

Behold! I (Hashem) will come to you (Moshe) in a thick cloud... and also in you they shall believe forever. (19:9)

The seminal event in Jewish history, the experience which transformed us from a tribe of people into a Torah nation, was the Giving of the Torah. *Matan Torah*. The unparalleled Revelation of the *Shechinah* which we experienced was much more than a spectacle that we witnessed. Indeed, we were much more than spectators. According to **Ramban**, every Jew achieved a level of prophecy during this experience. He explains that although Hashem spoke to Moshe *Rabbeinu* from amidst a thick cloud, the people, having reached a level of prophecy, were able to know prophetically of Hashem's dialogue with Moshe. The people thus had first-hand knowledge of the event which transpired. This led to an unshakeable belief in Hashem and in His relationship with Moshe. Hashem told Moshe that as a result of this unique experience, the nation's belief in Moshe would be so steadfast that if someone would later arise to dispute him, the nation would reject the usurper. The nation had heard with their own ears, and seen with their own eyes, that Moshe had reached a level of closeness with Hashem that was heretofore unprecedented. Indeed, no human being had ever reached the level of prophecy attained by Moshe. This is not conjecture – this is what we believe!

The *Ramban's* explanation begs elucidation. It may be agreed that the generation that stood at *Har Sinai* could very well reject any so called “prophet” that challenged Moshe or his teachings. They were there; they saw Moshe in action. There is no way that they would fall prey to the guile of an imposter – no matter how charismatic and convincing he might be. No one ever could be on a par with our quintessential leader. But, can this idea be equally applied to later generations who never had the privilege of knowing, seeing and interacting with Moshe? Can we really say that if a powerful, charismatic orator brilliantly and prolifically articulated a scholarly challenge to Moshe's teachings, that we are confident that we will not be moved by his rhetoric? Perhaps I should rephrase this question: we will adhere to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* teachings regardless of who would have the insolence to impugn their integrity or validity in our contemporary society. But, why? Why are we so confident in our beliefs?

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains that *Klal Yisrael* has been endowed with another precious legacy. We possess not only the Torah, but the entire experience of the Revelation is ineffaceably engraved in our consciousness. The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes *Rabbeinu Bachya* in his commentary to *Devarim* 26:16, that we all have the ability to recapture the Revelation in all its miraculous glory, as if we were there today. This is the idea behind *Ramban's* statement that *Klal Yisrael* perceived Moshe's true greatness. Whatever we were able to perceive then is eternally etched in our psyche, so that we feel it now. Therefore, nothing – no person – regardless of his ability – can sway us from our belief in Moshe and the Torah which he transmitted to us.

In *Shemos* 3:12, the *Ramban* takes this idea one step further. Concerning our opening *pasuk* he writes, “And they shall follow you wherever you command them.” This implies that not only our

people's eternal belief in the Torah which Moshe transmitted is derived from the Revelation, but, also our devotion and commitment to the teachings which he expounded, remain the primary factors which have granted us the fortitude to endure countless trials and tribulations.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* applies the *Ramban's* words as a "salve" for those who are distant from the Torah way. Regardless of the reason – whether by previous circumstance beyond their control – or by personal choice – one's present lack of religious affiliation should not serve as an obstacle to prevent return. Every Jew, his distance from Torah notwithstanding, despite his simple demeanor and appearance, is heir to this glorious inheritance which is already a part of him. We may not deny him his heritage – nor should he himself renounce it because he feels that he can never return. A Jew who exploits his potential can achieve the sublime level of being an active part of the nation which is a *mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh*, "Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation."