



PARSHAS YISRO – YEHUDAH LEBRETT

There are several different Midrashim that describe the incredible scene of the Bnei Yisroel receiving the Torah. One Medrash says that ‘when Hashem began to give over the first commandment no sparrow chirped, no bird flew, no angel moved, the sea was calm and no human spoke’. Clearly, the fact that every part of nature stopped out of respect for Matan Torah, is an incredible concept. But what is the message that justifies this rabbinic comment and what is its relevance to us?

The Rambam writes (Hilchos Avodah Zorah (1:1) that at the time of Enosh many people accepted that Hashem had created the world, but believed that the mundane day to day running of the universe had been delegated to other forces. The logical explanation for this belief was the fact that the people of this era could not comprehend a situation where the Divine Creator could ‘lower’ Himself to our level and involve Himself in such mundane and lowly matters.

Rabbi Pinchos Roberts writes that this concept could add additional meaning to the posuk in Bereishis (4:26) ‘they profaned G-d by calling him Hashem and not Elokim’. We know that whilst the title of ‘Hashem’ refers to the Creator of the world, the title ‘Elokim’ refers to the Director of daily affairs. Therefore by referring to Hakodosh Boruch Hu only as ‘Hashem’ and never as ‘Elokim’ they showed that they truly believed that Hakodosh Boruch Hu had no involvement in the day to day running of the world.

Therefore, Hashem chose the occasion of Matan Torah to demonstrate how every tiny and miniscule detail of this world is fully controlled by Him. Hence a big emphasis is placed upon the fact that when Hashem spoke, every aspect of nature - from the normal everyday chirping of the birds to the movement of the sea as well as human speech - stopped in awe as Hashem proclaimed, ‘I am Hashem your G-d’.

One other interesting point to note, is the giving of the Torah (a book of rules) to a nation that had just been freed from 210 years of slavery and hardship. Picture the scene of a nation that had just recently escaped the tyrannical dictatorship of Pharaoh, that had been promised freedom, and now finds that a thick rule book containing 613 commandments is thrust upon them as well as countless oral laws. This was not in the ‘terms and conditions’ of the ‘freedom’ miracles that Hashem had performed for them in bringing them out of Egypt!

This issue can be resolved through the following moshul. Imagine someone who has never seen a computer, is suddenly presented with the most modern, state of the art laptop. The problem is that it did not come with an instruction manual. This individual struggles with all the seemingly complex wires and buttons but does not understand the point of the fancy looking lump of metal. Eventually, this person gives up and sells the expensive laptop as scrap metal. If only the computer had come with an instruction manual! This person would have been able to fulfil so many useful tasks with it. Rather, he discards it and sells it for a fraction of its true value.

The same is true with us, the Torah and our world. The Torah is not just a rulebook; it is an instruction manual to cover all aspects of our lives, to lead us to a happy, successful and fulfilling existence. This is why the Jewish people were so eager to receive the Torah.

Good Shabbos.