Jewish Tribune – Yisro

**Flowers for Shabbos?**

“How can I help you?” asked the Rov.

“It’s my husband again!” said an exasperated Mrs Goldberg. “He just doesn’t get it! Never buys me anything! Not even flowers for Shabbos!”

The Rov agreed to speak to her husband and a few days later it was Mr Goldberg in the Rov’s office. The Rov explained how important it is for a wife to be feel loved and cared for. And buying flowers is an expression of that.

“But the flowers die after a few days, and I just have to put them in the green bin. What’s the point!”

The Rov saw that the husband really didn’t get it and used language that he hoped he would understand. “Mr Goldberg, let me put it this way, I am your Rov, and I am instructing you to buy flowers for your wife every Shabbos.”

The next Motsei Shabbos, straight after making havdolah, the phone went in the Rov’s home. It was Mrs Goldberg.

“How can I help you?” asked the Rov.

“It’s my husband again!” exclaimed Mrs Goldberg.

“Did he not buy you flowers this week?” asked the Rov incredulously?

“Yes, he did. He came home on erev Shabbos and presented me with the flowers and said: ‘Here, the Rov said I should give you these!’”

Mr Goldberg really didn’t get it.

The major event not just in this week’s sedrah, but in all of history, is Matan Torah. Klal Yisroel say “na’aseh v’nishma” (recorded in parshas Mishpotim - Shemos 24:7) and receive the Torah. But Chazal tell us they did so under duress.

On the words וַיִּתְיַצְּבוּ בְּתַחְתִּית הָהָר – and they stood at the bottom of the mountain (Shemos 19:17), the Gemoro in Shabbos (88a) says:

מלמד שכפה הקב"ה עליהם את ההר כגיגית ואמר להם אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב ואם לאו שם תהא קבורתכם

This teaches that the HKBH held the mountain over them like a barrel and said, 'If you accept the Torah, it is good. And if not, here shall be your graves.'

It was only nearly a thousand years later that the Jewish people accepted the Torah willingly and with love. 40 years in the midbar, 40 years of Yehoshua’s leadership, about 400 years for the period of the Shoftim, 410 years for the first Beis Hamikdash and 70 years of golus Bavel.

And it was towards the end of this 70-year period, when the Purim story takes place, that Klal Yisroel accepted the Torah voluntarily and with love. The Gemoro in Shabbos (88a) continues:

 הדור קבלוה בימי אחשורוש דכתיב קימו וקבלו היהודים, קיימו מה שקיבלו כבר

They again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written: “They kept and accepted” (Esther 9:27), the Jews kept and accepted what they had already taken upon themselves (through coercion at Har Sinai).

But why now? Why is it specifically during golus Bavel that Klal Yisroel re-accept the Torah with love? Why not at any time during the preceding nearly one thousand years? A period that covers giants of Jewish history in the shoftim and all of bayis rishon?

Reb Tzadok Hacohen of Lublin offers a fascinating explanation (Pri Tzaddik, Chag HaSuccos, 18).

The Gemoro in Yoma (54b) says when the gentiles entered the kodesh kedoshim during the churban of the first Beis Hamikdash, they found the two keruvim on top of the aron hakodesh embracing each other. And yet, the Gemoro in Bava Basra (99a) says when Klal Yisroel are not doing the will of Hashem, the keruvim face away from each other. And surely at the time of churban, Klal Yisroel are not doing the will of Hashem! So why did they find the keruvim embracing at the time of the churban?

Reb Tzadok essentially says that absence makes the heart grow fonder. As Klal Yisroel are about to depart from Yerushalayim and leave Eretz Yisroel for Bavel, there is an awakening of love between Hashem and His people. Bein hazmanim, when yeshiva bochurim return home from yeshiva, can have some stressful moments, but there are often tears and feelings of love when bein hazmanim comes to an end and it is time to say goodbye.

Yes, it was the time of churban and for many of the preceding years we were not following the will of Hashem and the keruvim were indeed facing away from each other, but now, as we part from one another, there is a sudden longing and pangs of love. Hence the embracing keruvim and it is specifically in the period that follows that we reconnect with HKBH with a voluntary acceptance of Torah.

Reb Tzadok further explains that that is why there is a sudden explosion of Torah after churban bayis sheni. The Mishna and Gemoro are all written at this time. As we embarked on a very long golus that we are still languishing in, there is another outpouring of love, and it is this love which gives rise to the writing of the Mishna and Gemoro. And this explosion of Torah she’ba’l peh is an expression of our deep love for HKBH at a time when He is distant from us.

So, while we indeed say “na’aseh v’nishma” at Matan Torah, it is only many centuries later that we do so with love and joy. And there is a big difference between doing things when you are forced to, and when you do so voluntarily – just ask Mrs Goldberg.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**