

Parshas Yisro was the parsha of kabbolas haTorah. After that and the aseres hadibros, the Torah records that Klal Yisroel are afraid that they will be overwhelmed if this gilui shechinoh continues for all the mitzvos. The parsha concludes with mitzvos of avodo zoro and building the mizbeach.

At the end of Parshas Mishpotim, we again have a reprise of the events of Matan Torah with added details of offering korbonos and presenting Klal Yisroel with a sefer habris. Rashi says this sefer habris included the parts of the Torah given at Moroh. There is a krisas bris at this juncture.

The question is why is the Torah's narrative of Matan Torah interrupted with all the halachos of nezikin in between? Rashi gives a possible explanation—that the sefer habris included the dinim of parshas Mishpotim that was also given in Moroh.

The first parsha in Mishpotim is about Eved Ivri. It is mistranslated as "laws of a Jewish slave". He really isn't a slave. He is, in many senses, a live-in worker. The Beis Halevy explains that the critical difference between a hired worker in halacha and an eved ivri, is that a worker is hired to perform a set of defined tasks. He is not at the employer's beck-and-call to do any job that he wants done. If you hired a plumber, he will not fix your electricity. If you hired a cook, he will not clean your bathrooms. And visa-versa. But an eved is obligated to do any job you request of him.

The Torah describes a scenario where the eved ivri wants to stay with his master and his slave family for the long-term. So the master takes him to beis din to have his ear pierced.

Why his ear? Rashi quotes the gemara in Kiddushin. It is because he was sold into slavery for stealing and he didn't listen carefully enough at Har Sinai which told us not to steal. Or, a Jew who finds another master for himself after hearing Hashem say at Har Sinai that we are His avodim, means his ears didn't listen carefully enough and need to be pierced.

Why at the mezuzah, the doorpost? Because in Egypt, Hashem commanded us to paint the blood of the korban Pesach on the doorpost in order to leave slavery, and he sold himself as a slave.

These halachos teach us a basic lesson right at the beginning of all the halachos. The lesson is that a Jew is a slave to Hashem and is completely subject to Hashem. And if for a period of time he chose to be subject to another human being, he needs to know that this is not his true identity. This is the introduction right after kabbolas haTorah.

In Parshas Yisro, Moshe told them they are about to get the Torah and Klal Yisroel responded with "na'aseh". Why here do they add "nishmah" to their previous "na'aseh"? And why is there a krisas bris with a sefer habris?

The Rambam says the process of geirus for every convert is supposed to parallel the process of kabbolas haTorah of Klal Yisroel at Har Sinai. They went to mikveh and brought a korbon. The geirus then and the geirus today is a process of making a bris with Hashem. There is a mutual relationship being forged.

Hashem will protect us as His special nation and we commit ourselves to be His people. There are many mitzvos which are not a sign of a bris. Miloh is part of a krisas bris, along with teviloh and korbon.

They brought a korbon shlomim at Har Sinai. A non-Jew cannot bring a korbon shlomim—only olos—which are completely burnt up. What

is unique about a korbon shlomim? There are parts that are burnt on the mizbeach and there are parts that are eaten by human beings before Hashem in a state of kedushah and taharoh. It reflects the fact that a Jew who follows the system of the mitzvos of the Torah is given a way of using olam hazeh in the service of Hashem. In other religions, the classic religious person dedicated to his religion was to seclude himself from the world and physicality. In Yiddishkeit, the goal is to integrate the physical world into a life of kedushah and taharoh.

There were mitzvos before Matan Torah which were commanded by nevi'im. But now all the mitzvos express a bris with Hashem by being put within a sefer habris. It is a written document which allows us to know what it means to be a mamleches kohanim. It goes beyond a mere list of mitzvos. We are becoming avdei Hashem with this sefer habris.

Why did naaseh venishmah need to wait to this moment when we are entering a bris with a sefer habris?

There are two elements to naaseh venishmah which complement each other.

The Torah demands absolute, unconditional acceptance. The midrash says that Hashem first went to offer the Torah to the other nations and told them the mitzvah which they refuse to accept. It is teaching us something very deep about the nature of what our kabbolas haTorah has to be. We don't evaluate the Torah with our own judgment to make a determination if the mitzvos fit into our lifestyle and our moral logic. Torah is given to us to teach us how to evaluate and judge everything else.

Maybe the Torah goes against all human nature, but we accepted it anyway by saying naaseh venishmah. But in reality, the mitzvos are uplifting and edifying beyond description. But there is one prerequisite—you have to submit to Hashem's command.

The gemara says a surprising thing. One who does mitzvos out of spiritual inspiration alone and is not commanded, is on a lower level than someone who performs it as a Divine command. Why? Wouldn't we admire the person who does good things voluntarily rather than be coerced? The Ramban answers that you have the wrong understanding of mitzvos. We don't do Hashem any favors by doing mitzvos. It's not a bigger favor to Hashem when we do mitzvos voluntarily. The mitzvos have inherent value and create positive effects on the world. But you only connect yourself to those effects and get credit for them when you perform them as a command. Anytime I do a mitzvah, I am subordinating myself and my mind to the will of Hashem. A person who does things as an eved gets more reward because he is mekkabel ol malchus shomayim along with performing that mitzvah.

Chazal tell us that the Torah was first created, and then the world emerged from the wisdom imbedded in the Torah. Everything about the world and about the human being has its foundation in the metaphysical system of the Torah.

So naaseh venishmah on the one hand is an unconditional commitment, but Hashem designed the Torah and the human being as complimentary systems.

There is another aspect to naaseh venishmah. What does nishmah mean? To hear? No. It means to understand. This is the essence of limud haTorah—to understand the ideas of the Torah for their own sake—beyond the practical knowledge needed to perform the mitzvos

correctly. Of course it takes a lot of learning necessary to keep Shabbos properly and to make proper brochos. This is all included in naaseh. But nishmah is a whole other level.

A Jewish businessman once asked me—why does everyone have to be learning beiyun as if they are going to be paskening sheilos? I'm a businessman and I conduct my business without knowing any business law. When I have a legal issue with a contract or a business deal, I'll call up my lawyer who spent years studying business law and he'll instruct me on what's legal. So too with Torah—if I have a halachic problem, I'll call a rabbi to help me resolve it. Why do I need to learn sugyos and shittos myself? It is a good question.

One answer is that the halachic system is so complex and all-encompassing, that everyone needs to have basic familiarity with Shas to know how to live properly like a Jew. It can't be relegated only to experts to be consulted every once in a while. Questions of halacha come up all the time throughout your daily life and you need to know what to do constantly. So we need ongoing learning throughout our lives.

But the deeper answer is that which the Beis Halevy and others say. There is another mitzvah of limud haTorah beyond the practical knowledge. All that is naaseh. But then there is nishmah, limud leshem limud—to acquire Torah and absorb it through and through with a deep understanding until it becomes part of you.

So there was first naaseh to accept the mitzvos and commit ourselves to perform them. But now with the sefer habris there is a whole different connection through deepening one's understanding to make it part of oneself. The Midrash says there was a bas kol which proclaimed "who revealed this secret?" They received two crowns—one for doing the mitzvos and a second for understanding them.

There is a reason why a korban was necessary at Matan Torah. With a krisus bris, there has to be sacrifice. There has to be a willingness to give up something of ourselves. So although we received so much from the Torah, and it is naturally attuned to how we were created, we still have to be willing to give things up for Torah—when it doesn't seem to fit with our feelings and logic. We accept the Torah even though it will not be easy and we will have to struggle to have it match our personality. This is the way a person achieves perfection.

The gemara at the end of Meseches Shabbos discusses the different constellations of the zodiac and how each one affects the people born under that constellation. Some people are born with these tendencies and those character traits, etc. But then the discussion closes with the statement "ain mazal li'Yisroel." There is no mazal for Jews. What does this mean?

There is a Teshuvos HaGeonim in the end of Otzar HaGeonim of Shabbos which explains as follows. An average person is born with various traits and this is how they will stay. The non-Jewish world of psychology says there is a process of self-discovery—you discover who you really are. The Torah says there is a process of self-development—you develop who you want to become. If you find yourself with certain tendencies and character traits, the Torah tells us which are good and which are bad—which to develop and improve upon, and which to sublimate and overcome. We are all born with a mazal. But for Jews who have Torah, their mazal is not their destiny—they are not fated by the stars. You can redirect your path in life and become a better person with the program of Torah and mitzvos.

All this is part of naaseh venishmah. The deeper your insight into Torah and your connection with the Torah, the more you reflect its goals and become an expression of its ideals. But it only happens with a sefer—a sefer that contains everything. We go over it and sink our minds into all its details and nuances and keep finding new ways of connecting to Hashem.

After all of this, we read about the Zekeinim who kept eating while they were experiencing the gilui shechinoh of maamad Har Sinai. There is a machlokes about what happened. There are two ways of reacting to a spiritual awakening. One way is to use it as a challenge to grow and go higher in elevating their life. The other way is to sort of let it pass without letting it disturb your equilibrium, hoping you can continue with life as usual. The ones who aren't impacted by a hisorerus don't really have a chelek in Torah. They don't integrate it into their personality.

Only when you take a hisorerus and use it to spur you to greater heights will it change you to become a mamleches kohanim vegoy kodosh.