

# Reason to Believe

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Each of the three Pilgrimage festivals commemorates a significant event in Jewish history. On Passover we recount our miraculous extrication from the Enslavement of Pharaoh, while on Sukkot we reenact the lengthy trek in the Wilderness wherein we were sustained by many manifestations of Hashem's loving Providence.

Shavuot celebrates an event which is unique in the annals of human history. The Creator of the Universe, as it were, descended from heaven, and revealed the "Ten Utterances" to an entire nation which had been gathered for that purpose.

We must appreciate the full significance of this occurrence. No other religion can even come close to making a similar claim. All religions aside from Judaism have no recourse except to appeal to people to have faith in their theological claims. Judaism, however, does not ask a person to believe blindly but, to study the historical background behind the public revelation of the Torah. He will emerge intellectually convinced that "we have reason to believe".

It is interesting to note that the major Western religions *do* accept the veracity of the "Jewish Bible" (Tanach). Thus, Christianity and Islam, in addition to Judaism, affirm that the "Jewish Scriptures" are of Divine origin. The same cannot be said for the "holy" writings of any other faith.

Let us consider the significance of the Revelation at Sinai. Hashem wanted to give His Torah to the Jewish People. His ordinary method of communicating with mankind was by way of a prophet. The Jews believe in prophecy and have very exacting standards to determine who qualifies to be regarded as an authentic prophet.

In this regard it should be mentioned that *all* of the world-renowned prophets such as Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel and many others were introduced to the world by the Jews. Clearly, everyone must acknowledge that we have a keen knack for producing and identifying faithful bearers of G-d's message.

The question therefore arises, why didn't God just communicate the Torah to Moshe who would then pass it on to the Jewish sages? Why was it necessary to arrange a personal encounter with His People and to speak to them directly?

According to our great theologians such as Maimonides and Nachmanides it was because God wanted to remove any *shadow of doubt* about the divine origin of Torah. Therefore, He orchestrated an event at which every Jew was witness to the Revelation and which caused them to proclaim, "...this day we saw that Hashem will speak to a person and he can live".

This event was incorporated into the official national record of the Jews (the Torah) and has never been contradicted or disputed. We have been commanded to never forget this event or to remove it

from the forefront of our consciousness for it is the basis of our absolute conviction about the truth of Torah.

The holiday of Shavuot commemorates the great Revelation on Mt. Sinai which fundamentally changed the course of human history. In my opinion it should be regarded as the holiday of *Emunah* (Belief) for, at this time, we should reorient ourselves regarding our relationship to the Revelation.

It is vitally important that our connection to Judaism be based on a sense of certitude about the veracity of Torah. For starters we need to consider deeply the origin of our religion and ask; what nation claims that it witnessed miraculous events such as those recorded in the *Aseret Hadibrot* narrative (Shemot 20:2 and Devarim 5:6) and heard a voice from heaven proclaiming the most profound moral imperatives?

However, affirmation of the divine source of Judaism, alone, might not suffice to engender a religious commitment to Judaism. The most compelling motivation for keeping the Torah emerges from exposure to its depth and profound wisdom. Shavuot calls on us to renew our commitment to the serious and ongoing study of our sacred heritage.

Jews have the beautiful custom of staying up all night on Shavuot eve engaged in Torah study to prepare for acceptance of the Torah on the following morning. This demonstrates the central role that *learning* and knowledge play in our pursuit of religious perfection. On the anniversary of the Revelation may we rededicate ourselves to preserve and defend the Torah and to reflect its deep wisdom in all areas of personal and communal endeavor.

Shabbat Shalom V'Chag Shavuot Sameach,