



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת חיים

## MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

### פרשת תרומה תשס"ט • Parshas Terumah 5769

## GETTING MORE THAN YOU PAID FOR

R' Avigdor Miller would bemoan the fact that many basic and fundamental Torah episodes are studied only during one's younger years. Of course, it is important to expose our youngsters to narratives such as the story of the flood or the binding of Yitzchak and instill within them the essential lessons contained therein. But if these lessons are not reviewed and examined more deeply when one matures, he runs a great risk: his understanding of such epic events will remain, indefinitely, on a kindergarten level.

The episode of Har Sinai is a case in point. Many are familiar with the dramatic proclamation of B'nei Yisrael when they were asked to accept the Torah. The Jews' emphatic response was "Na'aseh v'nishma (we will do and we will hear)" (*Shemos 24:7*), an answer that became known as the crowning jewel of their existence as a people. Chazal pay particular attention to the order used in this declaration. Upon being asked to abide by a code of law, the conventional response would be to precede the "doing" with the "hearing": "Let me hear what the laws are, and then I will do them." Klal Yisrael, however, reversed this procedure, promising to "do" the *mitzvos* before even learning about them.

The true meaning of this classic response is another matter. The problem is obvious: how can one "do" that which is unknown? An aspiring medical student can grandly proclaim that he will perform surgery even before he attends medical school. When he arrives at the operating table to perform a triple bypass, however, he'll be hit by a stunning realization: he doesn't have the slightest idea what to do next. How, then, could the Jewish people consent

to perform all of the *mitzvos* before even opening up a *sefer*?

### MISHKAN, MISHNAH, AND NISHMA

This week's *parshah* deals with the directive to construct the Mishkan (sanctuary). The Medrash provides some background to this commandment, which may shed some light on the issue mentioned above:

"When Yisrael... said, 'Na'aseh v'nishma,' Hashem immediately told Moshe to instruct them concerning the building of the Mishkan" (*Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabbah, ch. 17*).

Apparently, the mitzvah of the Mishkan was a result of the *na'aseh v'nishma* response. To understand the connection, we must first clarify the meaning of this famous declaration.

There is a Mishnah in Avos (3:9) which, as we shall see, is also connected to this classic statement. The Mishnah states:

רבי חנינא בן דוסא אומר... כל שפמעשיו מרביץ  
מחכמתו, חכמתו מתקיימת.

"R' Chanina b. Dosa says: Only if one's deeds supersede the extent of his knowledge, will his knowledge be preserved."

Rabbeinu Yonah (*ibid.* and *Sha'arei Teshuvah 2:10*) wonders how such an arrangement is possible. How could someone perform more *mitzvos* than those about which he is aware? If he doesn't know what they are, he surely can't do them!

Yet herein lies a great secret. Rabbeinu Yonah reveals R' Chanina's intent: there actually *is* a way an individual can increase his deeds, or at least get credit for deeds that exceed his actual base of knowledge. The key is *acceptance*. When a Jew agrees and accepts upon himself to carry out

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Hashem's Will in its entirety, *he is immediately considered to have actually done so.*

It could very well be that this individual still has a lot to learn and is currently unaware of many of the *mitzvos* and the details of their performance. Subservience to the yoke of Heaven, however, is quite dear to Hakadosh Boruch Hu. The lesson and meaning of our Mishnah is that amazing things are accomplished by merely *deciding* to fulfill the Torah. When someone takes upon himself to fulfill whatever *mitzvos* he can discover, he is immediately credited with the fulfillment of them all – even those which, as of yet, he doesn't know exist. In this way, his actual deeds outnumber the *mitzvos* of which he is aware.

Rabbeinu Yonah identifies the source for this lofty concept: it is none other than the Jews' remarkable statement that "We will *do* and (then) we will hear." When it comes to Torah, it *is* possible to perform

even before one hears and learns of the *mitzvos*. Submission to complete observance of the Torah is credited as actual performance. Such is the depth of *na'aseh v'nishma*.

### HOW IT WORKS

This singular quality of the Torah can be attributed, perhaps, to the theme of our discussion of recent weeks: namely, the special, reciprocal relationship of the Jew to the Torah. As an entity in and of itself, the Torah goes to those who seek and yearn for it; to others, it remains elusive. To truly acquire Torah wisdom, one must "convince" the Torah that he truly loves it. When one displays a real thirst for Torah, the Torah itself will acquiesce to reveal its secrets. And when one demonstrates a strong desire to fulfill all of its *mitzvos*, the Torah will likewise "present" itself to its pursuer and grant him all of the *mitzvos* as if he has already accomplished the noble goal upon which he has set his sights.

And so we discover the power and essence of the *na'aseh v'nishma* declaration. It is a further manifestation of the striving and yearning for the Torah in all of its detail. As a result of a burning love for the Torah, one is rewarded by the Torah itself, as it were, in a measure beyond one's loftiest dreams.

It is perhaps for this reason that the mitzvah of the Mishkan was the most fitting reward for the Jews' magnanimous utterance. The Vilna Gaon (*Siddur Hagra*) explains that the Mishkan itself is the ultimate source of Torah wisdom, a veritable fountain of spiritual revelations.

This interdependence is reflected in our prayers (see *Mishnas Chayim, Devarim, 5768*). Upon concluding the Shemoneh Esrei, we beseech Hashem to restore the Beis Hamikdash. Immediately following this request, we add another: "*V'sein chelkeinu besorasecha* (Grant our portion in Your Torah)." For only with the return of the Beis Hamikdash can we merit a complete revelation of the Torah's mysteries – may it happen speedily in our days.

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