

PARASHAS YISRO

Spontaneous Consensus

The six hundred thousand people gathered around Mount Sinai didn't discuss it beforehand. They didn't consult with each other and decide on a consensus response. As we read in this week's Torah portion, Moses descended the mountain as Hashem's messenger and offered the Torah to the Jewish people. They asked no questions, held no conferences. And yet, they responded in one spontaneous outcry, "We will do it!"

How could such a thing happen? How could six hundred thousand people spontaneously utter the identical response? Whoever heard of even six Jewish people being of one mind, let alone six hundred thousand?

Let us read a little further in the Torah. "And Moses referred the words of the people back to Hashem." Here again, we are puzzled. Why would Moses have to convey the response of the Jewish people back to Hashem? Didn't Hashem know on His own what the Jewish people had said?

The commentators explain that we are all a composite of body and soul, material and spiritual. Our material side responds to our environment, to our specific needs, to our situation. But our spiritual side completely transcends the physical and temporal. The spirit in its purest form is a divine spark, a blaze of eternal fire that responds only to the ultimate truths of the universe and is entirely impervious to the petty considerations of mundane existence.

Divisions and disagreements only arise when we are focused on our material sides. Since innumerable factors affect our material existence, no two people ever really experience the exact same conditions. Therefore, it is almost inevitable that there will be some differences in the way we react and respond to diverse situations.

But if we step back from our material existence, if we reach deep within ourselves and connect with the divine spark that resides in all of us, we can break free of all the pettiness of the mundane world and soar into the exalted realm of the pure spirit. And in this world we are all one, luminescent divine sparks united by our perfect connection to the Source from which we are all derived. There are no divisions, no disagreements.

Had the Jewish people related to the Torah as a set of instructions to govern and improve their material lives, they would undoubtedly have

responded with a plethora of questions, opinions and suggestions. But they understood that the Torah functions on a much more profound level, that it is the channel which connects the divine spark within each of us to the Master of the Universe, that it provides the wings on which our spirits can soar to the highest spheres of Heaven. In this light, there were no divisions among them, and they responded with a spontaneous consensus.

This then is what the Torah is telling us. "And Moses referred the words of the people," he explained their universal agreement, "back to Hashem," by attributing it to their total focus on connecting with Hashem.

A king was once travelling through the outlying districts of his realm. In one very remote village the people gave him a wonderful welcome, and the king was so moved that he promised them a gift.

After much reflection, he decided to give them an airplane, since this would connect them to the rest of the country and improve their economy and quality of life. The airplane was delivered, and the people sent the king letters thanking him for the precious gift that had so enriched their lives.

Several months later, the king visited the village again. The people greeted him with great festivity and took him to see the airplane he had so generously gifted to them. He was taken to a lush meadow beyond the village, and there it stood in all its gleaming splendor.

All around the airplane, families were enjoying picnic lunches. Teenagers sat on the wings, their legs dangling off the sides. Children scampered excitedly through the fuselage and cockpit, sliding down the emergency chutes and running back up for another turn. Everyone was having a wonderful time. When the king appeared, they all applauded and shouted their gratitude.

"My dear people!" the king cried out. "What are you doing? This thing flies!"

In our own lives, we all appreciate the ideals and values of the Torah. We know that the timeless wisdom of the Torah is as fresh and relevant to contemporary life as it was three thousand years ago. We know that it prescribes a way of life full of wonderful benefits and rewards. But do we also realize that "this thing flies"? But indeed it does. If we connect with the Torah on a spiritual level, we can transform ourselves and enrich our lives in ways we never thought possible..