

Hashem said to Moshe, "Go to the people and sanctify them...and they shall wash their clothing...You shall set boundaries for the people roundabout... (19:10,12)

The *Torah* is enjoining people to prepare for the moment of Revelation when they will receive the *Torah*. They are to wash their clothes and fix limits around the mountain, so that no human or animal would be able to come closer. We may note the distinction of these two *mitzvos* - washing clothes and cordoning off the periphery of the mountain. What is the significance for these two forms of preparation for *Kabolas HaTorah*?

Horav Y.A. Hirshovitz, zl, suggests that these two *mitzvos* serve not only as preparatory agents for *Klal Yisrael's* ascent to religious nationhood, they underscore the *kedushas ha'Torah*, the sanctity of *Torah*. They remind us how distant we were then from the *Torah's* ideal.

Every religion is the product of the generation in which it was introduced. Thus, all religions are subject to the influence of the place, time and culture from which it emerged. Certainly, the people who initiated it as a creed affected the formation of the religious dogma, codes, and form of service. A religion which the people initiated will ostensibly have passed the critique of the people. This applies to all religions - except the one religion that was given by the Almighty to His Chosen People. Judaism is not a figment of human imagination. It is, therefore, not subject to the influence of the time and place from which it originated. It is not bound by a specific culture. It does not revolve around the social climate of a given era. It transcends time and space.

Man must bring himself closer to the religion, because it stands on a sublime plane, above everything and everyone. It is a beacon of perfection -- shining through clouds of ambiguity and weakness -- which inspires each of us to identify our mission in life. Because other religions are of human origin, they achieved acceptance even before they were practiced. The converse is true of Judaism. Indeed, in the beginning people were not yet ready to accept it. Hashem raised the mountain above their heads, catalyzing an affirmative response. Many hundreds of years later -- after struggle and, at times, "*kashyus oref*," stiff-necked, opposition -- the *Torah* was finally accepted whole-heartedly, with joy and goodwill. This, once again, demonstrates its supernatural origin.

In order to imbue into the Jewish psyche the idea that the spiritual plane upon which the people presently stood was not acceptable by *Torah* standards, Hashem enjoined them with two *mitzvos* that would demonstrate their distance from the *Torah* ideal. They were to sanctify and set boundaries for themselves. Although they are not presently on a level appropriate for accepting the *Torah*, they could prepare themselves to achieve *Kabolas haTorah*. The requirement of commitment to cleanse and purify their "clothes," was a reference to their spiritual raiment, which was at that time unclean. Setting boundaries around the mountain clarified to them that, even after all the preparations, they would still be distant from the mountain. They were not ready.

Judaism is not a religion that emerged from a human. Hashem seeks conviction, commitment to perfection, striving for holiness and purity, a realization that we have not yet attained the required status. These two *mitzvos* taught us how far we were then. How are we to respond now?