this verse the word *vayihan*, 'camped' is in the singular. Rashi on this verse states that the previous encampments were marred by arguments and disunity, but when they came to Sinai they camped 'like one person with one heart'.

The Midrash⁴ states that this enabled the giving of the Torah: G-d said now that they are unified, this is the moment to give them the Torah. Similarly, adds the Rebbe, at the time of Purim, when they completed and ratified the receiving of the Torah, they were unified together, and hence *vekibel* 'and [they] received' is in the singular, as if they were just one person, the whole people unified together.

This use of the singular also links with what we learn at the beginning of Ethics of the Fathers: משה קבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע 'Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua'. Here too the singular form *kibel* is used.

The Rebbe points out in the discourse that at Sinai, Moshe received a unique revelation of Torah which came to him as an individual, and which he then had to pass on to Joshua, and so on. At the time of Purim, due to the great spiritual attainment of the Jewish people (which will be explained below), the entire Jewish people reached the same level, and each one received the Torah from G-d in a unique way, coming to him or her as an individual.

An important aspect of the story of Purim is seen in the fact that throughout the Scroll of Esther the Jewish people are termed *Yehudim*, which means 'Jews'. This is the first Biblical Book to refer to the Jews in this way. Earlier they are called 'Israelites' or as members of the specific twelve tribes, one of which Judah - Yehudah. A member of the tribe of Judah might be called Yehudi. But in the Megilla all the Jews are called Yehudim.

Thus, near the beginning of the Megillah when Mordechai is first mentioned, before we learn his name we learn that he is a Yehudi, a Jew, even though he is actually from the Tribe of Benjamin: איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה ושמו מרדכי... איש 'There was a man a Yehudi in Shushan the capital and his name was Mordechai... a man of the Tribe of Benjamin (Est.2:5).

The reason why there were different tribes is because each had their own specific spiritual qualities and their own way of serving G-d. But Mordechai and all the Jewish people of his time reached that level which exists and is equal in every Jew.

⁴ Vayikra Rabba 9:9.

Now let us consider the significance of the Giving of the Torah. The Sages often express the idea that Abraham and the other Patriarchs kept the Torah before it was given at Sinai. But their actions did not affect the world. There was a kind of decree that the upper levels of spirituality would be divided from physicality. Then came the Giving of the Torah in which those levels are joined. Through the Mitzvot, which concern physical life, holiness is drawn into the physical.

But at the Giving of the Torah this came about through an arousal from above. The Talmud⁵ depicts the situation in that G-d held the mountain over them like a barrel and said ‘if you accept My Torah, well and good, but if not, here will your graves!’

The discourse explains the reference to a barrel: it was as if they were *in* a barrel, immersed in an atmosphere of miracles and Divine revelations. It was quite impossible for them to do anything but agree to accept the Torah. Their acceptance of the Torah came from above.

Indeed at this point in the Talmud Rabbi Acha bar Yakov asked ‘isn’t this an excuse against keeping the Torah?’ If it was forced on us, we did not really accept it by our own free volition. The Talmud answers this question by stating that in the time of Ahasuerus we really and finally accepted it, as the verse states ‘the Jews upheld and accepted’, as discussed earlier.

How did the Jews achieve this? Because they were *Yehudim*, and determined to be nothing but Yehudim. Haman’s decree was only against those who were Yehudim, as the Talmud states ‘anyone who denies idolatry is called a Yehudi’. Haman considered himself a deity, an idol.

That is why Mordechai would not bow down to him, and that is why he is called Yehudi even though he was from the tribe of Benjamin. The other Jews in the time of Mordechai followed his example. They too would not worship Haman, even though this might cost them their lives, and that is why they were all called Yehudim, whatever tribe they were from.

This self-sacrifice of the Jewish people enabled them to complete the receiving and acceptance of the Torah, in which each individual received the Torah in the individual way that Moshe alone had achieved at Sinai. Then they had the further responsibility to pass the Torah down through the generations.

But when the festival of Purim comes we re-enact those events, and again feel that unique bond with the Divine, in which each of us, man and woman, receives

⁵ Shabbat 88a.

the Torah in an individual way. This includes the deepest levels of Torah, which will be revealed primarily with the coming of Moshiach, when the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea⁶.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁶ Isaiah 11:9, and see Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, end of Laws of Kings.