



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik zt"l: 10 Insights on the 10 Commandments, Part 2

1. *Beyond My Own Bundle*: The eminent great-grandfather of the Rav, Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik was intrigued by the fact that the Ten Commandments were given in the singular form. If this is the case, why then did the response not also come in the singular form?

The well known celebrated reply of *Na'aseh Ve'nishma* (We will do and We will hear) is in the plural. Why? The Beit Halevi cites a midrash (*Tanchuma Tetzaveh*) which states that in response to the people's two words, *Na'aseh Ve'nishma*, two angels were sent to each Jew; one that crowned him and the other that armed him. One crown was given because they had agreed to undertake a personal observance of the law. The second angel that armed the Jew was awarded as a blessing for taking responsibility for helping fellow Jews who would be far less engaged in a committed life. This loyalty to others requires strength and exertion. (*Beit Halevi*, Parshat Mishpatim, first dvar Torah on the parsha)

2. *Torah Lishmah*: The Beit Halevi offers an insight regarding the phrase *Na'aseh Ve'nishma* that captures an abiding principle

of the Brisk and Soloveitchik family. The classic question, which has perplexed sages for centuries is the apparent incongruity in first stating a commitment to observing (*Na'aseh*) before one has yet to learn about and understand the obligations (*Ve'nishma*). It would be more logical, it seems, that the order be flipped - *nishmah ve'naaseh*. The Beit Halevi answers that it was pronounced in this order to reflect a basic principle regarding Torah study. We do not study Torah in order to fulfill the commandments. Judaism introduced the revolutionary idea of *Torah Lishmah*. We learn as an ideal. Torah study is an end in itself. Torah is not merely a means to attain the knowledge necessary to perform the mitzvot. Torah study is a mitzvah that is an objective in its own right. (*Beit Halevi*, Mishpatim, first dvar Torah on the parsha)

3. *Ratzon Elyon*: The Rav addressed the deeper meaning behind the immortal words, *Na'aseh Ve'nishma*. He is perplexed by the issue of how the Children of Israel could pledge unconditional commitment without prior deliberation and critical judgment. Do we not place utmost weight on

critical evaluation? What they did seemed rash and unwise. The Rav, employing the language of the Kabbalah, answered that there are two kinds of decision making: *Ratzon Tachton* (practical will) and *Ratzon Elyon* (intuitive will). (See first Rebbe of Chabad's *Torah Ohr*, Parashat Vayakhel, dibur Hamatchil Vayahel Moshe, daf 87). We make many decisions using the intellect. We weigh pros and cons and come to conclusions. However, there are decisions that are more spontaneous, not necessarily affected by pragmatic considerations. This is the *Ratzon Elyon*, in which one bursts forth with fervor and emotional intensity. These decisions can change the course of one's life. The Kabbalists taught that the *ratzon elyon* belongs to the *Keter Elyon* (the crown, the highest *sefirah*). The crown sits on the top of the head; it towers over the intellect. It starts with an awareness of the world, but leaps beyond it. Hence, the Jews acceptance of the Torah embodied the most elevated method to accept the Divine Will. (Reflections of the Rav, pp. 89- 92)

4. *Yes, Yes!* : Rashi, quoting the *Mechilta* teaches that the Jewish people responded to each positive commandment with a positive affirmation, "yea", and responded to each negative commandment with a "nay." The Rav noted that Rashi did not cite the opposing position of Rabbi Akiva who says that just as the positive commandments were received by a "yea," so too the negative commandments. This seems at first glance to be a trivial difference. However there is a profound difference. It comes down to the motivation for mitzvot. The response of "yea" and "nay" suggest that there is an inner urge to act in harmony with the command.

Yes, I agree with the positive and I affirm, by saying "nay" that I am in agreement with it's content. In contrast the answer of "yea" to all the commandments, even the negative, suggests a surrender and commitment to the mitzvot even when one is unable to comprehend their meaning. The Rav stated that he preferred Rabbi Akiva's position, the approach not cited in Rashi. The notion of *metzuveh ve'oseh*, fulfilling a mitzvah out of a sense of commandendness is the most integral aspect of Torah observance. (Chumash Mesoras Harav, Shemot, pp. 438-441)

5. *Broadcast to the World*: Why is the epic event of Revelation placed within the context of the episode of Yitro's visit with Moshe? "Yitro came and said, "Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hands of Egypt..." (Shemot 18:10). The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 94a) lavishes praise on him. Yitro represents the potential of Torah and Divine wisdom to inspire the world at large. The Jewish people are a *mamlechet kohanim*, a community of priests who teach by practicing the morality and ethics of Judaism, "This is why the story of Yitro was placed in the Torah just before the story of *matan Torah*. Because there was a man like Yitro, the whole character of *matan Torah* assumed cosmic proportions and universal significance." A time will come when "mankind will be ready to practice the Torah and to recognize God as "King over the whole earth."" (Vision and Leadership, p. 102-107) ■

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