

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn

Prepared by
 Rabbi Yehudah Leib Altein



To watch this on video, visit:
MerkazAnash.com/cp/bamidbar5779

BEING FORCED: VICE OR VIRTUE?

Chazal tell us that when Hashem gave the Torah to the Bnei Yisroel, he held Har Sinai over them like a barrel and said: "If you will accept the Torah, good. If not, your burial spot will be right here!"

The commentators question the need for this coerced acceptance of the Torah. After all, the Jewish nation had already accepted the Torah of their own free will, declaring, "*Naaseh venishma*—We will do and we will understand." Why was it necessary to force them?

FUNDAMENTAL SURRENDER

What exactly did the Jews commit to when they said *naaseh venishma*?

A Jew can commit to serve Hashem by accepting the yoke of mitzvos (*kabolas ol mitzvos*). He resolves to fulfill Hashem's commandments, whatever they may be; he is nullifying himself to *Hashem's Will*.

A higher level of commitment is to accept the yoke of Heaven (*kabolas ol malchus shomayim*). In this level, a Jew focuses (not on the details of the mitzvos, but) on Hashem Himself: he accepts Hashem as his king. His *bitul* is not only to Hashem's Will, but to *Hashem Himself*.

This is the difference between *kabolas ol mitzvos* and *kabolas ol malchus shomayim* in the level of Elokus toward which the person is nullifying himself (to Hashem's Will or to Hashem Himself). Additionally, they differ in the part of the person that is becoming nullified.

Kabolas ol mitzvos merely affects a person's actions. Instead of doing whatever he fancies, he resolves to act according to Hashem's Will. He is submitting his exterior faculties to Hashem's

"exterior" dimension, so to speak.

Kabolas ol malchus shomayim, by contrast, affects a person's entire existence. Through accepting Hashem as his king, he is effectively transforming his identity from a free man to an *eved*, a Divine slave. Just as a slave has no self-identity and is but a possession of his master, a Jew surrenders his very existence to Hashem, leaving nothing behind. He is submitting his essence to Hashem's essence.

When the Jews said *naaseh venishma*, they were accepting not only the yoke of mitzvos, but also the yoke of Heaven. They were surrendering themselves in an extremely profound way. This serves to strengthen our question: Why was it necessary to force them to accept the Torah by holding Har Sinai above them?!

100% SUBMISSION, NO SELF ADDED

When submission to Hashem is the result of a person's personal decision, even if he surrenders himself as much as he can, a feeling of self still remains. True, he is submitting his very essence to Hashem Himself. He is declaring, "I am all yours; I am not keeping anything to myself!" Yet, since *he* is the one making this decision, he is not completely *batel*.

We see this concept in a *halachah* involving slaves. There are two types of Jewish slaves: one who sells himself out of financial distress, and one who is sold by Beis Din because he is unable to repay a theft. From among these two categories, it is Beis Din who may be given a Canaanite maidservant. Why?

The allowance to live with a Canaanite maidservant stems from the servitude of the slave to his master. As an absolute slave,

Why was it necessary to force the
 Bnei Yisroel to accept the Torah?
 Hadn't they already accepted it of
 their own free will?

only the person sold by Beis Din who may be given a Canaanite maidservant. Why?

he must serve his master both by day and at night: by day through actual work, and at night by producing offspring who will eventually serve the master as well.

However, this is only the case if the person is truly and entirely subjugated to his master. In a case where he sold himself, he cannot be said to have no self-identity whatsoever, since his subjugation was self-imposed. It is only when he was sold through Beis Din, where he was never asked for his opinion on the matter, that he is indeed a slave through and through.

This is why Hashem forced Bnei Yisroel to receive the Torah. Yes, the Jews had surrendered themselves to Hashem in the greatest manner possible. But Hashem wanted our connection to Torah to be deeper than what one can accomplish alone. He wanted us to experience a total *bitul*, one that removes any and all trace of self.

This can help us understand a *possuk* in Parshas Behar: "For Bnei Yisroel are slaves to Me; they are My slaves whom I have taken out of Mitzrayim." The wording here seems to be repetitive. After stating "For Bnei Yisroel are slaves to Me," what is added by the words "they are My slaves"?

If the *possuk* were to have only stated "For Bnei Yisroel are slaves to Me," we might have understood this to mean that *they* resolved to become Hashem's slaves. The *possuk* therefore continues "they are My slaves": the reason they are slaves is because *Hashem* subjugated them.

JOYFUL COERCION

How does this play itself out in actuality?

There is the Jew who has a *geshmak* in Torah and mitzvos; he enjoys and appreciates following a life of Torah. Then there is

the Jew who doesn't enjoy the mitzvos themselves, but he wants to be a good Jew, *an ehrliche Yid*. Being an *eved* of Hashem is something he accepts voluntarily.

But then there is the Jew who doesn't even want to be Hashem's slave. If it were up to him, he would go elsewhere, *chas veshalom*. Yet, there is something that does not let him leave. He feels a force pushing him to stay. This is Har Sinai being held over him; it is Hashem forcing him to stay connected.

Realizing that this is the greatest privilege possible will enable us to joyfully accept the yoke we have no choice but to accept.

ultimately he is the one who chose to be an *eved*. But how can someone who is being forced to remain be expected to serve Hashem happily?!

The fact that we are being forced to serve Hashem is not a *nebach*. To the contrary, *Atah bechartanu mikol ho'amim*—Hashem chose us and wants us to be connected to Him in the strongest manner possible, and he therefore does not give us the option of choosing otherwise. Reflecting on this and realizing that this is the greatest privilege possible will enable us to gladly and joyfully accept the yoke we have no choice but to accept.

For further study see

ד"ה רני ושותמי תשכ"ז (סה"מ מלוקט אדר-סיוון) ובהערות 27, 28, 32.

Dedicated in honor of
the tireless director of **Sichos In English**

Rabbi Yonah Avtzon ע"ה

who led the way in disseminating
English Chassidus

by his children

Rabbi Yitzchok and Chanie Wolf שיחני ווולף