

Title: Who Really Said *Na'ase v'Nishma*

וַיִּקְחֶה סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע

And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the ears of the nation: and they said, "All that the Lord has said נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע, we will do and listen."

Towards the end of this week's Torah portion, in response to Moshe's reading from the Book of the Covenant, the Jewish people declare that they will **do** what is requested of them and **listen**.

But why is **doing** what they were requested not sufficient? What does the **listening** component add?

Four verses earlier the Torah recounts a similar occurrence:

וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לְעַם לְעַם אֶת כָּל דִּבְרֵי ה' וְאֵת כָּל הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וַיַּעַן כָּל הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה
And Moshe came and told the nation all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and the whole nation answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the Lord has said נַעֲשֶׂה, we will do."

In this instance, the people simply commit to **doing** what they are commanded.

What was the difference between the first and second encounters between Moshe and the people of Israel that generated the different responses?

Furthermore, why should Moshe and the nation repeat what appears to be the same procedure?

There seem to be three obvious differences between the verse where the Jews respond by saying *נַעֲשֶׂה* - *we will do* - and between the verse where the Jews respond *נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע* - *we will do and we will listen*. In the latter verse, Moshe reads to the Jewish people from a book, the Book of the Covenant and he reads it **in their ears**. Additionally, unlike in the first verse, the Torah does not add that the whole nation responded.

Rashi stipulates that both of these interactions between Moshe and the Jewish people occurred before the Ten Commandments were presented at Har Sinai. Consequently, the content that Moshe relayed to the Jews in the former verse was solely the seven Noachide laws, the laws how to behave at Har Sinai when Hashem would speak to them, and the few laws they were presented up to that point. Their response after hearing these laws was *נַעֲשֶׂה* - *we will do*.

The content of the Book of the Covenant from which Moshe read in the latter verse was the content of our Torah from Breishit until the revelation at Sinai. Upon hearing this, the people responded *נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע* - *we will do and listen*.

The Netziv suggests that in the two above encounters, Moshe is addressing two different populations. In Parshat Yitro, Hashem told Moshe

כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יִצְחָק וְתִגִּיד לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

"This you shall say to the house of Ya'aqov, and tell the children of Yisra'el"

The Netziv suggests that the *house of Ya'akov* refers to the general population, while the *children of Yisra'el* refers to the scholars.

In discussing our two verses at the close of this week's parsha, the Netziv theorizes that in the first verse, in which Moshe reviews the seven Noachide laws, the few laws they learned since they left Egypt, and the laws of how to act at Har Sinai, Moshe was addressing the general Jewish population. Moshe was seeking their commitment to perform the mitzvot and learn the Torah. The people responded accordingly "נעשה - *we will do*".

However, in the latter verse, Moshe had a different focus. He would not have to read the entire Torah from Breshit till that point, which is mostly narrative, if his aim were simply to have the people follow certain laws. He would not have read it "*into their ears*" if the aim was simply that they obey the laws.

According to the Netziv, Moshe was focusing on something beyond the apparent actions of performing mitzvot and learning Torah. Moshe was presenting to the people the aim of performing the Torah and mitzvot **FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN**. His focus was on the mindset and motivation the individual should strive to assume when performing the mitzvot. In response to that plea, the Netziv suggests that only the scholars responded "נעשה ונשמע, *we will do and we will listen*."

There is an apparent contradiction between the Netziv's suggestion that Moshe presented to the scholars the idea of performing mitzvot **for the sake of Heaven**, as the verse explicitly states: "...and he read in the ears of the nation..." - the whole nation. If Moshe were presenting this more profound idea to the scholars, why did the verse itself say that Moshe read the Book of the Covenant to the entire nation?

We must say, as our Rabbis express in many places, that the level of serving Hashem for the sake of Heaven is the goal for us all. Moshe presented the idea in all of the people's ears. However, according to the Netziv only those who at that point were at the level to understand and appreciate that concept responded "נעשה ונשמע, *we will do and listen*."

May we continue to mature in our commitment and relationship to Torah to the point where we all achieve this wonderful and lofty connection to Hashem and His mitzvot.

comments: dov_zemel@yahoo.com