

Commentaries of the Dubno Maggid

Parashas Yisro

This week's parashah recounts the revelation at Sinai. In the period leading up to the revelation, Hashem told Moshe (Shemos 19:9): "Behold, I am going to come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people will hear as I speak with you, and also will believe in you forever." The Maggid asks why Hashem used the phrasing "believe in you" (*yaaminu becha*) rather than simply saying "believe you" (*yaaminu lecha*)? Seemingly it would have been more correct to say "believe you," just as Moshe said previously – when Hashem first told him to lead the Jewish People out of Egypt – "but they will not believe me (*yaaminu li*)" (Shemos 4:1). The Maggid asks further: What did Hashem mean by "forever"?

The Maggid explains as follows. It is a basic principle that the strength of a person's belief depends on how critical-minded he is. Some people readily accept anything they hear. But such people can be just as readily convinced to abandon an idea they accepted previously, in favor of a contrary one. With a critical-minded person, it is just the opposite. He will not accept any claim until he investigates it thoroughly and obtains clear evidence for it. Once he is convinced, however, his belief is firm and unwavering.

This principle played a pivotal role in the discussion between Hashem and Moshe at their first meeting at the burning bush. Moshe told Hashem that the Jewish People "will not believe me." Hashem replied (*Shemos Rabbah* 3:12): "They are believers, the children of believers." Hashem was telling Moshe: "I call them believers because they are critical-minded." We can see a hint to this idea in a homiletical reading of Yeshayah 25:1: "Hashem, You are my God. I shall exalt you and give thanks to Your Name, for You have done wondrously. From a distance, faith was firmly adopted." That is, Hashem performed a wonder in implanting into the Jewish soul a critical nature, so that they would accept only claims that are proven reliable, and their faith would thus have a firm basis.

The Jewish People refuse to listen to charlatans who try to peddle their own fabricated ideas. In matters of basic world outlook, they accept only those ideas that are reliably known to have been taught by Moshe and handed down from generation to generation. When critical analysis reveals that a claim runs counter to this tradition, the claim is rejected.

This is what Hashem meant when He told Moshe that He will come down to him and speak with him before the Jewish People, in order that the people will "believe in you forever." The revelation at Sinai firmly established the authenticity of Moshe's teachings. The Torah testifies elsewhere to Moshe's status as a true prophet of the highest order, saying (Bamidbar 12:17): "In My entire house, he is the trusted one." By virtue of Moshe's status, the one whom Moshe ordained as a reliable teacher – Yehoshua – is worthy of our trust, and is worthy as well of ordaining his successor. In this way, our faith is handed down through the chain of tradition, from teacher to teacher and from generation to generation. Moshe is the foundation of the entire chain, and thus our reliance on him continues forever.