

Naaseh V'Nishma

This morning, my mind was racing during davening and before I knew it I got up to *Barchu* even before the minyan was up to *Ashrei*. I didn't want to get sucked into using my phone, so I did something I have never before done. I turned to the back of the siddur and decided to say Tehillim while I waited for the minyan to catch up. Since it's Rosh Chodesh today I turned to the beginning of Tehillim. Then, I realized that tomorrow is the 1st of Adar and today is the 30th of Sh'vat, so I turned to the Tehillim for the 30th day of the month.

I start reading and to my great surprise (since I'm not that familiar with all of Tehillim) I was reading Psalm 145 which is the tefillah of *Ashrei*! So, as I was reading the Tehillim, the minyan was davening *Ashrei*. Then as the minyan said the *Hallelukahs*, I continued reading to the end of Tehillim which are the same five *Hallelukahs* following *Ashrei*.

The message I took from this, aside from improving my kevanah in davening and davening more slowly, is to daven in unison with the minyan. We're here together davening to Hashem as a community, as a congregation, and as representatives of Klal Yisrael starting our day collectively speaking with Hashem.

In our parsha, Mishpatim, we begin with many laws being described, but then shift to the revelation at Har Sinai. Hashem instructed Moshe to ascend Har Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights to be taught the Torah in its entirety. At that point, B'nai Yisrael collectively accept the Torah in unison with the eternal responsibility to study and observe it before even receiving the Torah, proclaiming together, נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע (*naaseh v'nishma*) – “We will do and we will listen.” (Sh. 24:7)

They had complete bitachon in Hashem that He would not encumber them with mitzvos that were beyond their ability to perform. It was an act of pure faith in Hashem. The Beis HaLevi asks: Why did each individual respond in the plural, “Na'aseh v'nishma” – more correctly, each person should have said “E'eseh v'eshma”, I will do and I will listen? How could they speak for everyone else? The Beis Halevi answers that everyone made two commitments. One commitment was to personally observe the Torah, the second commitment was to take responsibility over his friend, to ensure that he would also keep the Torah faithfully.

Rav Joseph Soloveitchik compares the difference between נַעֲשֶׂה (*naaseh* – we will do) and נִשְׁמָע (*nishmah* – we will listen). The word נַעֲשֶׂה (*naaseh*) connotes unqualified obedience and the submission of one's will. נִשְׁמָע (*nishmah*) suggests a receptivity of mind and heart and also indicates the willingness to study and to be enlightened.

Giving priority to נַעֲשֶׂה (*naaseh*) over נִשְׁמָע (*nishmah*) meant that B'nai Yisrael pledged their absolute, unconditional commitment even before they were informed of the content of the Torah or understood the meaning of its commandments. They accepted a distinctive and demanding national destiny, for themselves and for their future generations, without prior deliberation, without subjecting the proposition to critical evaluation. How could they do this?



Man's pragmatic intellect, which weighs pros and cons, is actually of subordinate stature in man's personality – it is called the *ratzon tachton*, the lower, practical will. The masters of Kabbalah taught that it is not man's rationality, but his *ratzon elyon*, higher will, which constitutes the singular endowment that distinguishes him from the rest of creation. This higher will makes decisions without consulting the intellect. It is in the center of the spiritual personality and constitutes man's real identity.

The *ratzon elyon* is intuitive, dynamic, aggressive, and passionate. Decisions which are radical in nature, revolutionary, and decisive are extensions of the *ratzon elyon*. This higher will transcends man's intelligence and points toward a more exalted ideal. The major decisions of man's life are made spontaneously from intuitive affirmations which suddenly light up from within. Then, the practical intellect is called upon to justify the decision, remove inconsistencies and plan implementation.

There are thus two wills: the *ratzon elyon*, the unmotivated will which derives from unknowable inner promptings and the *ratzon tachton*, the will which is pragmatically motivated by reason or practical considerations. When motivated by the *ratzon tachton*, man lives in a utilitarian, pragmatic, world. He does only what is to his practical benefit. The mundane, drab, plodding *ratzon tachton* will only take the safe path and ends in mediocrity – it is guided by cold facts and will take no chances. It lacks elevating vision and the capacity to venture forth boldly. If man aspires to greatness, says Rav Soloveitchik, he must identify with the *ratzon elyon* as B'nai Yisrael did when proclaiming "*naaseh v'nishmah*".

The Nesivos Shalom asks the question how is *naaseh v'nishmah* even possible? It almost defies logic. How can one "do" and fulfill the mitzvos before hearing them without knowing what they are in order to perform them properly?

The Nesivos Shalom cites Rav Moshe of Dolina, the 19th century author of Divrei Moshe, that in theory, it should be possible for anyone to "figure out" all the mitzvos of the Torah without even being informed of them. A person doesn't need to be told or coaxed to eat; even a baby who experiences hunger pangs will cry out to be fed. Such is the nature of instinct – a person needs sustenance to survive and for all of his systems to function, and so he naturally craves and is drawn toward the very source of sustenance.

Every person should have a natural instinct to automatically gravitate toward the fulfillment of the mitzvos of the Torah, but explains Rav Moshe, a certain factor blocks our natural spiritual cravings – and that is an immersion in materialism. The more a person is invested in his physicality – the opposing force to his spiritual side – the less he will be attuned to the needs of his neshamah. If an individual truly refined himself, divesting himself of his materialistic tendencies, then his real spiritual yearnings would come to fore and he would naturally gravitate toward the fulfillment of the Torah.

We can then understand Klal Yisrael's declaration of *naaseh v'nishmah*. We received the Torah at *Mattan Torah*, but the priceless gift B'nai Yisrael received along with the Torah itself was the formal command from Hashem to make the service to fulfill the Torah and mitzvos binding and obligatory. Each mitzvah has its *shoreshe elyon*, a root and repository of supreme kedushah in



Heaven above. By conferring a formal commandment to observe the mitzvos, Hashem provides us with the means to connect with this *shoresh elyon* and become infused with its supreme kedushah attaching ourselves to Hashem Himself.

The Zohar refers to the mitzvos as *eitzos* (advice) for the attainment of *dveikus* (attachment) with Hashem. Through careful observance of the mitzvos, a person is able to achieve *dveikus* with Hashem in the arena of mundane activities. As he so occupies himself, his constant adherence to the mitzvos ensures that his focus remains continually on Hashem, providing for Him a resting place even amid the materialism of this world.

The Zera Shimshon explains that a person who was commanded to fulfill the mitzvos receives more reward than the one who does it because it seems as if it's the right thing to do. There's no question that a person has to be informed of the details of the mitzvos before he can actually do them. One cannot fulfill a mitzvah without knowing what it's all about, and B'nai Yisrael never considered carrying out the mitzvos without hearing what they entailed. So what were they saying by putting *naaseh* first?

They were saying, explains the Zera Shimshon, that even if Hashem planned to reward them with the lesser reward of someone who wasn't commanded to do the mitzvos instead of rewarding them with the much greater reward of someone who was commanded to do the mitzvos and carried out His orders – it would have been enough. Because B'nai Yisrael wanted to make it very clear that they planned on doing the mitzvos just because Hashem wanted them to, and not because of the reward that would follow. Similarly, the Sforno writes that B'nai Yisrael *will do* toward the purpose of *listening* to Hashem's voice, akin to servants who serve their master without a motivation to receive reward.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov teaches that B'nai Yisrael were able to accept the Torah and mitzvos because they did indeed hear the words and knew what they were commanded to do, but they didn't ask for or analyze the meaning behind the commandments. Rather, they acted enthusiastically to fulfill Hashem's word with utter simplicity. They knew that they were not really worthy of Hashem's salvation, but that everything is an undeserved gift from Heaven.

Rav Moshe Weinberger cites Rebbe Nachman of Breslov's Likutei Moharan (Torah 22) that physical life has a certain amount of chutzpah. The chutzpah, the brazenness of the body is its relentless demand to have its needs fulfilled. The only way a person can overcome this is with a chutzpah of the neshamah, a holy brazenness. You have to get your spiritual adrenaline going. When a person is in a true joy – a strong feeling of simcha – then they have the strength to perform mitzvos and it counteracts and removes the feeling of being lethargic. You have a kind of strength you wouldn't normally have without simcha. When someone is sad or depressed they lose their *koach*.

Receiving the Torah in the way of *naaseh v'nishma* had to be done in a way of holy chutzpah coming through simcha. *Naaseh* are those mitzvos that are comfortable to us while *Nishma* are those mitzvos that are beyond us. It takes brazenness, and a listening heart to daven and grow from *naaseh* to *nishma*. A person who lives their life with holy chutzpah continually opens the gates and comes closer and closer to Hashem.



Rav Avigdor Miller taught that whatever one can add to their store of happiness, it's a mitzvah to add. Because you're going to be serving Hashem with your tefillah, and with your learning and your good deeds, so all the simcha that you have becomes energy to help you daven and learn and perform good deeds! We need all the energy we can and simcha is energy. Find simcha in everything around you because the world is built for simcha. Even looking at a tree causes simcha naturally. The truth is nature is planned to stimulate simcha.

Today is Rosh Chodesh Adar, a time to increase our happiness. We have the ability to be happy at all times. The Ben Ish Chai writes in his sefer Aderet Eliyahu that everything that happens to a person is first decided by Hashem, but there is one thing Hashem will not bring upon a person – *atzvut* – sadness or depression. Hashem wants us to accept everything with simcha. The more emunah we have the happier we will be.

Rabbi David Ashear writes in his Living Emunah email ([#1405](#)) that during these days of Adar, we are supposed to be increasing our happiness. How could a person be happy if he's feeling pain? How could a person be happy if he doesn't have what he wants? One way is emunah - to increase our belief that everything we're going through is from Hashem, who loves us so much and only does what's best. Hashem has given us a tremendous power. Our thoughts can influence the way we feel. If we increase our emunah, we'll increase our feelings of happiness.

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman told that one time a man came to Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Revikov and asked the Rebbe to please give him *chizuk*, as he felt that he was lacking in his life. The Rebbe looked at him and said, "You're asking me for *chizuk*? There's another man who's willing to pay me one thousand Rubles just to see my face, and you're asking me to give you *chizuk*?" The man was taken aback by the Rebbe's response, as the Rebbe was known to be exceedingly humble. But the Rebbe immediately explained, "That other man is blind in both eyes. He'll give anything to see the face of another person. And you are healthy, both of your eyes are working, yet you need *chizuk*? Thank Hashem for what He has given you. That will help you the most."

Rabbi Biderman told, as well, that a man experienced an open miracle which took place with his 14-year-old daughter. For ten years she suffered with trouble breathing. She went to all the doctors that specialized in that field and not one of them was able to figure out the root of her problem. The more they searched, the more baffled they were as to why it was occurring. A couple of months ago she took upon herself to write every night before she goes to sleep, ten kindnesses that Hashem has done for her on that day and then thank Hashem for each one of them. It wasn't necessarily anything big. She would say, "Thank You Hashem, my mother made my favorite dinner tonight. Thank You Hashem, I was a little late to school and I didn't get in trouble." And on the forty first day, one of the things she wrote was, "Thank You Hashem for letting me breath normally today like everybody else." Her sickness was gone, just like that.

Imagine recognizing Hashem's hand in our lives every day and that He is kind and constantly bestowing blessing upon us. How would that feel?

Before going to sleep can you try to thank Hashem for one kindness He did for you that day?

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov. Wishing you abundant and increasing simcha in your life.