



Torah's Transformation

We find two chapters that chronicle the events of *Matan Torah*; *parashat Yitro* describes the events leading up to the monumental event, and the actual giving of the Torah. *Parashat Mishpatim* then delineates various laws, particularly those that are *bein adam lachaveiro*—between man and his fellow man.

The last chapter in *parashat Mishpatim* then describes how Moshe Rabbeinu spoke the words of Hashem to the people, offered sacrifices, and sprinkled blood of the offering on the altar. It was at this juncture that Moshe Rabbeinu read parts of the Torah, and the Jews declared, “*kol asher diber Hashem na’aseh ve’nishma*—All that Hashem spoke, we will do and we will hear.” (*Shemot* 24:7) The commentators grapple here with the chronology, when exactly did this covenant take place? Was it before or after the giving of the Torah?

Rashi, true to his approach throughout his commentary, notes that there is no sequential, chronological order in Torah, and this event happened before *Am Yisrael* received

the Torah. The *Ketav V’haKabbalah* supports this view based on the expression, “*V’el Moshe amar*—and to Moshe [Hashem] said,” as opposed to, “*Vayomer el Moshe*—and He said to Moshe,” (*Shemot* 24:1) and thus understands the command had already been given in the past, and this section is just recounting what had already occurred.

The Ramban takes issue with this approach and maintains that the Torah is written in chronological order, and this event took place after the Torah was given. The *Tur* supports this view, noting that there was no time prior to *Matan Torah* to bring all of these sacrifices, and to build *matzeivot*. This gave the people time to pause, and to integrate the experience.

Rav Soloveitchik *zt”l* asks a fundamental question on the Ramban. If bringing sacrifices and casting the blood upon the people was part of the Jews’ conversion process, then how was it possible for them to receive the Torah before converting? According to the Ramban, they would only have gone through conversion the following day! The Rav offers a compelling idea. The experience of *ma’amat Har Sinai* was so powerful that it did not only affect the Jews cognitively, but it also transformed them spiritually.

The experience of seeing thunder, lightning and fire, and the great shofar impacted the people on the most elemental level, and as such, they went through a “conversion” experience the very moment Hashem spoke with them!

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The experience was then solidified the next day through the physical, concrete acts of bringing sacrifices and sprinkling of the blood.

The message here is extremely relevant and impactful. When learning Torah, one must allow it to be a total spiritual experience, affecting every part of us. Torah cannot be solely an intellectual experience or mental acrobatics, rather, it must transform us to the core of our being and must be felt in our very nervous system. Let us heed the Ramban's advice in his letter to his son— when one gets up from his learning, he should find a way to implement some aspect of his learning into his practical life. Thus, we can live Torah, not only learn it. ■

**Mazal Tov to**
Sarah & Shlomo Fisherowitz and
family on the birth of a grandson

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