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*What Happened at Sinai*

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# שבועות

WITH

# R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## What Happened at Sinai

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## *Part I. Learning Yirah*

### **Rewriting History**

I once saw a history book written by Reform Jews for Reform children – people bring me these things – and I was looking at it. Of course, it didn't start with Bereishis; no, it doesn't say anything there about Hashem creating the world out of nothing. It skips all that; “it's unnecessary”, you understand. Instead it starts with how we were a small tribe of slaves in Egypt and then we came out of Egypt. They like that subject because it's an opportunity to compare us to the nation who was enslaved in America. The Reform like that garbage, that we and the Africans lived parallel histories.

Anyhow it doesn't mention anything about big miracles, about the makkos and how Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim; nothing about that. Hashem is not part of the story. Just that Moses took us out, just like

Harriet Tubman or Frederick Douglass took out the black slaves. And then – this is what it says there – Moses led the people to Mount Sinai and there he taught the Jewish people the law and they accepted it from him. That's it. Moshe taught them laws. Nothing more. That's what Har Sinai is to a Reform Jew, a day at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

### ***The Life of the Nation***

Now, that's how you castrate an idea. That's how you castrate a nation. You know, you can take a living person and cut out his heart and cut out his lungs and cut out his liver and everything else and then you sew him back up and there you have it – a person lying on the table. Only that he's empty; he's dead.

Maamad Har Sinai is the heart of the Jewish people. That day is the core of the Jewish nation; it's our lungs and liver and blood and our everything. The fact that we were there at Har Sinai and we saw what no nation ever saw, that's the experience that made us into His people.

Now it might surprise you to hear this but I'm not talking about the Torah. Of course I'm talking about that too because from that day and forward learning Torah and fulfilling Torah became a paramount function of a Jew. And so, absolutely, when we talk about Maamad Har Sinai we certainly are talking about Kabolas HaTorah, about Torah and mitzvos. But it's much more than that; it's something much more fundamental.

Because what happened at Sinai? What happened when the Bnei Yisroel heard the Voice of Hashem? They became frightened! They realized what it means to be mekabel the Torah, what a heavy obligation it is, and they were terrified! They were fainting from fright!

### ***Fear and Terror***

You remember what the Bnei Yisroel told Moshe Rabbeinu after they heard the Voice of Hashem? The sights and sounds were so terrifying that they begged Moshe that he should be the one to communicate the message to them (Devarim 5:20). הֵן הִרְאָנוּ ה' וְנֹאֲלַקֵינוּ אֶת. כְּבֹדוֹ וְאֵת גְּדֻלוֹ – Behold Hashem has shown us His glory and His greatness, וְאֵת קְלוֹ שָׁמַעְנוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ – and we heard His Voice from the midst of the fire. “But we cannot take it any longer!” they said. “Hearing the Word of Hashem has so shaken us that we're afraid to continue! וְעַתָּה לָמָּה נָמוּת – Why should we die? כִּי תֹאכַלְנוּ הָאֵשׁ הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת – This great fire will

consume us. אָם יִסְפִּים אֲנַחְנוּ לִשְׁמֹעַ אֶת קוֹל ה' לְאֹלֵינוּ עוֹר וּמִתְנוּ – If we continue to hear the Voice of Hashem we shall surely perish.

And so they made a special request from Moshe Rabbeinu: קָרַב אֲתָהּ – You come close to Hashem, וְשָׁמַע – and listen, אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר ה' לְאֹלֵינוּ – to whatever Hashem will say, וְאֵת תְּדַבֵּר אֵלֵינוּ אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר ה' לְאֹלֵינוּ אֵלֶיךָ – and you'll tell us all that Hashem spoke to you, וְשָׁמְעֵנוּ וְעָשִׂינוּ – and we will listen and we will do.

That's the famous na'aseh v'nishma: “We promise we'll accept everything!” Only that they made a proposal to Moshe, “We want to listen through you; we'll do whatever you, our Teacher, will tell us from now on. But to experience again the dvar Hashem?! No. We can't take it anymore. Don't you see how afraid we are? We're shaking! We're dying from fright!”

### **Hashem Approves**

Now, the question is, did they do the right thing? Was it an error to back out and have Moshe come in as a go-between? Because we might think that they should have persisted – they should have steeled themselves against the fear and continued to hear the Words of Hashem from Har Sinai with their own ears. That's what we would have said.

But that's not what Hashem said: שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת קוֹל דְּבַרֵי הָעָם הַזֶּה – “I have heard the voice of this people...,” He said, הֵיטִיבוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרוּ – and they did well in all that they spoke.” Kol asher dibeyru means everything; He agreed with everything they said.

Now we understand why Hakadosh Baruch Hu agreed with the promise to hear and to do; that's self-understood. That's the only way to be mekabel the Torah; you have to go all in – there's no casualness when it comes to Torah. But why did He agree when they said they were afraid to listen any longer? Why should they allow the fright to weaken their hearts? If Hakadosh Baruch Hu is speaking to you, if He's giving you that opportunity by showing Himself to you so you should steel yourself and not allow yourself to be frightened!

### **Fear is Desirable**

And this brings us to a big principle in understanding what took place at Har Sinai. The entire spectacle of Har Sinai, the great sounds and the great fear that was demonstrated then was just for this purpose – that they should gain fear of Hashem. That's the chiddush you're hearing now: that yiras Hashem, to be constantly aware of the obligations

of what it means to be a mekabel HaTorah, that was the prime purpose of Ma'amad Har Sinai.

You know, we have the idea that Ma'amad Har Sinai was to accept the Torah. And it certainly is true; without וְשָׁמַעְנוּ וְעָשִׂינוּ, without Torah, there's no Kabolas HaTorah. But we're learning now that the Giving of the Torah could have been done in an unspectacular manner. After all, it didn't require kolos u'brakim; it didn't require that there should be such tremendous phenomena, fire and smoke and sounds. It could have been given chas v'shalom the way it's described in that Reform book of Jewish history. Moshe Rabbeinu comes with a book of laws and we accept it and finished. A very businesslike Kabolas HaTorah.

On no! The purpose of the tremendous phenomenon of Matan Torah was to create a people that would be loyal forever; a people who would keep the ol malchus shomayim, the burden of being servants of Hashem, before their eyes always. A person can only truly be mekabel the Torah if he is aware of the tremendous obligation on his shoulders, the heavy responsibilities that weigh down on a nation chosen to serve Hashem. And for that there was an ingredient that was required above and beyond the Torah itself – Matan Torah was for the purpose that the Bnei Yisroel should gain this rarest of gems, yiras Hashem. And so we have to say that before anything else, before the Torah, it was yiras shomayim that they received on that day.

### **Passing the Test**

That's what Moshe Rabbeinu told the people when they told him they're afraid. He said (Shemos 20:17), “There's a purpose to this. כִּי לְבַעַב כִּי לְבַעַב לְבַעַב וְנִסּוּת אֲתֻמָּם בְּאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים – Elokim came in order to test you. לְבַעַב וְנִסּוּת אֲתֻמָּם בְּאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, we'll soon see what that means. וְנִסּוּת אֲתֻמָּם בְּאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים – in order that His fear should be on your faces, לְבַלְתִּי תִחַטְּאוּ – so that you should never veer from the path that you're expected to follow.

כִּי לְבַעַב וְנִסּוּת אֲתֻמָּם בְּאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים – Elokim came in order to test you. What's the test? The test was: are you going to utilize the opportunity to acquire mora shomayim? That's why He made this phenomenon, this spectacle.

Now, it was a test because they could have steeled themselves. They could have hardened their hearts. You know there are soldiers who have been trained to stand at the mouth of a cannon and wait for the cannon

ball to shoot through their bodies and they won't flinch. They've been trained to not be afraid, to not be affected by fear.

So the Am Yisroel could have done the same; they could have said, "We're here to accept the Torah but we're not going to be like little fearful children, like crybabies. We'll steel ourselves against that fear and we'll be business-like. We'll do what we're expected to do, of course. We came here to receive the Torah and we'll do that, but we're not going to melt in fear."

### ***Feeling Your Feelings***

No! They didn't say that. Just the opposite – they wanted to be afraid. You know just like a person is capable of steeling himself against his emotions, he's capable also of opening his heart to feel them. Don't you see sometimes people are so interested in a certain ideal that when they hear even the music, an anthem connected with the ideal, they welcome the emotions that it stirs within them and tears flow from their eyes. Others will ignore it and it doesn't make any impression on them. But those who are looking for it, their heart swells with inspiration because they welcome it and absorb it. They want to be saturated with the message.

That's what the Bnei Yisroel did at Har Sinai. They utilized every aspect of the Maamad to become more frightened. Kabolat HaTorah didn't mean only eating milchigs and cheesecakes. It didn't even mean accepting the Torah. It meant accepting an entirely new way of life; not only of behavior but of attitude.

Before Maamad Har Sinai Moshe Rabbeinu taught them that every second of our lives must now be under the control of the Torah and every moment is an opportunity for the service of Hashem. He also described for them how every cheit, a transgression against the Torah is punishable with an onesh atzum venora. How dreadful will be the punishment for transgressing anything. And he made it clear to them; he showed them in the generations to come they'd have to throw themselves into the fire for Hashem. They'll have to take their sons and daughters and slaughter them in order that the gentiles shouldn't force them to baptism. He showed them everything, and the people were agitated and overcome by anxiety when Moshe told them the responsibility that's waiting for them.

And instead of being casual about it, they were waiting for that experience. The preparation of the responsibility of Torah put such fear into them they were trembling. Their limbs were actually shuddering with fear. But they used that fear – they wanted to be yorei shomayim and so they fostered the fear that they experienced at that time. They rose to the occasion and made the most of all the phenomena at Har Sinai that could nurture and encourage yiras Hashem. They permitted themselves to become so excited that נִפְּשֵׁי יִצְאָה בְּרִבְרוֹ. They swooned. They actually fainted.

Don't think it would have happened to you too. I'm not so sure. It was a nisayon – they were being tested. Only because they wanted an opportunity to learn to fear Hashem more and more, that's why they passed the test successfully. And therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu agreed and he said, הֵיטִיבוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרוּ – “They did well in all that they said.” Because they were zoche to the great achievement of mora shomayim in a tremendous degree.

## Part II. Acquiring Yirah

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### **Stuck on the Escalator**

But I want to add now something else, a better understanding of what happened on that day. Because there's another meaning that Moshe Rabbeinu intended when he told the Am Yisroel that “Elokim came down on Har Sinai לְבַעֲבוֹר נְסוֹת אֶתְכֶם.”

The word nasos is connected to the word neis, which means a banner, like in וְשָׂא נֵם לְקִבְץ גְּלוּיֹתֵינוּ. Nes means a banner; anything that's lifted on high, elevated above something else. נ-ס-ה and נ-ש-א are relatives, close relatives. And so Moshe Rabbeinu told the Bnei Yisroel that Hashem came down on to the mountain with kolos u'vrakim, with thunder and lightning and His terrifying Voice, not only linasos eschem, to test you, but linasos eschem, to raise you up; to lift you up and elevate you forever.

Now, how could it be that one event in history should elevate us forever? Well, number one is that we are told to never stop thinking about that day. It's a command of the Torah. הִשְׁמַר לְךָ וְשָׁמַר נִפְשֶׁךָ מֵאֵד הַשְׁמַר פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח, הִשְׁמַר לְךָ וְשָׁמַר נִפְשֶׁךָ מֵאֵד הַשְׁמַר פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח, – Be on guard and watch yourself very much, פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח, – lest you will forget what you saw with your eyes at Har Sinai, אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר רָאָה עֵינֶיךָ וּפֶן יִסּוּרוּ מִלְבָּבְךָ כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ, – and lest it should ever be

removed from your mind. And so, these constant thoughts elevate us constantly.

### **Constant Awareness**

You'll say, "Well, constant thought, that's a very big demand to make." It's not. It's like saying 'never forget that you're a Jew'. When you wake up in the morning, when you go out in the street, when you're in business, when you're in yeshivah, when you're with your family, when you're asleep, you have to be a Jew all the time. That you understand, right? Well, being a Jew means only one thing; it means Kabbolas HaTorah. A Jew doesn't mean anything else except Kabbolas HaTorah. And that, you should never forget. That's linasos eschem, that's an elevation of the mind.

And not only ourselves. We elevate the minds of our children and grandchildren too when we tell them the story of what happened that day. **וְהוֹדַעְתֶּם לְבָנֵיכֶם וְלִבְנֵי בָנֵיכֶם** – And you should make known to your children and your grandchildren, **הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַדְתָּ לְפָנָי ה' אֶל־מִלְכִיךָ בְּהַרְבֶּה** – the day that you stood before Hashem at Har Sinai (Devarim 4:9).

So when you're an old man and your grandchildren come to your house, say, "Kinderlach, you know what happened on Shavuos? We all were assembled at Har Sinai and we heard a Voice."

So one of the children might say, "A voice. So what? We always hear voices."

### **Retaining the Impression**

"Oh no, my little Moshele!" you tell him. "This was a Voice like no other. It was so loud, so powerful, so terrifying and wondrous that **נִפְשֵׁי** **יִצְאָה בְּרַבְרֹו**, our souls went out when He spoke. We were shaking in fright until we all fell down on the floor. Malachim had to come and revive us! Ooh, was that an experience. Our bones still shake from that experience."

That's our responsibility; to try and retain the impression of Matan Torah in our own minds and to renew it in the minds of all the generations forever. Always to hark back to that great spectacle when our forefathers went through a superhuman ordeal, and thought that they were about to perish in fright. We should try as much as possible to foster the picture of that day in our own minds and our children's minds and to recapture those moments of yirah.

But I want to tell you now that it's not only the recapturing of the memory and the passing down of the story. We have to know that it's

much more than that. I'm going to tell you something now, a chiddush I heard from one of my rebbeim in Slabodka and it's something that I always repeat. Besides the fact that we transmit to our children the story of the yirah that we gained on that day, we are also transmitting genes of yirah, the characteristics of being a yorei shomayim.

### ***Lamarckism and Reality***

I'll take the time now to explain that for a few minutes because it's very important. You know, for many years there was a question among the scientists if certain characteristics that are acquired during your lifetime can be transmitted to your posterity. There was once a theory like this called Lamarckism – it got that name from the scientist Jeanne-Paul Lamarck who wrote about this idea that a parent can acquire physical characteristics and then pass on those traits to children.

Now, although the idea of acquired characteristics being transmitted by heredity is already dead – it's been proven to be false - however there is a little bit of truth in the theory; at least in the idea behind the theory. Because we have a tradition that up until a certain period of time in the history of the world – when the world was still somewhat new and the families were separating and becoming nations – Hakadosh Baruch Hu allowed a certain plasticity in human genes.

In the days of old, as the nations were being established, there were opportunities available to people that aren't available anymore. In those days it was still possible for the progenitors of each nation to create characteristics: middos and attitudes, for their descendants. Today – I'm not saying that as a certainty, as a final statement, but it's probably so that today our chromosomes and genes are set forever; probably you won't be able to change your genes by means of your emunah and bitachon and pass it down to your children. But up to a certain time, when the world was young, Hakadosh Baruch Hu allowed a certain amorphous quality in the human genes and so it was possible for people to accomplish in their character, in their nature, achievements of mind and soul that would be transmitted to their posterity.

### ***Molding a Nation***

And so when the Avos and Imahos chose to walk in the ways of perfection – in the ways of emunah and character perfection – Hakadosh Baruch Hu allowed them to mold their nature into a shape that would be passed on in their genes. They were molding not only their own

characters but what they accomplished became the permanent character genes of their descendants.

That's what the Gemara says, sheloshah simanim yesh beumah zu, there are three characteristics of this people, rachmanim beyshanim vegomlei chassadim. They have pity, compassion. Bayshanim, they are modest; they have shame of wrong actions. They don't like to do immoral things. And gomlei chassadim, they have a sincere desire to do kindness to others.

I'll give you an example. You remember when Rivkah, our great mother, was asked to give a stranger a drink, so she volunteered to give even his camels water to drink. And she ran back and forth and drew water for all their camels. It was a day's work; and she didn't regret her offer. And when she was chosen to be the mother of the Am Yisroel you can be certain that this quality of compassion and kindness that had entered into her genes became part of the nature of her descendants too.

### ***The Goodness of Wicked Liberals***

The fact that the Jewish liberals are always leading the way in espousing the cause of compassion is part of their nature as Jews to feel pity for the downtrodden. It's misused of course but it's coming from the genetic makeup that our Avos and Imahos created. Karl Marx, that rasha, one of the lowest characters of our nation, was driven by a certain feeling of compassion for the downtrodden. Now of course he was misusing it and it was falsely interpreted by him and it became a doctrine of wickedness. The best ideals can be distorted.

But we have to know that in all of our reshaim, all of our wicked, there is that gene in their nature of rachmanim beyshanim vegomlei chassadim. Sometimes they do a lot of work to cover it up, to repress it, but it's there. And if they'll have children and the children won't be adversely influenced, you'd be surprised that there crop up in the children of reshaim people who have Jewish qualities.

And so, this Gemara is telling us that the work that our Avos and Imahos put into transforming themselves entered into the Jewish genes. The ideals and attitudes that Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov practiced, the character and ideology that Sarah and Rivka and Rochel and Leah developed in their lifetime became the permanent inborn inheritance of their children forever. It couldn't happen afterwards – we ourselves

probably can't accomplish such a thing, to acquire a good character trait and then pass it down to our children – but at that time it took place.

### **Implanting Yirah**

Now at Har Sinai this happened once more. Maamad Har Sinai was such a tremendous event in the history of the world – the entire world history depended on that great event – that once again something took place in the genes of our forefathers.

At Har Sinai they weren't merely mekabel the Torah – they were mekabel new neshamos. They were actually transformed. They became physically different, emotionally and mentally different, and their neshamos became intrinsically different. Like the Gemara says about a person who has certain good middos, **בְּיָדוֹעַ שֶׁעָמְדוּ אָבוֹתָיו עַל הַר סִינִי** – You can see from his character that his forefathers stood at Har Sinai (see Nedarim 20a). It means that at Har Sinai they acquired certain good qualities of character that would be passed down forever and ever. Something happened then to the Jewish gene, to the chromosomal makeup of a Yisroel.

And among the good qualities they acquired the most fundamental one was **בְּעִבּוֹר תְּהִיָּה יְרֵאתוֹ עַל פְּנֵיכֶם**. Because they passed that test so successfully, as a result, yiras Hashem entered into them and became part of their nature. They swallowed the fright; they absorbed it and became saturated with yiras Hashem so much so that they passed out. They died from fright. But when they revived, they were no longer the same. **בְּעִבּוֹר** means that the fear of Hashem entered into the nature of the Jewish people. It entered into our blood. It changed our genes and from then on we are no longer a nation among nations.

### **A Change in Status**

That's the secret of Maamad Har Sinai. When our nation stood around Har Sinai, it wasn't accepting the Torah like l'havdil a people accepting a constitution. It wasn't that we remained the same people only we took upon ourselves a new way of life. No! When they heard the Voice of Hashem and allowed themselves to be overwhelmed with the understanding of the responsibility that Kabolas HaTorah means, something happened – their souls shot out of the bodies. Like it says, **נַפְשִׁי יֵצְאָה בְּרִבְרוֹ** – My soul went forth when He spoke. And when their souls were restored to their bodies, they were not the same as previously.

And that's why the Jewish nation was born at that time. We became elevated to a new status. We're a different kind of creature now. We went forth from the status of Bnei Noach – Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov and their descendants were included in the category of Bnei Noach; they were not Bnei Yisroel – and now they all became geirim. At Har Sinai, not only were we converted to Torah, but our natures were converted; we were converted to yiras shomayim. The Jewish nation left the company of mankind at that time and they became transformed into a different kind of being. A being capable of achieving yiras shomayim on levels that would have been impossible before then.

## *Part III. Living Yirah*

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### **Contemporary Attitudes**

Now, I understand that I'm talking to people sitting in Brooklyn in this day and age who aren't interested in such talk. Yirah? Fear of Hashem? Awareness of the burden of constant responsibility to our purpose in life? It seems exaggerated.

Especially today it requires effort because it's the opposite of what the attitude of the world is. Today there is an attitude of irresponsibility, of wanting to live without a master. Even Orthodox people – and I'm talking about the best of the Orthodox – if they don't have training in yirah, so they do things because they choose to do them, not because they acknowledge a Master over them. They don't feel the yirah, the hachna'ah, the responsibility towards a Superior Power that rules the world.

Today, we're like people who are at the bottom of a pit. We're in a hole in the ground and somebody's telling us about huge mountains someplace. All that we can know is that there is a rim to the pit. We think, "Ah, how wonderful it would be if we could get out of the pit and stand on the rim." Without thinking about it, we have no idea of the heights to which persons can attain by climbing higher on the mountains of yirah.

### **A Life Attitude**

So you'll have to picture that great day in our history when Hashem proclaimed that He came down **בְּעֶבֶר תְּהִיָּה יִרְאַתוֹ עַל פְּנֵיכֶם**, in order to put His fear upon your faces. It means that from now and forever, you are a

nation that is imbued with potential greatness, and your purpose now, each one of you, is לְהוֹצִיא מִכֶּחָ אֶל הַפְּעַל, to bring forth that greatness of yirah, that of malchus shomayim that we accepted on Shavuos.

Kabolas HaTorah is not merely a system of living. It's an attitude of having a master, a Master with a capital M. Shavuos means we accept, not only the Torah, but we accept upon ourselves the yoke of Your kingdom. What's the yoke? Not only the yoke of fulfilling the Torah, of fulfilling the Shulchan Aruch and all of the seforim. It means the yoke of constantly being aware that You Hashem are the King and that we are responsible to live only according to Your dictates. That's what yirah means – to be aware, always and constantly, that I have a Master.

Now to be afraid of Hashem, number one requires, you should think about Him always. You can't fear something if you don't think about it. So number one is, at all times, every Jew must have in his mind Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And so if you're standing in your shop, you're working, you're selling merchandise, that's an opportunity. Of course, you have to think about your customer too. If you're a dentist filling teeth, of course you have to think about your patient – otherwise you might drill into his cheeks. Certainly you have to keep your mind on your job, but it's just as certain that you have to keep before your eyes Maamad Har Sinai. What happened to us that day means that no matter what, no matter where, there must always be an awareness, a feeling, that you're working in the service of a Master.

### ***Gaining That Attitude***

Now, I don't want to frighten anybody off. When you hear that it's very difficult, you'll say it doesn't pay to begin. It's not true because there are easy and simple acts that help a person grow in yiras Hashem and if you make use of them and gain even a tiny amount of that yirah, you're already successful. It was already worth being born into this world! And whoever achieves even more yirah, is an even greater person.

I want to tell you something; even when a man puts on a yarmulke on his head, he's making a good beginning in mora shomayim. כָּסִי רֹאשִׁי בִּי הֵיכַל יְתְהוּי עֲלָיְךָ אִימְתָא רַשְׁמִיָּא – “Cover your head so that you should have thereby fear of heaven” (Shabbos 156b). That's what Rav Nachman's mother told him. It means that you can become very great by that experience of covering your head. A yarmulke means, “I'm a servant of Hashem.”

Now, it doesn't take too much intelligence to wear a yarmulke, to wear a hat, or a sheitel. But it's a very good beginning. If you put even a little thought into it, so you're already facing in the right direction. Of course if I want to go to Yerushalayim and I face east, I can face east all my life, if I won't make a move to get there nothing will happen. But at least we face east when we pray to show that is where our hearts are; and maybe someday we will keep on going and we will get there.

### ***Accepting the Burden***

Covering your head with a little bit of machshavah, is a good beginning. The fact that you wear something on your head, whether it's a silk top hat, a shtreimel, a yamulke, a straw hat, whatever it is a Jew puts over his head, a tarbush, whatever it is, it's a demonstration that he fears Hashem. And the more times you remind yourself of that during the day so you're doing more than facing in the right direction. You're already walking on the road towards the yiras Hashem of Kabolas HaTorah.

Now, I know that the atmosphere today is so liberal that even among the frumme this sounds strange. Who puts on a hat, or something on the head, and thinks about yiras Hashem? They do it because they consent to this way of life; they chose this way of life. No! Forget about that! We're doing it because we want to remind ourselves of Kabolas HaTorah; that from that day forward we have a yoke on our heads, a burden of avodas Hashem, of constant yiras shomayim.

That's what Har Sinai was all about. Hakadosh Baruch Hu, when He displayed on Har Sinai a raging fire, and a tremendous blast of a shofar that was never heard before or after – Hashem appeared with such sounds and such spectacles that they understood clearly what life was about - they understood that there is one purpose in this world and that is to become as close to Hashem as possible. That's your responsibility in this world. And therefore, from that day forward, we are always under pressure. You're always under pressure because you have been given the tremendous opportunity and now you must begin utilizing it to gain more and more excellence in the Eyes of Hashem.

### ***Fright and Emotional Health***

Now, nobody should be worried that yiras shomayim will make you sick or depressed. There was once a man who said that he went to a shmuess in the yeshivah and heard about yiras shomayim and he became

sick because of that. So he went to his rebbe and his rebbe said, “No. The shmuess didn’t make you sick. Nobody gets sick from hearing about yiras shomayim. You were sick with something else. It’s a fact, a klal gadol – from yiras shomayim nobody gets sick.

That’s what Moshe Rabbeinu said. אַל תִּירָאוּ – don’t be afraid, because Hashem did all of this so that you should be afraid. What does that mean? Moshe Rabbeinu said, “Nothing will happen to you because of this yirah. On the contrary, you’ll be ma’arich yomim, you’ll live long because of this. The purpose of your experience at Har Sinai is so that you should be afraid from now on, but it’s nothing that will harm you.”

The yiras shomayim of the frum Jew doesn’t affect him adversely. It doesn’t make him unhappy. A frum Jew who lives a life of utmost yiras shomayim enjoys life even more than anybody else. Because of his yiras shomayim he enjoys his relations with people, bein adam l’chaveiro, because he keeps his mouth closed. He’s afraid of what Hashem said לֹא תִלְוֶה רֵעִי בְעַמֻּדָה, and so he doesn’t say gossip and lashon hara. And he lives more happily because of that. He keeps away from machlokes, וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ. The frum Jew who serves Hashem gets along well with people. He lives quietly and happily because he’s afraid of Hashem.

### ***The Joys of Proper Living***

A Jew who keeps the Torah doesn’t begin to realize how lucky he is in gashmiyus. We have to study that. It’s one of the thirty cheshbonos of the Chovos Halevavos that he tells us to do homework and think about how lucky you are that you have the Torah. Look how many dangers and difficulties you avoid because the Torah doesn’t let you do certain things. And even though in this world there always are blemishes on our joys – not everything in this world is kulo tov; the next world is kulo tov – however even in this world nobody is as happy as the Jew who lives with yiras shomayim.

A Jewish home is a place of joy, no question about it. The yorei shomayim doesn’t pursue pleasures. People who aren’t afraid of their responsibilities in this world, so they pursue pleasures; they waste their lives traveling, trying to get more money, looking for thrills. Let’s say on Saturday night, look on Ocean Parkway; all the cars are running to Manhattan for a good time. They’re going to spend money, to waste time. They’re going to come out of the theaters – they come out with empty pockets. What do they take with them? Nothing at all. Nothing at

all! Only some garbage that they put into their minds from looking at these stupid things.

But the yorei shomayim knows he's living with a purpose. He's satisfied to live quietly. He lives successfully and happily. Besides for being the one who lives longer than anybody else, the frum Jew knows when he does anything, even mitzvos which make him happy, it's for the purpose of enjoying the schar, the reward in Olam Haba. Kol Yisroel yesh lahem chelek leolam haba. And there's no question that he enjoys this life more because he knows that after this life, is another form of existence where the happiness is extremely greater and that causes him to have more ta'anug, more joy, more simchah in Olam Hazeh.

And all of this greatness and happiness, all of it is because the Jew has by inheritance this quality of yiras Hashem that we gained at Har Sinai. Our forefathers passed the test successfully and as a result yiras Hashem entered into them and became part of their nature. And that's why the Jewish nation was born at that time, They became the Am Yisroel that's going to last forever as a result of this immense experience which no one in mankind had ever before undergone and as a result of the efforts of every Yisroel to continue growing in yiras Hashem.

### **Have A Wonderful Yom Tov**

## **LET'S GET PRACTICAL**

### ***Accepting the Yoke of Awareness***

The deep well of Yiras Shomayim, the potential for living with the tangible feeling of our great obligation to Hashem and His Torah, is waiting to be tapped. Every day this week I will bli neder spend twenty seconds before saying kriyas Shema drawing forth an understanding of Kabolat Ol Malchus Shomayim by reminding myself of what happened at Har Sinai and the Fear and Awareness we achieved on that day.

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שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך



**In your opinion, what was the greatest event in all of history?**



Besides for the creation of the world out of nothing I would say that the greatest event in history is unquestionably Ma'amad Har Sinai. That's why the Rambam says, gadleihu al kol gedulah, you should elevate that event above all other great things. Elevate Matan Torah above everything else because that was the grandest moment in history!

That's what the Torah says, והשמר לך – Be careful, ושמור נפשך מאד – and guard yourself very much. What about? פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך – that you shouldn't forget the thing that your eyes saw at Har Sinai, אלוהים אלוקיך בחורב, – the day that you stood before Hashem your G-d at Har Sinai.

The Rambam says it's a command not to forget Ma'amad Har Sinai; it's a mitzvah to remember how we were standing at Har Sinai. In all of history it only happened once! At least two million people were standing in front of Har Sinai and they heard the voice of Hashem. והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך. נפשי יצאה ברברו – When He spoke, they fainted from happiness. They were delirious; they were intoxicated with happiness and they fell down on the floor. They had to be revived.

Do you ever think about that? Maybe on Shavuos. Maybe. Shavuos is an especial day for remembering but it's true every day. Don't stop talking about it, the Rambam says. Gadleihu al kol gedulah; talk about it more than anything else in the world. You have to talk about Ma'amad Har Sinai and make it great.

We should speak about it to our children and grandchildren. והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך. The Torah says, you should inform your children and your children's children and always remind them of Ma'amad Har Sinai.

You grandfathers, do you speak about it to your grandchildren? Think about that when you become grandfathers. If you're looking for a conversation piece, bring up Matan Torah. "But we know all about it," they say. Say it anyhow! You should always continue to speak about Matan Torah all the days of your life because that's the most important day in history that we have to remember.

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