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"דרכי  
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מכון "מנחת אשר"



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מורנו הרב

שליט"א



Na'aseh V'Nishma

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## **Na'aseh V'Nishma**

During the course of the liberation of Bnei Yisroel from Egypt, we witnessed awesome miracles, the likes of which the world had never seen. When we crossed through the Yam Suf, we saw even greater wonders. Our Sages tell us that the prophetic revelations granted to even a simple serving girl during Krias Yam Suf, were greater than those seen by Yechezkel, who envisioned the "*Merkava*" - the Divine Chariot.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the greatest revelation of all was received at Har Sinai, when the very Heavens were torn asunder, and Bnei Yisroel were able to see with their own eyes, that throughout all the myriad worlds Above, there was nothing else in all existence except for the One True G-d, whose majesty permeates everything that exists. Of this revelation, Moshe Rabbeinu said "אתה הראת לדעת כי ה' הוא האלקים אין עוד מלבדו" – "You have been shown, to realize, that Hashem is Elokim, and there is nothing else beside Him."<sup>2</sup>

When they proclaimed "נעשה ונשמע" – "We will do, and we will listen,"<sup>3</sup> they subjugated all their desires to the will of the Creator, and were elevated to the level of angels.<sup>4</sup> They were purified from the "filth" of sinful inclination, with which the snake had defiled Chava;<sup>5</sup> and they were granted eternal life.<sup>6</sup>

Our Sages tell us that at the moment they made this declaration of perfect obedience, angels descended upon them, to crown each and every Jew with two crowns, one for "we will do," and one for "we will listen." What is the symbolism of these crowns, and what is their correlation to Bnei Yisroel's declaration of "we will do and we will listen"?

A person would normally hesitate to surrender his freedom, and obligate himself to a system of rules, without first understanding the commitment he is asked to undertake. Yet Bnei Yisroel willingly and joyfully accepted Hashem's mastery, committing themselves to anything Hashem might ask of them. This sincere dedication to Hashem's will was expressed by the words "we will do and

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<sup>1</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni* 244

<sup>2</sup> *Devarim* 4:35

<sup>3</sup> *Shemos* 24:7

<sup>4</sup> *Shabbos* 88a

<sup>5</sup> *Shabbos* 146a

<sup>6</sup> *Avoda Zara* 5a

we will listen.” At that point, Bnei Yisroel accepted upon themselves “*ol malchus Shomayim* – the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

However, our Sages also tell us that Hashem held Har Sinai in the air over their heads, and warned that if they would not accept the Torah, they would be buried beneath the mountain.<sup>7</sup> Tosefos asks what need there was for this threat, since they had already said, “*na'aseh v'nishma* - we will do and we will listen.” Tosefos explains that Hashem was concerned that Bnei Yisroel would regret their decision, after seeing the fearsome fires, and the thunderous voice, which accompanied Kabbalas HaTorah. Therefore, He held Har Sinai over their heads, to warn them not to renege on their commitment.

Perhaps we can suggest another answer to Tosefos’s question, by first noting that in light of the awesome miracles Bnei Yisroel had witnessed, and the lofty spiritual peek to which they were raised, it is no wonder that they willingly accepted the Torah. In the course of the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Yam Suf, they had seen Hashem upend the laws of nature. They had seen the fulfillment of Hashem’s assurance, “And afterwards, they will emerge with great wealth,”<sup>8</sup> each of them having left Egypt with no less than ninety donkeys, loaded with the plunder of Egypt.<sup>9</sup> Even greater were the riches they took from the Egyptian horsemen, who were drowned in the Yam Suf.<sup>10</sup> They traveled through a barren wasteland, filled with venomous snakes and scorpions, yet were nourished from manna, the “bread of angels”<sup>11</sup>, and quails sent by Heaven. They were led by a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. Their clothes were miraculously laundered on their backs, and never wore thin. Having witnessed these miracles, which constantly surrounded them, was it any wonder that they willingly agreed to accept Hashem’s commandments? Who would have refused?

Yet for this very reason it was necessary to hold Har Sinai over their heads. They had to realize that their acceptance of the Torah imparted upon them not only nobility, but also slavery – slavery to Hashem and his commandments, at all times, and under all circumstances. They were destined to endure thousands of years of hardship and sacrifice for the sake of the Torah, in which the glory and joy of Hashem’s countenance would be hidden from them. By holding Har Sinai over their heads, Hashem showed them that their acceptance of the Torah must be absolute and uncompromised.

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<sup>7</sup> *Shabbos* 88a

<sup>8</sup> *Bereishis* 15:14

<sup>9</sup> *Bechoros* 5b

<sup>10</sup> *Bamidbar Rabba*, 13

<sup>11</sup> *Tehillim* 78:25

## *Na'aseh V'Nishma*

The Gemara tells us that when a gentile is converted into an *eved Canaani*<sup>12</sup>, he is immersed in a *mikva* like any other convert. However, when he ascends from the water, a bucket of cement is balanced on his head, to immediately signify his new status as a slave, indentured to his master's service.<sup>13</sup>

The same was true at Har Sinai, when Bnei Yisroel were "converted" into Hashem's chosen nation. Har Sinai was held over our heads as a sign of slavery. Bnei Yisroel realized this, yet they still said *na'aseh v'nishma*, accepting this status of slavery with love and joy. They saw that there is no greater privilege, and no status more noble, than to be vassals of the King of kings, Hashem. Tosefos cites from the Talmud Yerushalmi that although most slaves would prefer freedom, the slave of a king realizes the prestige of his position, and would rather not be freed.<sup>14</sup>

A Jewish slave must serve his master for six years. If at the end of this six year period he wishes to remain in his master's service, he must have a hole pierced in his ear. The Gemara explains the significance of this ritual: "His ear heard on Har Sinai the words, 'For Bnei Yisroel are My slaves,' signifying that we were to be Hashem's own slaves, and not the slaves of other slaves, yet he willingly enslaved himself to another person. Therefore, let his ear be pierced."<sup>15</sup>

Why is this ritual performed only at the end of six years, when he wishes to extend his term of slavery? Why was his ear not pierced when he first sold himself as a slave? The first time he sold himself, he was obviously forced to do so by the pressures of poverty. However, when he extended his term of slavery, he received no money in compensation. He freely and willingly accepted the yoke of slavery, since he "loved his master,"<sup>16</sup> as the *possuk* states. It is this kind of slavery that infringes on our debt of slavery to Hashem – a service of love.

By lovingly crowning Hashem as our king, we merited a corresponding measure of kingship for ourselves. For this reason the angels descended to crown each Jew with two crowns, one for *na'aseh*, and one for *nishma*.

The greatest accolade to which a human being can aspire, is to be known as a loyal servant of the King. This was the title that Hashem bequeathed to Moshe Rabbeinu, when he said, "My servant Moshe is trusted in all My house."<sup>17</sup> In recognition of Moshe's loyal service of Hashem, he was granted a crown of splendor, as we say in Shacharis for Shabbos:

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<sup>12</sup> Canaanite slave of a Jewish owner, who is obligated in mitzvos to the same extent as a Jewish woman.

<sup>13</sup> *Yevamos* 46a

<sup>14</sup> Tosefos, *Gittin* 11b s.v. *Gittei nashim*

<sup>15</sup> *Kiddushin* 20a

<sup>16</sup> *Shemos* 21:5

<sup>17</sup> *Bamidbar* 12:7

ישמח משה במתנת חלקו כי עבד נאמן קראת לו כליל תפארת בראשו נתת לו.

Moshe rejoice in the portion he was granted, since he was called a faithful servant. You placed a crown of splendor upon his head.

There is no greater joy in all the world, than the peace of mind that comes with knowing that one faithfully serves his Creator.

The Gemara often discusses the heretical sects founded by Tzadok and Baitus, who had once been students of the Sage Antigonus of Socho. When they heard their Rebbe teach that we must be like servants who serve their master with no thought of reward,<sup>18</sup> they misinterpreted this to mean that there is in fact no reward for the righteous. "Must a laborer toil from morning to night, only to be denied his wages?" they asked. Disheartened by this thought, they abandoned Torah observance, and founded their own cults, which rejected the teachings of the Sages.<sup>19</sup>

Tzadok and Baitus failed to understand the intrinsic difference between a slave and a laborer. Had we been mere laborers, perhaps they would have been correct to insist that we should labor for reward. In truth, however, we are much more than mere laborers. Having declared *na'aseh v'nishma*, we shackled ourselves with chains of devotion, to do the every bidding of beloved Master – with no thought of any reward, other than the very privilege to serve Him.

We find in the Gemara yet another example of this intrinsic debate between the heretical followers of Tzadok, and the faithful Sages:

ההוא צדוקי דחזייה לרבא דקא מעיין בשמעתא ויתבה אצבעתא דידיה תותי כרעא וקא מייץ בהו וקא מבען אצבעתיה דמא. אמר ליה עמא פזיזא דקדמיתו פומייכו לאודנייכו, אכתי בפחזותייכו קיימיתו. ברישא איבעיא לכו למשמע אי מציתו קבליתו ואי לא לא קבליתו. אמר ליה אנן דסגינן בשלימותא כתיב בן "תמת ישרים תנחם." הנך אינשי דסגן בעלילותא כתיב בהו, "וסלף בוגדים ישדם."

Once there was a Tzadoki who observed Rava concentrating on a Torah teaching. Rava was so engrossed in his studies, that

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<sup>18</sup> *Pirkei Avos* 1:3

<sup>19</sup> *Avos D'Rebbe Nosson* ch. 1. See also Rambam, commentary on the *Mishna*, *Avos* 1:3

he did not notice that he was sitting on his fingers, causing them to bleed.

“You are an impetuous nation, who put your mouths before your ears (placing ‘*na'aseh*’ before ‘*nishma*’),” said the Tzadoki. “You are still just as impetuous as ever. You should have first asked to hear Hashem’s commandments. If you felt that you were able to observe them, you could have accepted. If not, you could have refused.”

“We trust Hashem implicitly,” explained Rava. “Therefore, the *possuk* says of us, ‘The sincerity of the straightforward will guide them.’ You, however, always search for complaints. Of you the *possuk* states, ‘The crookedness of the traitors will rob them.’”<sup>20</sup>

The Tzadoki in this story followed the ideology of his predecessor, Tzadok, and could not possibly understand the “impetuous” love of Klal Yisroel for Hashem. Rava, like his predecessor Antigonus, remained a faithful slave of Hashem. He placed “*na'aseh*” before “*nishma*,” with no thought of personal benefit.

I once heard from the Lev Simcha of Ger, *zt"l*, in the name of his father, the Imrei Emes, an interesting incident that occurred in the Beis Midrash of his grandfather, the Sefas Emes, during the holiday of Sukkos. The Sefas Emes said to his Chassidim, that when saying the words “*Ana Hashem* - Please, Hashem,” in Hallel, it is an auspicious time for all one’s prayers to be answered. A debate then erupted among the Chassidim over how to interpret the Sefas Emes’s words. Some thought he referred to the *possuk*, “Please Hashem, save us.” Others thought he referred to, “Please Hashem, grant success.”

The next morning during Hallel, the controversy between them was evident. When they reached the *possuk*, “Please Hashem, save us,” some of them would cry out with great fervor. When they reached the *possuk*, “Please Hashem, grant success,” the others would cry out with equal emotion.

The Imrei Emes said that he did not join either group, since they were both wrong. The Sefas Emes referred to neither of these *pesukim*. He referred to the *possuk*, “Please Hashem, for I am your servant.”

I have often said that the relevance of this teaching is especially appropriate to the holiday of Sukkos, “the season of our joy.” The Rambam writes:

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<sup>20</sup> *Shabbos* 88a.

*Na'aseh V'Nishma*

אף על פי שכל המועדות מצוה לשמוח בהן, בחג הסוכות היתה שם במקדש שמחה יתירה שנאמר "ושמחתם לפני ה' אלהיכם שבעת ימים."

Although there is a mitzva to rejoice on all the holidays, the festival of Sukkos was marked by special rejoicing in the Beis HaMikdash, as the *possuk* states, "You shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d, for seven days."<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere, the Rambam writes that the recital of Hallel is a special expression of joy. For this reason we do not recite Hallel on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, days which are made somber by the fear of judgment.

As such, the recital of Hallel, the expression of joy, on Sukkos, the holiday of joy, is the most auspicious time for a Jew to call out to Hashem from the innermost depths of his heart, and proclaim, "Please Hashem, for I am your servant." This is our greatest joy – that we have the privilege to serve Hashem. It is no wonder that such a prayer has great power to shake the Heavens.

*May Hashem grant us the privilege to subjugate ourselves to Him, with pride and joy, and to serve Him faithfully, with all our hearts and souls.*

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<sup>21</sup> Rambam, *Hilchos Lulav*, 8:12