BS”D

Parshas Yisro

*Every person is tested by the Holy One. The wealthy man is tested, and the poor man is tested.*

G-d Is Testing Us

Rabbi Chaim Zev Citron

As the Jewish people stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai after the Torah was given, they trembled in fear and asked Moshe to speak to them rather than to hear directly from G-d. They feared they would die if they continued to hear His word.

Moshe told them not to be afraid, for G-d was speaking to them “*L’nasos es’chem* (we’ll explain the different interpretations of “*L’nasos es’chem* shortly) and so they would learn the fear of G-d and not sin in the future. The people stood at a distance and Moshe approached the cloud of darkness on the mountain.

There are two ways to understand the chronology of this story:

The first is that it took place after the Torah was given. Hashem would have taught the entire Torah to the Jewish people (see Rashbam). They were afraid, though, despite Moshe’s encouragement. According to this approach, the description of this event is explained in more detail in the book of Devorim (chap. 5) where Hashem agrees with the Jews and tells Moshe to send the Jewish people back to their tents while Moshe alone stays with G-d.

The Ramban suggests a different approach. The events described here *preceded* the giving of the Torah. The Jews had not yet heard the words of G-d. However, the noise, the smoke, and the trembling of the mountain frightened them so that they were afraid to hear the actual voice of G-d. Moshe convinced them to hear the words. They trembled as they stood afar and heard the Ten Commandments. *Afterwards*, as recorded in Devarim, the elders asked Moshe to hear the *rest* of G-d’s words since they felt they would die if they continued to hear His words. To this Hashem agreed.

Moshe told the Jews that G-d was speaking to them “*L’nasos*.”

Rashi interprets the word as meaning to uplift. You will be considered great before the nations since G-d revealed Himself to you.

The Ramban brings an interpretation of *l’nasos* “to train you.” You become trained in faith, your souls will learn to cleave to G-d and not be separated from Him.

The Ramban quotes the Rambam in the *Moreh Nevuchim* as explaining the word *l’nasos* as “testing.” G-d will be able to test you in the future if a false prophet challenges your faith. Since you personally experienced the Divine revelation, you will be able to overcome all of the arguments of the false prophets against the Torah.

The Ramban himself interprets *l’nasos* also as a test, but in a different sense than the Rambam. When G-d gives you something good, something of great value, that is a test. Will you respond to G-d’s gift with appreciation and coming closer to G-d or not? So the gift of our hearing G-d’s words is a challenge for us to live up to that great experience. For the rest of our history we are tested as to whether we serve G-d on the highest standard or not.

The Ramban quotes a Midrash on the concept of tests that I’d like to cite in more detail.

“Fortunate is the person who withstands his test. Every person is tested by the Holy One. The rich man is tested; will his hand be open to the poor? The poor man is tested; will he accept suffering and not be angry?

“If the wealthy man withstands his test and performs deeds of charity, he will be rewarded in this world and the principle will remain for him in the next world. If the poor man withstands his test and does not rebel, he receives double in the world to come…” (Shmos Rabah 31.2)

We are all being tested. Bad things happen to us sometimes. Often we have no answers, no explanation. The way to respond to that kind of test is to deepen our relationship with Hashem. We must learn to respond not with anger or with frustration, but with becoming closer to G-d, becoming better, becoming holier.

Most of us are being tested with the test of wealth. I don’t mean only people who are actually rich. The average American has a fairly comfortable lifestyle. He has food, he has shelter, he has friends, he has a community. As far as our opportunity to practice Judaism, we are truly blessed. We live in a free society. No one stops us from living a full life of Torah and Mitzvos. We are very fortunate.

But this is a test. We must not take our blessings for granted and practice Judaism in a comfortable and unexciting way. The test is can we *excel* in goodness, or do we loll around in mediocrity? We have the possibility to push ourselves to a higher level. To daven with passion. To learn Torah with consistency and dedication. To help others with an open hand both physically and spiritually. Or, on the other hand, to relax, sit back, and enjoy our comforts.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, is testing us with comfort and peace. We must respond with energy and with zeal. “Fortunate is the person who withstands his test.”