

great Revelation at Sinai and the giving of the Aseret haDibrot, the Ten Commandments. But they also imagine God saying to the people, through Moses, “Hearken now.” Or as a famous ad campaign would one day put it, “Just do it.” And that is just what the people pledge: “All that the Lord has spoken, we will do!” (19:8). This is very similar to another famous verse, Ex. 24:7, when again the people respond to Divine instructions with the words: “All that the Lord has said, *na’aseh v’nishmah* – we will do and we will hearken...” What’s more, the word order matters here, according to the rabbis. First the people pledge to do what God asks. Only after making that commitment do they turn to probing and learning and understanding.

If there were ever a moment when we need to emulate our ancestors, and put *na’aseh* first, the commitment to do and keep going, this year is it. It will probably be a long time before we fully, if ever, reach the place of *nishmah*, of understand everything we have been through in these last months and are still going through. Will we feel this week, or in retrospect, that this holiday was, as it is usually known, *z’man simhateinu*, the time of our great happiness? I can’t say. But at least I hope to keep finding some respite, and even some joy in learning Torah – the joy of Torah, which is what Simhat Torah means. Which demands that I (and we) stare down this hard (re)beginning, and just do it. A new world stands to be created if we can just get ourselves to Gen. 1:1.

Shabbat shalom and hag sameah!

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