

המגזין

HAMODIA

PRIME

Weekly News Magazine

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SHAVUOS, HAR SINAI, AND THE POWER OF SILENCE



did not roar, the creatures did not speak; the whole world was hushed into breathless silence, and the voice went forth: 'Anochi Hashem Elokecha.'"

The Torah was given in complete silence.

Many centuries later, Eliyahu Hanavi stood at Har Sinai alone and had a revelation of Hashem. First, Eliyahu experienced a tremendous wind, followed by an earthquake, and then a fire. However, the *pesukim* tell us that none of those awe-inspiring experiences actually revealed Hashem. It was only following the noise when there was a *kol demamah dakah* — a thin, still voice — that Hashem's Presence was revealed to Eliyahu (*Melachim I* 19:11-12).

Mattan Torah was a far-reaching spiritual event and one that touched the essence of the Jewish *neshamah* for all time. Our *Chachamim* compared it to a wedding between Hashem and the Jewish people and, in fact, some *minhagim* of a *chuppah* have their source in what occurred on *Har Sinai*. For example, one reason that the parents accompany the *chassan* and *kallah* with candles is to parallel the lightning at *Har Sinai*.

Like a wedding, *Mattan Torah* was the initiation of *Klal Yisrael* into a whole new way of life, as elaborated in the Talmud and *Zohar*. In what context did this wedding, the giving of the Torah, take place?

The Torah records that immediately before *Mattan Torah*, there was tremendous thunder, lightning, and the increasingly loud sound of the blowing *shofar*. We are told that the very earth shook on its foundation!

Nevertheless, at the actual moment of the giving of the Torah, the entire world was utterly silent. The *Midrash Rabbah* (*Shemos* 39:9) records, "When Hashem gave the Torah, no bird twittered, no fowl flew, no ox lowed, none of the *Ophanim* stirred a wing, the *Seraphim* did not say 'Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh,' the sea

On Shavuos, the *haftarah* that we read (*Chavakuk* 2:20) begins, "And Hashem is in His holy sanctuary — let the whole earth be silent before Him!" The *Malbim* explains that the world needs to be silent to recognize Hashem's glory and be filled with awe before Him.

This inherent connection between the giving of the Torah and the necessity for silence is also brought out by the fact that the Torah was given in a desert. The *meforshim* explain that the reason for this is that a desert is a place of silence. There is nothing visually to distract you, and there is little noise. It is in such a place that the Torah can be given.

If one wishes to encounter Hashem, if he wishes to connect to Hashem, he must experience silence.

Silencing the background din of life is a tremendous challenge for us. We are inundated and driven by distraction. In a world filled with vivid colors and a cacophony of noises, the one essential component that is absent is silence.

As a society, we have removed silence from so many areas. We listen to music or podcasts when we drive, at work, in the grocery, and at home. We are so used to auditory stimulation that we use white noise to go to

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sleep and musical alarm clocks to wake us up. Yet, this lack of silence can be detrimental to us as individuals and as a society. When it's so noisy, we cannot hear ourselves think, and it is difficult to see things clearly.

French philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote, “All of humanity's problems stem from a person's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.”

Taking time for silence provides clarity.

As a child, the Chozeh of Lublin would go off into the woods by himself.

When his father asked him why, he responded, “I go there to find Hashem.”

His father said to him, “But, my son, don't you know that Hashem is everywhere?”

“Hashem is,” responded the boy, “but I'm not.”

It was in solitude that he was able to connect spiritually.

This year, Shavuos begins immediately after Shabbos.

Shabbos also provides us with this message.

It's a time of *menuchah* — of cessation. Shabbos is a day when we stop. To

accept the day's sanctity, we shut out all the outside world's distractions. We turn off our devices, set aside our work, and spend the day connecting to Hashem and His Torah.

On Shabbos, we connect to ourselves, our families, and our communities.

Making the time to experience silence gives us the gift of Shabbos and Shavuos during the week. Taking a device-free walk or a drive of quiet, uninterrupted thought, turning off the music to truly listen to those around us, or taking a few minutes at the end of the day to just stop and think — all provide an opportunity.

In silencing the noise of the world, we can hear the messages that are waiting to be heard. ■

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