

SHAVUOT: The Ode to Silence: It Speaks Volumes!

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As we prepare for Kabbalas Hatorah, the receiving of the Torah, it is important to remember that the Torah is not something we simply received thousands of years ago; it is something we are meant to re-experience each year, if not each day. How so?

One of the beautiful things about Torah is that it is both timeless and yet simultaneously contains within it wisdom that relates to the very specific experiences that we face or find ourselves in. That is why it is described as a “Toras Chayim”, a Living Torah, one that is relevant to any and all times and situations.

This becomes apparent if we learn Torah each day with a lens of that specific day. If we think about our own lives before looking into the Torah, with that unique and timely perspective, we will see amazing insights reveal themselves that seem as if they are written for us in the year 5781/2021.

With COVID, we can certainly agree that the lens that we have this year is much different than it has been for the majority, if not all, of our lives.

So after more than a full year of life being affected by COVID in unimaginable ways, what is but one of the multitude of lessons that we can perhaps pull out from our reservoir of thousands of years of tradition, and more specifically from the experience of Kabbalas Hatorah – the receiving of the Torah?

3333 years ago we stood at the foot of Sinai and received the Torah and perhaps we each have our own image of what that might have been like, but there is a fascinating midrash, part of our Oral transmission, that fleshes out some of the details of the experience at Har Sinai. I always found this midrash fascinating, but after a year such as we’ve been through, I find it much more potent, relatable, and instructive.

Rabbi Abbahu said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: When God gave the Torah, no bird was chirping, no fowl was flying, no cow mooed, the sea did not roar, and in fact, no creature uttered a sound. Even in the spiritual world, no malach or angel flapped a wing, nor did they chant any praise of G-d. Rather, throughout the entire world there was only a deafening silence as the Divine Voice went forth speaking, “Anochi Adonai Elohecha (I am the Lord your God)”.

Nice description of the scene! It’s almost as if everything, literally everything, simply froze in place while G-d made His grand appearance with a booming voice. G-d’s voice was so powerful that it shook the earth and caused every creation to stop dead in their tracks.

However, that’s not exactly what happened. While the description that I just presented of the midrash might sound logical if not intuitive, an accurate reading reveals that that is not what happened; the reality was very different. If you read the midrash above carefully, it does not say that G-d’s voice thundered throughout the world, and as a result, naturally everyone froze in their tracks...

Rather, everything FIRST went silent, creating a deafening silence, the sound of absolutely nothing, not even a wave in the distance or a flap of a wing, and only then, could the Divine Voice be heard.

The silence came first. Everything came to a grinding halt first. All movement, all interactions. And only then was the voice of G-d heard.

But so what? What can we learn from that that is relevant to our lives today?

In our tradition, the voice of G-d is not a booming voice. G-d's voice is described as a kol demama daka, a very quiet, faint voice, a voice that you can only hear if you quiet everything around you, and even all of the noise inside of you. Our sages teach us that the kol demama daka has never stopped calling; our lives and the world just often get too noisy to hear it.

I would like to suggest that the midrash is sharing with us a tremendous strategy, a secret. You want to hear G-d speak to you? Don't look for those big signs outside, but quiet the noise and you will hear Him calling you from inside. If you want to connect to the frequency of Hashem, turn off all of the noise and distraction that is taking up all of your bandwidth.

As we enter Shavuot, and especially another COVID Shavuot, this midrash is a hint to a powerful reality we can tap into this year more than ever.

This year, all of the external noise around us was quieted. The running around and the clatter of day-to-day life was muted significantly, if not nearly completely. Things that used to occupy our time, our minds, our schedules, were cleared.

As a result of this quiet, many people I have spoken to have shared how they found greater clarity. I too, often found myself hearing faint, yet clear voices and thoughts that challenged me to rethink my priorities, to clarify my values, and more importantly to see if my life was actually reflecting those values in the years lived. These quiet voices are incredibly important.

Rather than look at this past year as a "writeoff", we should see it as an opportunity to take steps to get the years ahead "right on" track again, using our inner silence and clarity to receive and integrate more of our values into our lives.

Shavuot is not about our ancestors receiving the Torah millennia ago; it is about us realizing that the Torah is what has carried our people for millennia, as each generation and person reaccepted it throughout history.

This year, it is our turn to do so!

For more thoughts on Shavuot go to:

<https://torah2711.buzzsprout.com/>

Episodes: 140, 141, 142, 143, & 145