

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Chayah *bas* Yehudah *a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

## “We Will Do” and “We Will Do and We Will Listen” PARSHAS MISHPATIM 5776

וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר ד' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע – “And (Moshe) took the book of the covenant, and he read it to the ears of the people, and they said: ‘All that Hashem has spoken – we will do and we will listen!’” (*Shemos 24:7*).

### A Word of Difference

This legendary declaration made in this week’s *parshah* represents what very well might be the apex of Klal Yisrael’s history. Chazal are effusive in their treatment of this display of devotion to Hashem, in which the people expressed a willingness to serve Him even before learning about the details and their underlying reasons. In fact, Chazal describe Yisrael as acting on par with the angels: “At the time that Yisrael placed ‘We will do’ before ‘We will listen,’ a Heavenly Voice resounded and proclaimed: ‘Who revealed to My children this secret employed by the Ministering Angels?’ (for the angelic beings likewise precede “hearing” with “doing”), as it states (*Tehillim 103:20*): בְּרַכּוּ ד' מְלֹאכֵיו גְבוּרֵי כַח עֹשֵׂי דְבָרוֹ לְשִׁמְעָה בְּקוֹל דְּבָרוֹ – ‘Bless Hashem, you angels of His, mighty of strength, who **perform** His word **to listen** to the voice of His word’” (*Shabbos 88a*). Chazal relate further that they had thereby attained such exaltedness that they were liberated from the sway of the Angel of Death – an idyllic situation that lasted until their tragic fall through the Sin of the Golden Calf (*Avodah Zarah 5a*).

As celebrated as this declaration is, there is an aspect that sometimes goes unnoticed. That is, this is not the first time in the narrative that such a declaration appears; just a few *pesukim* prior, the Jewish people proclaimed almost the exact same thing: וַיְבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לָעָם אֵת כָּל-דִּבְרֵי ד' וְאֵת כָּל-הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וַיַּעַן כָּל-הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר ד' נַעֲשֶׂה – “And Moshe came, and he related to the nation all the words of Hashem and all of the statutes; and the entire nation answered with one voice, and said: ‘All of the words that Hashem has spoken – we shall do!’” (*Shemos 24:3*). But we do not find the same clamor attached to this declaration; only in connection with the second one were the Jewish people considered to have attained the level of angels and thus freed from the decree of death. What accounts for this difference?

To be sure, it is only in the second declaration that both elements of “doing” and “hearing” were explicitly mentioned – “We will do and we will hear,” while in the first instance they stated simply, “We shall do.” Nonetheless, it does seem – on the surface at least – that even with this abbreviated statement they were declaring their subservience to Hashem in a most dedicated fashion. And yet, the second declaration is viewed on an entirely different level. What exactly is the significance of the “*Na’aseh v’nishmah*” statement that is responsible for its august status in comparison to the similar “*Na’aseh*” proclamation?

### What is Your Angle?

The Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe*) sheds much light on the subject. He does so by citing a Mishnah which, at first glance, almost appears to offer contradictory sentiments. The Mishnah states (*Avos 4:17*):

יִפָּה שְׂעָה אַחַת בְּתַשׁוּבָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְיִפָּה שְׂעָה אַחַת שֶׁל קוֹרֵת רוּחַ בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא, מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה.

“One moment of (involvement) in repentance and good deeds in This World is more precious than the entirety of the life in the World to Come. And one moment of delight in the World to Come is more precious than the entirety of life in This World.”

This Mishnah – composed of two statements – might seem to be offering conflicting assessments of which is “supreme” – This World or the Next. But the apparent contradiction can be resolved with relative ease. The beginning of the Mishnah speaks from the perspective of action: simply stated, it is impossible to fulfill *mitzvos* once a person leaves This World. On this score, then, This World is preferable. When it comes to sheer delight, however, there is no comparison; This World is nothing compared to the unmitigated bliss of the World to Come.

Interestingly enough, the Chasam Sofer perceives the two sentiments expressed in this Mishnah reflected in the two declarations issued by Yisrael at Har Sinai. And this is why the reaction to these (slightly) varying declarations was so vastly different. Something occurred between the two proclamations; it might have appeared somewhat subtle at the time, but Yisrael did progress to a higher level of pristine intent in the service of Hashem, which found expression in the “*Na’aseh v’nishma*” statement.

At first, explains the Chasam Sofer, Yisrael was certainly dedicated to fulfill Hashem’s will. However, their prime motivation at the time was to secure the coveted reward of Olam Haba. That is, they were focused on that sentiment expressed in the Mishnah emphasizing the bliss of Olam Haba over Olam Hazeh – הַזֶּה הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. This itself is a mighty accomplishment; if the whole world today felt like this, it would be a much better and more wholesome world. In any event, this declaration did not trigger the effect of freeing Yisrael from the Angel of Death – *for that would have contravened their own yearnings*. They pined for the World to Come; as such, they had to experience death so as to arrive at their desired destination.

Standing before Har Sinai, they came to an even more profound realization – a testament to the fact that they had become more elevated. That is, they understood and desired to serve Hashem *solely for His sake*, without thought of their own, personal benefit. This is the essence of the “*Na’aseh v’nishma*” declaration, and it was in this way that they resembled the angels. For as the *passuk* attests, the sole motivation of the angels’ service is to listen to and fulfill Hashem’s command: עָשִׂי דְבָרוֹ לְשִׁמְעַת בְּקוֹל דְּבָרוֹ – They **fulfill** His charge simply in order **to listen** to Him and follow His instructions.

This, then, became the driving force of Yisrael, as well. Their sole yearning was to fulfill Hashem’s will. This is why this particular declaration had the effect of freeing them from the Angel of Death’s power. Now, proceeding to Olam Haba would have frustrated their desire; for in the Next World, one can no longer fulfill *mitzvos* and carry out His will. Their focus was now along the lines of הַזֶּה הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה; they therefore had to remain alive in This World, so that they could continue to fulfill the crucial task of performing Hashem’s will.