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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Why does the parsha that includes the Revelation at Har Sinai open with Moshe's family reunion with his wife, two sons, and father-in-law? Chronologically, chapter 19, when B'Nai Yisrael reach the base of Har Sinai, preceeds chapter 18. Yet when the Torah relates Yitro and Moshe's family arriving at the camp (18:1), B'Nai Yisrael are already at the base of Har Sinai. Why does the Torah depart from chronological order here?

One reason to switch the order is to emphasize the thematic relationship between Beshalach and Yitro. After watching Hashem destroy the Egyptian country and economy with plagues for a year, and waking up to find the Egyptian army, chariots, and horses dead in the Sea of Reeds, B'Nai Yisrael clearly realize that Hashem is the most powerful force and strongest military might in the world. What the people need to learn is that God cares for each Jew and will continue to do so. God teaches this lesson in Beshalach by showing Moshe and Aharon how to turn a rock into a flowing stream with enough water to quench the thirst of three million people – and then taking care of their hunger with miraculous manna that appears over night six nights a week and clouds of quail that come every morning. The manna and quail are exactly enough to satisfy the hunger of each person, with no waste and no shortage. The concept of a god that cares for every individual is completely new – not part of the theology of any pagan nation. The ability to meet the needs of every individual with exact amounts every day demonstrates amazing precision, something new to any concept of a divine entity.
Yitro brings Moshe's family to the base of Har Sinai when he hears about Hashem's power. When Moshe explains how God takes care of every Jew at all times, Yitro is "blown away." He prepares a feast to celebrate the God who not only has supreme power but also cares for every Jew. Yitro's revelation connects the parsha to Beshalach.

A careful reading of the Torah shows that the only guest who fails to appear at Yitro's feast is Moshe. Yitro goes to ask Moshe where he was – and Moshe explains that he spends virtually all his waking time listening to the people and judging all issues that arise, based on Hashem's mitzvot. Yitro tells Moshe that what he is doing is "lo tov," not good. The only other place in the Torah where we see this description is when Hashem says that Adam living alone (with no other human) in Gan Eden is "lo tov." God creates Chava out of one of Adam's ribs to provide a companion to complete him. Yitro tells Moshe that he should select highly intelligent and frum leaders to help him – leaders of groups of 10, 50, 100, and 1000 – to solve issues that they can, with only the most challenging questions going up to Moshe. God creates a partner for Adam to solve the first "lo tov" problem, and Yitro solves the next such problem by directing Moshe to select partners to help explain Hashem's mitzvot to the people.

Tu B'Shevat always comes during or very close to the week of parshat Yitro. Rabbi David Fohrman reminds us that Tu B'Shevat comes when the rainy season has essentially ended in Eretz Yisrael. Man can plant, fertilize, and care for trees – but the most critical part of such care is ensuring sufficient rain during the winter rainy season to enable trees to thrive, set fruit, and provide shade and fruit later, during the dry times of the year. The one aspect of caring for trees and providing fruit is ensuring sufficient rain during winter. Hashem provides the rain. Indeed, it is the aspect of Hashem looking after Eretz Yisrael, by bringing rain in the proper season, that attracts Avraham to the mountain topography of

Israel. Lot, in contrast, choses to live in the Jordan valley, where a river provides water for trees and other crops without the need for God to watch over and care for the land (Bereishis 13:5-12; Rashi's comment to Devarim 7:12). Tu B'Shevat connects to Beshalach and Yitro by reminding us that God watches over the land of Israel and makes crops productive for B'Nai Yisrael. Throughout history, the only times when the land of Israel has thrived have been when Jews have controlled the land. When non-Jews have expelled Jews from the land, it has been desolate – as Flavius Josephus and Mark Twain both testified during their times in the area.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, visited Israel as often as possible. His parents and sister moved to Israel, and Hannah and I visited them on each of our trips. Rabbi Cahan brought back books, art, Judaica, and many stories after each of his trips. Listening to Rabbi Cahan reinforced the importance of Israel to every Jew, the presence of God watching over the land and people, and the significance of Israel in our lives anywhere on the planet. From Avraham Avinu to the present, all Jews must open our eyes to see how God continues to bless us and preserve the land that He promised to our ancestors to keep for our people. Hannah and I are currently planning a family trip to Israel, to include our sons, their wives, and their children. In addition to the Revelation, Yitro continues to reinforce the message that a huge part of God's gift to us is his caring and protecting all of us, for all times.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Yisro: Begin With The End In Mind

By Rabbi Dovid Green © 5762

This week's parsha contains the account of G-d's giving the Torah to the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai. About that great event the Torah states: *"…And all of the people in the encampment trembled.*(Exodus 19:16)" At the time that the Torah was given, and the presence of The Creator descended on Mount Sinai, the people who were gathered there trembled from fear. Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz questioned the fear of the Children of Israel. *"G-d was coming to give valuable gifts, and not to punish them. Why then, would they be so filled with fear?*"

Reb Yeruchem quotes an analogy to illustrate the answer. Once a wealthy man stood up with a purse filled with gold coins and announced that anyone who wished to borrow money from him was welcome to do so. Upon hearing his announcement, everyone began running in the other direction. No one wished to borrow money from him. Why was everyone running away? The reason is that it was known that when he comes to collect, no one can stand up to him. What would be if, by some chance, they would not have the money at the time the debt was due to be repaid? So too, G-d

came down on Mount Sinai to give the Ten Commandments on which the world is founded, and the Children of Israel were trembling – what will be when G-d comes to exact payment from those who transgressed the words of the Torah?

Reb Yeruchem explains that the Children of Israel didn't just think of the here and now. They understood that G-d may be giving them a valuable gift, but there is a responsibility attached to it. They understood the gravity of accepting G-d's Torah, and it instilled fear in them, and they visibly trembled The Torah is life-giving, and its fulfillment carries with it a great reward, yet the Children of Israel hesitated and trembled because they looked at the whole picture – that there was an expectation from G-d, and consequences for not carrying it out successfully.

Reb Yeruchem explains that there is another personality trait we find in contradistinction from fear. That is false confidence. There are some people who only see why they have nothing to worry about in any given endeavor. They don't take any possible risks into consideration, and in the end they find themselves in terrible danger and unfortunate predicaments.

Reb Yeruchem identifies the trait of "fear," taking every possibility into consideration, as positive in other ways as well. He explains that when it comes to compromising one's principles, a person who fears would not make excuses and give in. Someone who does not take possible risks in consideration always finds a reason why "in this case" principles can be compromised. Such a person is always plagued in the end by regrets. Several times in the Torah the positive trait of "fear" is noted in people who could have had good excuses to violate his/her principles, but didn't. For example, Abraham, whom G-d commanded to bring Isaac as an offering to G-d. Abraham did all he could to fulfill G-d's directive, and made no excuses, as valid as they would have been. Abraham is referred to as "someone who fears G-d." Needless to say, the fear we are discussing here is a healthy, positive concern for one's well being which leads to thoughtful action, as opposed to neurotic, baseless fear which leads to being petrified and unable to act.

We said that the Children of Israel trembled when G-d descended on Mount Sinai to give them the Torah. By extension we should note that on a constant basis G-d gives us life – a miraculous gift. Perhaps we need to tremble when we think about what we will answer when He comes to take it back!? It might be worth our while to apply this trait of "fear" accordingly when we make decisions in our lives, and when we think about living by principles, and being accountable for our actions. Perhaps we need to wonder whether we should rely on the excuses we sometimes make, or if maybe we are better than that. Are we only living for the here and now, or should we invest our energies in the future? Are we using this gift from G-d the way He intended us to? Our forefathers, The Children of Israel, answered these questions for themselves 3300 years ago. Let us take the time as well to give these questions some serious thought.

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5762-yisro/

Partnering With God

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2019, 2023

How many commandments were given at Mt. Sinai? The answer, surprisingly, is not 10. The Torah speaks of the aseret ha'devarim, the Ten Utterances, not the Ten Commandments. When one gets down to counting the commandments, she finds that the first of the utterances, *"I am the Lord your God,"* is not exactly a commandment, and that some, *like "You shall have no other gods before me; you shall not bow down to them nor shall you worship them,"* actually contain 3 commandments, if not more.

How many Torahs were given at Mt. Sinai? The answer, perhaps somewhat less surprisingly, is not 1. According to the Rabbis there were two Torahs given at Mt. Sinai: the Written Torah – that is, the 5 Books of Moses – and the Oral Torah – the traditions of interpretation of the Biblical text that are recorded, in what eventually became written form, in the Talmud.

But what exactly is this Oral Torah? And if God wanted clarify more what the mitzvoth meant, why not just write it in the Torah text itself? Well, in good Jewish fashion, there are at least two answers to this question.

According to one approach, found in Sefer HaHinukh (13th century), the enormous level of detail that we find in the Talmud was directly dictated by God to Moses. Following this approach, all the debates in the Talmud are a less-than-ideal reality brought on by imperfect transmission. The process of halakha is an attempt to get back to the original meaning of the Torah and to identify the Oral Tradition that is or that approximates the detailed verbal instruction that Moses received at Mt. Sinai. There is only one correct halakha in any given case, we trust the Sages to get it right, and if for some reason they make a mistake, then that is their responsibility, not ours.

As to why God didn't just write it all down, we don't really know, but it might have to do with allowing the Torah's broad message to be accessible by all people while ensuring that those with the Oral Tradition – the Jews in general and the Rabbis in particular – would serve as the custodians of its halakhic meaning that is relevant only to the Jewish people.

In opposition to this approach, many great authorities – including both Maimonides and Nahmandies – state that outside of a small handful of laws, the Oral Tradition is not about transmission; it is about interpretation. The Torah as a written text would always be open to multiple possible interpretations. God therefore empowered the Rabbis to give the binding interpretation of the Torah. The Torah is our Constitution, and the Sanhedrin, our central halakhic High Court, is our Supreme Court. The question is not what the Torah originally meant, it is what its binding halakhic meaning is. In Nahmanides words: *"For it was in accordance with the interpretation that the Rabbis would give, that God gave us the Torah."*

For this model, the Oral Tradition is not a static thing to be transmitted, it is a live, vibrant thing to be discussed, argued and debated. It is a way that we as human beings partner with God in the Torah's meaning and in what makes halakha. There is not just one true halakha; what the halakha is can change over time – just as the legal meaning of the Constitution has changed over time – based on how the Sanhedrin rules. And when we no longer have a Sanhedrin, which has been the case for about two millennia, then authority will be de-centralized and we will live in a world of multiple and competing halakhic truths: *"These and these are the words of the living God."*

This does not mean that the Rabbis can impose their readings onto the text; the process must be done with integrity and with a desire to discover the true meaning of the Torah. And it does not mean that everyone is empowered as an interpreter of the text's halakhic meaning – that requires a certain level of learning and recognition by one's colleagues and one's community. But what is does mean is that when the process is done properly, what emerges is halakha, is the Oral Torah.

This latter approach was adopted by Rav Moshe Feinstein, the preeminent halakhic authority for American Orthodox Judaism in the last century. He writes in his introduction to his responsa, Iggrot Moshe, that he was fearful to take on the responsibility of being a halakhic authority, lest he offer an incorrect ruling, something that did not accord with the true meaning of the text. But then he realized – so he writes – that as long as he approaches his task with proper fear of heaven, with honesty, with mastery of all the sources, and with full rigor of process, then his rulings would, by definition, be halakha.

It is no surprise that Rav Moshe was also one of the boldest and most creative decisors that we have had for a long time. Such courage from a decisor reflects not only confidence in oneself and one's mastery, but also a belief that the Oral Torah is a living, breathing phenomenon, one that invites us to take a part in it, to be partners with God in the meaning of the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom!

https://library.yctorah.org/2019/01/partnering-with-god/

Battling for the Soul of Orthodoxy: The Essential Teachings of Rabbi Marc D. Angel

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Rabbi Marc D. Angel has been one of the most prolific rabbinic scholars for over 50 years. He has written or edited almost

40 books and hundreds of scholarly articles and shorter pieces in various media. He served a distinguished career as Rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City, and since 2007 as the Founder and Director of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. He has served in many communal and rabbinic leadership capacities, as well.

The task of writing an article to encapsulate the extensive work of Rabbi Angel is reminiscent of the celebrated talmudic story of the prospective convert who demanded of Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while the prospective convert stood on one foot. Hillel responded: *"What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it"* (Shabbat 31a). My goal in this essay is to present "on one foot" Rabbi Angel's central ideas and ideals which he has promoted over the course of over 50 years.

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Rabbi Angel believes that one must first establish the proper intellectual foundations for an ideal vision of Judaism, and then attempt to build a great personal religious life and Torah community from the ground up. Judaism begins with a profound and abiding belief in God, that God revealed the Torah to the people of Israel through Moses as an eternal covenant, and that there is an accompanying Oral Law to the Written Torah. Judaism also maintains that the rabbinic sages throughout the generations have had the authority to interpret texts and traditions to apply the eternal principles of halakha to an ever-changing world.

What today is known as Orthodoxy is the faithful reflection of Jewish tradition. Streams of Judaism that are not committed to divine revelation or to halakha cannot be authentic representations of classic Jewish thought.

Living a proper halakhic life creates a deep, intimate relationship with God. Interiority, humility, love of humanity, and a desire to improve society are proper manifestations of a righteous life. Authentic religion is not about showiness, disdain for others, or authoritarianism.

The aforementioned arguments are easy to establish from within traditional Jewish sources, and Rabbi Angel therefore devotes relatively little energy to defend them. The lion's share of his work is dedicated to a different theme, namely, delineating and advocating for what he considers to be ideal Orthodoxy. Often, Rabbi Angel's writings are scholarly efforts to analyze and present various ideas and ideals of Judaism. There also is a regular hallmark of his writings to battle passionately and courageously for the very soul of Orthodoxy. Rabbi's Angel's writings are suffused with calm, thoughtful, well-researched wisdom, coupled with an urgent sense that these ideas must prevail or else our community is impoverished as a result.

Ideally, all Jews should be faithful to Torah and halakha. However, even in a less-than-ideal world, we must view all Jews, regardless of level of observance, as a family. The inclusive communal model, which never fractured into various ideological movements, provides the best paradigm for promoting Jewish unity for a fragmented contemporary Jewish community. The Sephardic world, and many Ashkenazic communities, championed this inclusive model. Even within the halakhically observant community, the ideal is unity without conformity. There are many legitimate avenues to a Torah lifestyle.

We must try to win the hearts of all Jews to the Torah through persuasion and through exemplifying excellent religious and moral behavior, and never through authoritarianism or coercion. We should learn from everyone: the full range of rabbinic thought throughout the ages, folk wisdom, and the wisdom of the world. Judaism is a truth-seeking religion.

Rabbi Angel regularly appeals to a passage in the Jerusalem Talmud: The way of the Torah is a narrow path. To the right is fire and to the left is ice. Overzealousness leads to fiery extremism and fanaticism, whereas too much secularization or watering down of Jewish belief and observance leads to icy skepticism. The Torah way of life is balanced, harmonious, and sensible. To be fulfilled properly, it must maintain its balance on the narrow path.

A confident faith is unafraid of questions and challenges. It is unafraid of diversity of opinion, and it is unafraid of ideas that force one to rethink one's own assumptions. The rabbinic axiom, *"know how to answer the heretic"* (Mishnah, Avot 2:14), requires a deep knowledge of what that heretic thinks, and a thoughtful understanding of why the heretic rejects our traditions.

Judaism balances a particularistic aspect in which God has a singular relationship with the Jewish people through the Torah and halakha; and a universalistic aspect that fosters genuine respect for all humanity. Jews should live in their divinely-given Torah path, while simultaneously embracing the Torah's ideal that God is everyone's God. The Torah's teaching, that all of humanity is created in the Image of God, should foster a genuine love and respect of humanity, and a desire to engage with the world, both its people and its wisdom. As Jews, we are responsible for all other Jews. As human beings, we are responsible for yishuvo shel olam — participating in the advancement of humanity.

Judaism is broad, and contemporary society needs its broadness to address the complex religious and communal realities of today. We also need to represent the profound sophistication and wisdom of Jewish tradition at its best to appeal to well-educated Jews.

There are two fundamental approaches to applying halakha to real life. One approach begins with a study of the classical rabbinic texts, reaching a scholarly conclusion, and then applying that conclusion to the individual or community. The other approach begins with the human reality and then studies the classical rabbinic texts for principles to apply to that reality. Rabbi Angel strongly favors the latter approach. For example, when addressing the question of saying Psalms of Praise (Hallel) on Yom HaAtzmaut (Israel's Independence Day), we must begin by acknowledging the religious reality of the miracle of the State of Israel. Only then do we turn to the halakhic books.

Ideal rabbis must be scholars and teachers of Torah, but also must be involved with the community. There needs to be a symbiotic relationship between local rabbis who know the particular needs of their communities, and rabbinic deciders who are experts in halakhic texts. Community rabbis must have the humility to consult halakhic experts, and they also must take responsibility to make decisions armed with that expert knowledge for their local communities. The Torah gives guidance for every aspect of life, and rabbinic leadership should offer that guidance to the community. Orthodoxy can exert its greatest influence when its representatives are involved in all communal matters.

The greatest role models behind Rabbi Angel's religious worldview are Rambam in the medieval period; and Rabbis Benzion Uziel, Haim David Halevy, and Joseph Soloveitchik in the twentieth century. On the communal leadership level, Rabbi Angel also admires two of his predecessors who led Congregation Shearith Israel: Dr. Henry Pereira Mendes and Dr. David de Sola Pool. These exceptional rabbis embodied the ideas and ideals of Judaism at the intellectual, communal, and personal levels.

We do not need to reinvent Judaism or Orthodoxy. We must find its most compelling elements from within our classical sources and promote them. The best of Judaism has the power to attract and inspire many Jews, and they in turn can create the positive model society to inspire humanity.

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Within the contemporary Orthodox world, there are powerful threats to Rabbi Angel's comprehensive vision. There are significant and growing strains within Orthodoxy that are overly fundamentalist. They teach Tanakh and the Talmud at a hyper-literal level, and ignore science, reason, and even the diversity of sacred Jewish texts that present other opinions. Some promote superstition. Some promote isolationism from less observant Jews, non-Jews, and any ideas that are foreign to the specific narrow ideas they espouse. Some overemphasize the particularistic elements of Judaism while ignoring the universalistic elements.

When Judaism is presented as isolationist and anti-reason, it distorts Jewish teaching and creates a cult-like religious group that cares only about its idea of God and the members of its small circle. This approach also alienates many intelligent, educated Jews who are made to feel that tradition and intellectual honesty are at odds with one another. In fact, they are completely intertwined.

Rabbi Angel frequently criticizes the attempt in certain segments of the Orthodox community to stifle legitimate diversity of opinion. One dimension of this problem is the phenomenon of self-selected "gedolim" (great rabbinic sages), who maintain that they alone possess the truth of Torah, and therefore all other opinions are invalid and irrelevant. The vitality of Judaism relies on debate and conversations. A healthy Judaism allows ideas to be debated, accepted, or rejected, but

never stifled or ignored.

This problem also extends to the proper balance between local rabbis and halakhic scholars who spend their time in yeshivot. The insistence of many today that halakha must derive from sacred texts first and then applied to real-life situations undermines the ideal symbiotic relationship between local rabbis and halakhic decisors. Suddenly, halakhic experts are required not only to share their knowledge with the community rabbis, but also to decide policy for individual communities. As noted above, Rabbi Angel insists that proper halakha must begin with the human reality and then turn to the classical rabbinic texts. Community rabbis must consult halakhic experts for the range of halakhic opinion, and then take responsibility for making the proper decision for their communities.

Another harmful restriction of opinion in many Orthodox circles is the frequent suppression of Sephardic voices of the past 500 years, generally through ignorance — whether willful or not. This bizarre reality is disrespectful to the sacred customs of Sephardic communities and causes pain to Sephardic yeshiva students who often feel excluded from "Jewish" experience. However, the harm on the communal level is far greater. The plethora of complex issues facing the contemporary Jewish community, including conversion to Judaism, the tragic agunah problem (a woman who is trapped in a dead marriage because her husband refuses to grant a religious writ of divorce, a get), issues pertaining to the modern State of Israel, the role of women, family values, contemporary modesty, and so many other issues, must be addressed with the full rabbinic toolbox. By stifling dissent and diversity, by ignoring the views of many Sephardic rabbis, and by adopting very restrictive positions, the Jewish community suffers irreparable damage.

Although advocates of more extremist, isolationist, restrictive, superstitious, and fundamentalist forms of Judaism cause harm on the intellectual and communal level, there is another culprit behind the flaws of the Orthodox community. Too many rabbis and laypeople remain silent or even tacitly support the more extreme views. Those who understand the ideas and ideals of the Torah must courageously stand up and promote the ideal vision of Judaism. The community must play a vital role by supporting institutions that promote these ideals.

Rabbi Angel quotes Rabbi Benzion Uziel, who in 1919 reminded his rabbinic colleagues that humility is praiseworthy, but it must never lead to shying away from the needs of the hour. Inertia cloaked in false humility is an abdication of one's responsibility as a leader. By writing articles with titles such as "On Torah Education and Mis-Education," "Reclaiming Orthodox Judaism," and "Re-Imagining Orthodox Judaism," Rabbi Angel draws his battle lines and appeals to the broader community to recognize the importance of standing up for these ideal values.

In his essay, "Reclaiming Orthodox Judaism," Rabbi Angel offers a remarkable analysis of a celebrated talmudic passage, the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza (Gittin 55b–56a). After a misunderstanding over a party invitation, Bar Kamtza was furious with the rabbis present who had remained silent at his humiliation. To retaliate, Bar Kamtza accused the Jews of rebellion to the Roman Emperor, suggesting that they would reject his sacrificial offering. The Emperor sent an offering, but Bar Kamtza made a slight blemish on the animal that would technically render the sacrifice invalid. When the rabbis discovered the blemish, most maintained that they should sacrifice the animal anyway, so as not to offend the Emperor. One rabbi named Zechariah ben Avkulas objected, since the law prohibits such a sacrifice. The rabbis then suggested killing Bar Kamtza so he could not inform on them to the Roman authorities. Again, Rabbi Zechariah objected, since Bar Kamtza had not committed a capital crime. As a consequence, Bar Kamtza returned to the Emperor, who was enraged against the Jewish community and destroyed the Temple. The story ends with a condemnation of the hardline position of Rabbi Zechariah: *"Rabbi Yohanan thereupon remarked: Through the scrupulousness of Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas our House has been destroyed, our Temple burnt and we ourselves exiled from our land."*

Rabbi Angel agrees with Rabbi Yohanan, that the hardline stand of Rabbi Zechariah was a disaster. Rabbi Zechariah placed book knowledge ahead of an obvious reality, namely, the Jewish community would be in dire peril if the rabbis rejected the sacrifice from the Emperor and allowed Bar Kamtza to inform against them. Clearly, the needs of the hour required the position of the majority, to make an emergency ruling to allow the sacrifice so that they could maintain the good favor of the Roman government.

However, continues Rabbi Angel, Rabbi Zechariah is not the true villain of this narrative. The ultimate failure should be ascribed to the majority of rabbis. Why did they not overrule the hardline position of this one rabbi? Evidently, they did not want to seem less religious, less committed to the sacred texts of the Torah. They had to take a risk by applying halakha

to a dire reality. The cowardly majority allowed the forceful insistence of Rabbi Zechariah to win the day — and therefore are complicit in the destruction of the Second Temple.

Rabbi Angel's analysis thereby sets out two of his central messages. First, when hardline halakhic analysis follows book knowledge prior to evaluating a living reality, halakha can be distorted and it may cause harm to the community. Second, and in many ways more importantly, those whose judgment is sound must courageously stand up against the hardline position. When the majority of reasonable voices remain silent, voices of extremism prevail and the entire Jewish community loses.

In his essay, "Re-Imagining Orthodox Judaism," Rabbi Angel writes that "If enough of us share these ideals; if enough of us are willing to work to promote these ideals; if we can impact on synagogues, schools, and yeshivot — then perhaps these ideals will actually be realized in our community." Rabbi Angel is right. The rest is up to us to support and build on this foundation.

* National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideal and Ideals; also teaches advanced undergraduate courses at Yeshiva University. Son of Rabbi Marc D. Angel.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/battling-soul-orthodoxy-essential-teachings-rabbi-marc-d-angel

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The Ethical Component: Thoughts for Parashat Yitro

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Dr. Henry Pereira Mendes served as Minister of Congregation Shearith Israel from 1877 through 1920. He continued to be associated with the Congregation as Minister Emeritus until his death in 1937. During the course of these 60 years, Dr. Mendes established himself as a remarkable communal leader, scholar, and author.

Born in Birmingham, England, he grew up in a family well-known for its history of producing religious leaders. His father Abraham was Minister of the Jewish congregation in Birmingham. H. P. Mendes received his early religious education and inspiration from his parents and as a young man served as Hazan and Minister of the Sephardic congregation in Manchester. While in New York, he studied and graduated from the medical school of New York University. In 1890, he was married to Rosalie Rebecca Piza.

Dr. Mendes was one of the leading Orthodox rabbis in the United States. He was a founder and the first president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (1898). He was also one of the founders of the Jewish Theological Seminary (1887), which he and his collaborators intended to be an institution that would produce English-speaking Orthodox rabbis.

A prolific author, Dr. Mendes wrote essays and editorials, children's stories, textbooks, sermons, prayers, dramatic works, poetry, and commentaries. His writings were imbued with the love of the Bible.

The religious vision of Dr. Mendes is reflected in the titles of his main books: *Jewish History Ethically Presented* (1895), *The Jewish Religion Ethically Presented* (1895), and *Jewish Life Ethically Presented* (1917). In 1934, he prepared a little volume of prayers and meditations for home use "to promote and facilitate the habit of prayer."

Dr. Mendes' religious outlook was deeply steeped in the Hebrew Bible. The verses of Scripture served as the basis of an ethical and compassionate way of life. In *The Jewish Religion Ethically Presented,* he demonstrated his method of thought. He began each section with a citation from the Bible, and then provided the traditional lessons that were derived from the text. He then added his own elaboration of moral lessons that could be rooted in the biblical text. And then he offered a series of biblical quotations to close each section.

For example, in dealing with the third of the Ten Commandments *(Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain),* Dr. Mendes provided the traditional explanations

of this commandment. It is forbidden to use God's name in a disrespectful way, for a false oath, or for any wrong purpose. Likewise, this commandment is violated whenever one says prayers without concentration and reverent devotion. Dr. Mendes added the ethical component: *"We take His name in vain, or to no purpose, if we speak of God being good, just, merciful, etc., without trying ourselves to be good, just, merciful, etc."* We must be loving, merciful and forgiving, in emulation of God's ways."
Dr. Mendes then offered a number of extensions to this commandment:

> *We are children of God. We are called by His name. When we do wrong, we disgrace or profane His name. Hence a disgraceful act is called Chilul Hashem, a profanation of the Name. And just as all the members of a family feel any disgrace that any one of them incurs, so when any Hebrew does wrong, the disgrace is felt by all Jews. We are known as the people of God. We assume His name in vain unless we obey His Laws. We take or assume His name in vain when we call ourselves by His name and say we are His children or His people, while for our convenience or ease we neglect religious duties which He has commanded us. (The Jewish Religion Ethically Presented,* revised edition, 1912, pp. 59–60)

In elaborating on the commandment to honor one's parents, Dr. Mendes stated:

> *To honor parents, ministers of religion, the aged, the learned, our teachers and authorities is a sign of the highest type of true manliness and of true womanliness. Respect for parents is essential to the welfare of society. Anarchy or the absence of respect for authority, always brings ruin. Respect for all the authorities is insisted upon in the Bible.* (p. 64)

In discussing the commandment prohibiting murder, Dr. Mendes noted that "we may not kill a man's good name or reputation, nor attack his honor. We do so when we act as a tale-bearer or slanderer." He goes on to say that "we may not kill a man's business. Respect for human life carries with it respect for anyone's livelihood. We may not make it hard for others to live by reason of our own greed" (pp. 65–66).

Dr. Mendes taught that the ethical component is integral to the commandments. Judaism is not only blessed with a system of laws, but is inspirited with a code of ethics.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/taking-first-step-thoughts-parashat-beshallah

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Lo Sachmod -- Be True to You

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Hashem was ready. He had been eyeing the Jewish family for awhile now. From the devotion of Avraham and the promises He made to him, the Jewish family had formed. The Jewish family, too, was ready. They were ready to be transformed from a family to become a nation. During the course of redemption, they had seen His mighty hand; they had felt the intensity of His love.

At Sinai, Hashem would reveal Himself to humans. It was a momentous occasion, one that Hashem planned with great precision. From the mountain and place that He chose to reveal Himself)a humble mountain in the desert(, to the miraculous décor of grass and flowers)hence the directive that the animals shall be restrained from grazing there(, to the

thunder, lightning, and then silence, as only His voice was heard, repeated by Moshe, His loyal and trusted emissary.

The words communicated to His people were also carefully chosen. Not all 613 mitzvos were commanded on that day. Ten statements were chosen to introduce Torah. Hashem inscribed these ten on the Luchos, the tablets, gifted by Hashem to the Jewish people. The ten include belief in Hashem and the mitzva of Shabbos. They also include prohibitions against idolatry, murder, and immorality. Most fascinating is that the final one is Lo Sachmod -- Do not covet. Do not be jealous of that which someone else was blessed with.

What is so remarkable about this particular mitzva is that many people think that since jealousy is an emotion, it is not in our control. Certainly, the Torah can command us how to act, what we should or should not do. But the mitzva of Lo Sachmod includes not even feeling jealous of another. How could the Torah command us how to feel?

The commentaries explain that indeed, how we feel, is in our control. Maybe not in the first instant that we have an urge or feeling of jealousy. But certainly, after we are aware of the urge, we are capable of changing our attitude and adopting a healthier perspective. Does a farmer feel jealous of the prince? Is he jealous and wish that he could marry a princess? No, the farmer knows that that is not his place; that is not the role that would give him satisfaction.)Rambam Gizeila 1:10; Chinuch 416; Ibn Ezra, Shimos 20:14(

Similarly, when a person has clarity of self, there is no need or desire to take away from others. Hashem runs the world, and He has given each of us a mission and the resources to accomplish it. Is a tank gunner jealous of a paratrooper that the army did not allocate him a parachute? Our focus is to take the cues from what Hashem has given us in resources and in talent and strive to be the best we can be.

The lesson of this mitzva also includes the attitude we have to the things we do. When we see achievement or blessing by someone else, we certainly can be inspired and try to also have blessing. But if our attitude is that through our achievement, we will eclipse the other and steal their thunder, then that is an expression of jealousy. The essence of this mitzva involves more than behaviors. It involves looking deep within ourselves to understand what drives us and be true to ourselves. The opening statement was about belief in Hashem. The final statement is how that belief plays out in the heart of each of us.

Thus, Lo Sachmod, the tenth of the statements, complements the opening statement. The first statement was belief in G-d; the tenth is how we ourselves become G-dly.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Yisro – Every Peace Counts

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

Yisro is presented to us as a man of unique wisdom and action. When the mighty Egyptian nation is brought to its knees and the Jewish slaves leave, through open miracle, after open miracle, there is one bystander who learns the lesson. Yisro, and only Yisro, travels to the desert to learn more about the G-d Who has revealed Himself through the Jewish people.

As he is approaching the Jewish encampment, Yisro sends a message to let Moshe know he is coming. The Sforno explains that this is an act of wisdom, as well. Our rabbis teach us that a person should not enter his own home unexpectedly in a way that they might be caught unprepared for him. This is even more true when coming to visit

someone else. Yisro was displaying the forethought to be aware that he did not know how Moshe was living, and if Moshe was ready to host his family and father-in-law.

Yisro then displays the wisdom of humility. Yisro was a master of many religions and had already recognized that the G-d of the Jewish people was unique. He had listened carefully to the events that occurred in Egypt and then in the desert, and had already therefore decided to come and learn about the Jewish G-d. Nonetheless, when Moshe reiterates those very events to Yisro, he listens. He listens, and openly acknowledges that he has learned more from Moshe by declaring, "Now, I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods."

Then, the next day, Yisro provides practical guidance on a national level. He witnesses the nation standing in line from morning until night, waiting for a chance to confer with Moshe. Again with humility and wisdom, he asks Moshe what the people are waiting for before offering any comment. Moshe explains that he sits alone as judge, teacher, mentor and advisor on all matters of service of G-d and Torah law. Recognizing the impossibility of the task, Yisro first warns Moshe of the dangers, explaining that neither he, nor the nation can sustain such a system. They will all be worn out from the effort and the waiting.

Yisro, then gently offers advice for how to practically divide the responsibilities of teaching, mentoring and judging. He explains how Moshe must indeed teach and guide himself, but judging cases can be handled by other people. He offers detailed advice on the character traits to look for in judges, and a detailed system for judgement and appeals so that only the most complex cases need Moshe's attention. He concludes by saying that if Moshe follows this system under G-d's command he will be able to succeed and then adds one more thought – "and also this entire nation will come to its place in peace.")Shemos 18:23(

The Sforno)ibid.(explains that Yisro was adding another benefit of his plan for Moshe to consider. When people come for a court case, one side may leave unhappy. However, with an appeal system in place, his judgement will be reviewed by several courts and he will leave satisfied that the judgment was correct. In this way, the people can live peacefully accepting the verdicts between them.

When we consider the arrangement in the desert, it is hard to understand Yisro's concern. There was no commerce and no business dealings. Perhaps there was an occasional lost item, confusion of ownership, or question of responsibility for damages. These cases were not dealing with their livelihood, though. How many of them wouldn't trust Moshe's judgement? How much angst would there truly be in the nation if Moshe was the sole judge? With Yisro's great wisdom and insight, why did he consider this so significant?

I believe the Torah is teaching us here of the great importance of peace. Discord eats away at our joy in life, and at our ability to appreciate what we have. The Mishna teaches in the name of Raban Shimon ben Chalafta (Uktzin 3:12) that the only vessel Hashem could find to hold blessing is peace. Without peace all blessings are drained.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Parshas Yisro – Redefining Our Own Fate

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

Rash"i quotes an astounding Medrash relating a conversation between Moshe and G-d prior to the giving of the Torah. After our ancestors stated their readiness to accept the Torah, Hashem explains to Moshe how the Torah would be given. Hashem tells Moshe, *"Behold, I will come to you in the thickness of cloud in order that the nation will hear when I speak with you and they will also believe in you forever."* The Torah then tells us that Moshe told Hashem the nation's words, but does not tell us what those words are. (Shemos 19:9)

Rash"i quotes a Mechilta which explains that Moshe was responding to G-d's plan for the giving of the Torah. As Rash"i says, *"I heard an answer from them regarding this. They want to hear from You -- it is not the same to hear from a messenger as it is to hear*

from the king. 'Our desire is to see our King.'" Moshe was telling Hashem that the Jewish people would not be happy to listen and watch as G-d gave Moshe the Torah to teach them. They wanted to receive the Torah directly from Hashem. They desired a higher level of closeness with their King and a clearer understanding of their responsibility to Him.

In the next verse, Hashem tells Moshe to go to the nation and sanctify them over the next days and to wash their clothing. Rash"i explains that this command was in response to Moshe. Hashem was accepting our desire and telling Moshe that if G-d would be speaking to the entire nation then they would need to prepare themselves for that experience. Hashem was accepting our desire and changing the arrangement He had planned for the giving of the Torah! These instructions were for the Torah to be given the way we wanted!

This concept is astounding and hard to fully understand. The giving of the Torah was a foundational event in the very existence of the world. Our Rabbis teach us that when Hashem created the world, He made a condition for all of creation – He would only maintain and continue the world if we would accept the Torah. (See Rash"i Berieshis 1:31) The acceptance of the Torah was establishing an eternal relationship between G-d and His beloved nation. Certainly, the appropriate procedure and and arrangement for the giving of the Torah was predetermined and defined. Yet, when Moshe expressed that we wanted something different, G-d was willing to incorporate our desires and adjust the plans for what may have been the most pivotal moment in the history of the world.

When we consider the details of our request, it is even more difficult to understand. The reason we wanted to hear the Torah directly from Hashem was because one has a different level of commitment when hearing instructions directly from the King. Seeing the King and hearing His direct instructions creates a deeper sense of connection and a deeper sense of responsibility to fulfill His commands. Nonetheless, it appears that in G-d's infinite wisdom, He determined that it was not necessary to include this added measure of connection to Him and commitment to Torah and mitzvos in the giving of the Torah. G-d had determined that He would not be allotting us with that added measure of spirituality. Yet, when Moshe explained that we wanted it, G-d changed our destiny and gave us that level of connection and closeness. In response to our desire, G-d gave us more than He had intended for us.

We sometimes think that our spiritual lot in life is predetermined. Some people are destined to be great scholars, some have great character traits, some are community builders. But if I was not born that way, then my life was not intended for spiritual greatness. This Medrash gives us an insight into a very different reality. If we truly wish for greater opportunities, G-d will change our destiny and increase our capacity. If we ask, G-d may even rearrange His plans for the giving of the Torah itself to help us.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. This Dvar Torah arrived after my deadline last year, so I am printing it this year.

Our "Egyptian Entanglement"

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

The Jewish narrative is forever entangled with ancient Egypt. That entanglement continues to challenge us.

An Organic Entanglement

Our Sages expand the narrative from a historic encounter to an organic mother-child relationship.

> *Or has God ever tried to go and take for himself a nation from the very bowels of another nation […]?* (Deut. 4:34) - As one who extracts a fetus from the womb of a cow. (*Mekhilta Beshalah*)

The image of blood on the passageways and of the people emerging from the breaking waters of the sea is a powerful image of birthing. Egypt is portrayed not as the familiar historical oppressor but as a woman in the midst of a violent birth. Egypt is the womb in which the Israelites gestated. The portrait which the Sages are painting is not one of a mere historical encounter but of an intimate organic connection.

Under the best of circumstances, severing the bond between the infant and the mother is a complicated business. This is even more the case when the mother is abusive and cruel, where love and loathing are intermingled, as were the primordial light and darkness.

How do we emerge?

So, how do we understand and emerge from what could be called, "The Egyptian Entanglement?"
The key lies in how the following verse is interpreted.

[…]and the children of Israel went out with a high hand. (Ex. 14:8)

Onkelos deviates from the straightforward meaning of the Torah text by translating "a high hand," *be yad ramah*, as *reish galei* –" heads held high."

The key to understanding the differing connotations of "a high hand" as opposed to "heads held high" is in the Targum Yonatan on the same verse. He translates, *"With a raised hand overcoming the Egyptians."*
The high hand is raised against Egypt.

Rabbi Mordechai Yosef of Ishbitz (1800 – 1851) explains that, in contradistinction to the raised hand, the head held high indicates that the freedom which the Israelites experienced was *"not against others with pride and a feeling of superiority; rather they felt as free people without fear of any man."* (*Mei Hashiloah, Beshalah*)

I would like to unpack this teaching of the *Mei Hashiloah*.

There is a danger that the people, because of the trauma of their slavery, would not properly separate from the abusive environment in which they developed. It is very tempting to adopt a stance of victimhood and self-righteousness. Together, these characteristics seem to grant the moral high ground. In fact, adopting a posture of victimhood and allowing it to fashion the personality and the lens through which one views the world around them is very destructive. Too often the victim turns into the victimizer. The abused becomes the abuser. Undoubtedly, the Israelites suffered terrible injustices at the brutal hands of their Egyptian masters. However, to adopt the role as 'victim,' when the post slavery era did not justify it, would in a sense perpetuate the slavery. Their "freedom" would be no freedom at all; it would be slavery in a different form. Their experience would be oriented back towards their oppressors – it would be a reaction to Egypt. R. Mordechai Yosef beckons us to infuse positive content into our freedom.

The Challenge Today

Rousseau famously wrote, *"Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains. Those who think themselves masters of others are indeed greater slaves than they."* Freedom for all people begins with an *attitude* of freedom. For the Jews, freedom required a paradigm shift away from powerless victim to empowered servants of God joined together by a cosmic destiny.

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Yitro: The Ten Concepts: You and God

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *****

Concepts, not Commandments

The famous term "Ten Commandments" is a misnomer. In the three references in the Torah to what we call the Ten Commandments, one term is used: the Ten Concepts.

> *He]Moshe[wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Concepts*)Ex. 34:28(
>
> *He told you of His covenant which he commanded you to follow, the Ten Concepts*)Deut. 4:13(
>
> *He]God[wrote on the]second[tablets, as the first writing, the Ten Concepts*)ibid. 10:4(

Those are concepts and not commandments because the first and the last items of the covenant cannot be commandments. The first is a statement:

> *I am YHWH, your God, who took you out of Egypt*

The last one is a promise:

> *You will not covet… that which belongs to others.*

Promise of Joy and Peace

The promise of the Ten Concepts is as follows:

> Understand and cherish your personal relationship with God, who gave you freedom.
>
> Do not adulterate or limit that relationship by making physical, limited images to represent God.
>
> Do not abuse the relationship by claiming to speak in God's name.
>
> Cherish your relationships with your parents, and by extension, your family.
>
> Allow yourself to enjoy the gift of Shabbat, together with the whole nation, thus acknowledging the importance of freedom.
>
> Do not infringe upon others' rights. Protect their life, their relationships, their possessions, and their right to fair trial.

Once you have accomplished that, you will be able to appreciate the basic gifts we all share as humans and to respect the rights of others. That, in turn, will guarantee that you will not covet what does not belong to you.

To achieve that state of mind is to have the greatest joy possible. As our sages have commented:

> *Who is truly wealthy? One who is happy with his lot*.

Envy and jealousy are the causes of all strife and misery in the world, on a personal, national, and global level, so this promise of the Torah should not be taken lightly.

I have explained this interpretation in detail elsewhere. Here, I would like to focus on the first two concepts, starting with this question:

Why does God consider it so important that we recognize Him as God and that we do not worship idols to the extent that He would be jealous if we did?

Personal God

Let us look at the first concept:

> *I am YHWH, your God!]I[have brought you out of Egypt, of the house of bondage.*

This statement, as is the rest of the covenant, is addressed to an individual and written in the singular. God speaks to the Israelites as a nation, yet He addresses each one of them individually. The covenant is about the importance and the uniqueness of the individual. It emphasizes the personal relationship each one of us has with God, a relationship which is a product of the way we perceive ourselves.

The idea of a personal God is a recurring motif in the bible. It is evident in the narratives of those who sought God or were chosen by him, but it emerges more powerfully in the stories of those who tried to hide from Him, even if only momentarily. They have discovered that the Image of God, embedded in humankind at creation, is a spiritual GPS chip which accompanies us wherever we go. Even when you try to drive God away, even when you run to the most remote corners of the world, you are not alone! YOU are there, and if you are there, God is there as well.

You Can Run

The first fugitive is Adam:

> *…Adam and his wife hid from God amongst the trees of the garden. God called out to Adam, saying, where are you? Adam said, I heard Your voice in the garden and I was filled with fear for I am naked, so I hid…)Gen. 3, 8-10(*

Adam is hiding because he has lost something he held precious: his relationship with God. He feels that he has been stripped naked, that he lost what he had because of his error. God calls out to Adam to remind him that they can still talk, even if it is to accept responsibility for the wrongdoing. Adam, forefather of humanity, thus learns to reclaim his dignity and face his demons, empowered by the divine spark in him.

Another famous fugitive is Jonah. After Jonah is thrown to the sea and swallowed by a fish, he speaks of his failed attempt to run away from God and from himself:

> *I thought I have exiled myself from your sight, but I still gaze at Your sacred temple… when my soul withdraws into itself. I remember You, and my prayer comes to You, to Your sacred temple…*)Jonah 2:5(

Jonah tried to exile himself, to drive himself away from the presence of God. He uses the same root which describes Adam's exile from the Garden of Eden – גרש. But he still gazes, as his soul withdraws into itself in the belly of the fish, at the sacred temple. He is the only one there, in the darkest, narrowest, most horrific prison, the belly of the fish at the bottom of the ocean, and yet there is someone in the room with him. It is Jonah himself. He is still connected to God and can still have a dialog with him. Eventually, he emerges from his living prison cell.

Running From God Towards God

The last biblical figure is David, who spent many years as a fugitive from King Saul, but who also reveals in Psalm 139)7-12(that he has contemplated running away from God:

> *How can I escape Your spirit? How can I avoid Your presence? If I rise to the heavens, You are there, I go down to the netherworld, I face You.]Even if[I soar on the wings of dawn, I dwell at the far end of the ocean, there also Your hand will guide me, Your right]hand[will hold me. I thought that darkness could cover me, that night could be my day, but darkness, for You, is not dark, the night shines as day, darkness is light.*

Rabbi Shelomo ibn Gevirol put it succinctly in his Keter Malkhut)chapter 38(:

I run away from You to You!

You are Unique

Going back to the first of the Ten Concepts, we can say that God tells each individual that the Exodus has granted him the power to be unique and to develop his own relationship with God, without being subjugated to any other human being. This does not mean that one could do whatever he wants with disregard for others. That is why we have the other concepts. We tend to think of the second half of the Ten Concepts as the one protecting the rights of others, but that idea is there from the very beginning. The individual divinity of each person is a manifestation of the idea of the Image of God. As we appreciate the Image of God in us, we understand that all humans are created in the Image of God. Therefore, all humans must respect and protect each other.

You and God

That idea is also at the core of the prohibition against idolatry. God's "jealousy" does not stem from selfish considerations but rather from His concern for humanity. Paganism is a pretext for doing as you wish, including the greatest evils, in the name of religion. When there is a pantheon of competing and quarreling gods, one can always choose sides. In stories such as the Iliad, one god supports the Greeks while the other fights with the Trojans. Paganism also allows people to craft their gods in their own image and then ask these gods to guide them. Thus, they make themselves gods and invent religions to live and kill by. This system, which the Israelites found very hard to abandon, could lead to the destruction of humanity. God uses such harsh language here and throughout the bible, not because paganism id a threat to Him, but because it is a threat to humanity.

This is also the reason for the prohibition against making images. God is the Creator, He is omniscient and omnipresent, and our perception of Him changes constantly in accordance with our experience and stage in life. Similarly, us humans, created in His image, possess something of these qualities. Making a carved or molten image confines the Divine Image into limited physical object with clearly defined boundaries. By creating molten or carved images, we limit ourselves.

In the first two of the Ten concepts the Torah teaches us to appreciate freedom, explore our potential, and remember our commitment towards all humankind.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

What's in a Name?

By Rabbi Eliezer Lawrence *

The Mechilta teaches that Yitro, Moshe's father in law, had seven names: Yeter, Yitro, Chovav, Reuel, Chever, Putiel, and Keni, each corresponding to an aspect of Yitro's entirety. Yeter, because he was always adding good deeds. Chovav and Reuel, because he was beloved and a friend of God. The list could go on. Rashi adds that the vav at the end Yitro's name specifically represents Yeter's conversion to Judaism and acceptance of God and His Torah. This is of particular importance in this week's parsha, named for Yitro, which includes ma'amad har sinai and the receiving of the Torah.

In the first 15 pesukim of our parsha, Yitro is directly referenced 11 times)Ex. 18:1-15(. The majority of these times make reference to Yitro being Moshe's father in law, which makes sense. His role is that of a schver, a father in law; he is a haven for Moshe's wife and children, bringing them when it is determined to be safe for them to join the rest of the Israelites. When settled, Yitro takes on a semi-parental advisory role and lovingly helps Moshe navigate the challenges of daily leadership. This is what a father in law does, and it is for this reason that the Torah put the relationship front and

center in referring to Yitro.

There are, however, two consecutive instances where the in-law relationship is not mentioned. We observe that Yitro is referred to only by his first name, not even his title as kohen midian — just him. In these two pesukim his actual personage is also independent, describing moments of Yitro's internal introspection.

> *And Yitro rejoiced over all the kindness that Hashem had shown Israel when delivering them from the Egyptians. "Blessed be Hashem," Yitro said, "who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians*)Ex. 18:9-10(.

When he stands in awe before God, he is not described as Choten Moshe, but simply as Yitro, the servant of God who will cast his lots with the Jewish people. He is not joining because he married into them, but because he, of his own volition and consciousness, recognizes the truth in God's dominion.

When we are in relationship with others, we take on so many different roles and titles. Sometimes we are our partner's spouse, our student's teacher or our children's parent. Sometimes we are our employee's supervisor, or our supervisor's employee. We may be our doctor's 20th patient, or the store clerk's kindest customer. We may be the person that inadvertently cut someone off on the road, or the kind stranger who helped someone with their groceries to the car. All of these contexts and descriptions contain truth about who we are; it is just not the full picture.

But like Yitro, when we stand before God, we are not seen in reference to our relationships with others. Our entirety is fully observable.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Semikha from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Faculty, YCT & Maharat Beit Midrash Program. Note: quotes in Hebrrew omitted because of problems with changing software.

https://library.yctorah.org/2023/02/whats-in-a-name-3/

Shavuon Yitro

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

The old Yiddish phrase goes: *"A mentsch trakht un Got Lakht"*)Man plans and God laughs(.

But now I think both we and God have a reason to laugh this week. Is it not a coincidence that AHC makes a momentous move to our new site on the same Shabbat that we read about the giving of the Torah?

The giving of the Torah transformed the nation of Israel from slaves to a purposeful community. At this new site we too have the opportunity for radical transformation to define and achieve whatever purpose we set.

And it's already underway. Kadimah has started the new year, and all the kids already look so happy to be running around and learning on a site with such features as a large, green grassy area and a pool. Not to mention, the kids, teachers, parents and I were granted the honour of singing Shalom Aleichem to the delegation from Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei as part of their very special welcome to the new site.

The Ten Commandments gave the Jews hope that they can use its statutes to build their own community. This move also gives all of us at AHC hope that we can continue building something beautiful in the heart of Auckland, New Zealand.

Allow me then to list off a few reasons for hope on this new site. There are many but I'll limit myself to ten.

1. A peaceful, central and tree-lined street

2. More people live in the immediate area who can join us for Shabbat and Chagim

3. Jewish and non-Jewish families in the surrounding suburbs can choose Kadimah for the their children's best education

4. A Kosher Deli and cafe)eventually(for all in Remuera to congregate in

5. A special Preschool like no other, offering a unique learning experience for our young children

6. A fantastic space for our Zionist youth movements

6. A cultural and social hub that is Jewish Auckland

7. All Jewish organisations on-site, in close proximity, allowing for the free flow of ideas and greater cooperation

8. Wonderful facilities, such as a large pool and large green areas for gardening, sports, and barbeques

9. Better parking possibilities

10. What an opportunity we have chosen and been given.!

Shabbat Shalom and Shalom Remuera!

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Auckland, New Zealand.

Rav Kook Torah
The Revelation: Seeing Sound

The Midrash calls our attention to an amazing aspect of the revelation at Sinai: the Jewish people were able to see what is normally only heard. What does this mean?

Standing near the Source

At their source, sound and sight are united. Only in our limited, physical world, in this alma deperuda)disjointed world(, are these phenomena disconnected and detached. It is similar to our perception of lightning and thunder, which become increasingly separated from one another as the observer is more distanced from the source.

If we are bound and limited to the present, if we can only perceive the universe through the viewpoint of the temporal and the material, then we will always be aware of the divide between sight and sound. The prophetic vision at Mount Sinai, however, granted the people a unique perspective, as if they were standing near the source of Creation. From that vantage point, they were able to witness the underlying unity of the universe. They were able to see sounds and hear sights.

God's revelation at Sinai was registered by all their senses simultaneously, as a single, undivided perception.

)Gold from the Land of Israel p. 135. Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, p. 491.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHAV58.htm

A Nation of Leaders (Yitro 5774, 5781)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

This week's parsha consists of two episodes that seem to constitute a study in contrasts. The first is in chapter 18. Yitro, Moses' father-in-law and a Midianite Priest, gives Moses his first lesson in leadership. In the second episode, the prime mover is God Himself who, at Mount Sinai, makes a covenant with the Israelites in an unprecedented and unrepeated epiphany. For the first and only time in history God appears to an entire people, making a covenant with them and giving them the world's most famous brief code of ethics, the Ten Commandments.

What can there be in common between the practical advice of a Midianite and the timeless words of Revelation itself? There is an intended contrast here and it is an important one. The forms and structures of governance are not specifically Jewish. They are part of chochmah, the universal wisdom of humankind. Jews have known many forms of leadership: by Prophets, Elders, Judges and Kings; by the Nasi in Israel under Roman rule and the Resh Galuta in Babylon; by town councils)shiva tuvei ha-ir(and various forms of oligarchy; and by other structures up to and including the democratically elected Knesset. The forms of government are not eternal truths, nor are they exclusive to Israel. In fact, the Torah says about monarchy that a time will come when the people say, *"Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,"* – the only case in the entire Torah in which Israel are commanded)or permitted(to imitate other nations. There is nothing specifically Jewish about political structures.

What is specifically Jewish, however, is the principle of the covenant at Sinai, that Israel is the chosen people, the only nation whose sole ultimate king and legislator is God Himself. *"He has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws, Halleluyah."*)Psalm 147:19-20(What the covenant at Sinai established for the first time was the moral limits of power.]1[All human authority is delegated authority, subject to the overarching moral imperatives of the Torah itself. This side of heaven there is no absolute power. That is what has always set Judaism apart from the empires of the ancient world and the secular nationalisms of the West. So Israel can learn practical politics from a Midianite but it must learn the limits of politics from God Himself.

Despite the contrast, however, there is one theme in common to both episodes, to Yitro and to the revelation at Sinai, namely the delegation, distribution and democratisation of leadership. Only God can rule alone.

The theme is introduced by Yitro. He arrives to visit his son-in-law and finds him leading alone. He says, *"What you are doing is not good."*)Ex. 18:17(This is one of only two instances in the whole Torah in which the words lo tov, "not good," appear. The other is in Genesis)2:18(, where God says, *"It is not good]lo tov[for man to be alone."* We cannot lead alone. We cannot live alone. To be alone is not good.

Yitro proposes delegation:

> *You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to Him. Teach them His decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. But select capable men from all the people — men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain — and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as Judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you.* Ex. 18:19-22

This is a significant devolution. It means that among every thousand Israelites, there are 131 leaders)one head of a thousand, ten heads of a hundred, twenty heads of fifty and a hundred head of tens(. One in every eight adult male Israelites was expected to undertake some form of leadership role.

In the next chapter, prior to the revelation at Mount Sinai, God commands Moses to propose a covenant with the Israelites. In the course of this, God articulates what is in effect the mission statement of the Jewish people:

> *You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and*

brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation.' Ex. 19:4-6

This is a very striking statement. Every nation had its priests. In the book of Genesis, we encounter Malkizedek, Abraham's contemporary, described as *"a priest of the most high God."*)Gen. 14:18(The story of Joseph mentions the Egyptian priests, whose land was not nationalised.)Gen. 47:22(Yitro was a Midianite priest. In the ancient world there was nothing distinctive about priesthood. Every nation had its priests and holy men. What was distinctive about Israel was that it was to become a nation every one of whose members was to be a priest; each of whose citizens was called on to be holy.

I vividly recall standing with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz zt"l in the General Assembly of the United Nations in August 2000 at a unique gathering of two thousand religious leaders representing all the major faiths in the world. I pointed out that even in that distinguished company we were different. We were almost the only religious leaders wearing suits. All the others wore robes of office. It is an almost universal phenomenon that priests and holy people wear distinctive garments to indicate that they are set apart)the core meaning of the word kadosh, "holy"(. In post-biblical Judaism there were no robes of office because everyone was expected to be holy]2[ )Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle, called Jews "a nation of philosophers," reflecting the same idea.]3[(.

Yet in what sense were Jews ever a Kingdom of Priests? The Kohanim were an elite within the nation, members of the tribe of Levi, descendants of Aaron the first High Priest. There never was a full democratisation of keter kehunah, the crown of priesthood.

Faced with this problem, the commentators offer two solutions. The word Kohanim, "Priests," may mean "princes" or "leaders")Rashi, Rashbam(. Or it may mean "servants")Ibn Ezra, Ramban(. But this is precisely the point. The Israelites were called on to be a nation of servant-leaders. They were the people called on, by virtue of the covenant, to accept responsibility not only for themselves and their families, but for the moral-spiritual state of the nation as a whole. This is the principle that later became known as the idea that kol Yisrael arevin zeh ba-zeh*, "All Israelites are responsible for one another."*)Shavuot 39a(Jews were the people who did not leave leadership to a single individual, however holy or exalted, or to an elite. Instead, every one of them was expected to be both a prince and a servant; that is to say, every one of whom was called on to be a leader. Never was leadership more profoundly democratised.

That is what made Jews historically hard to lead. As Chaim Weizmann, first President of Israel, famously said, *"I head a nation of a million presidents."*

The Lord may be our shepherd, but no Jew was ever a sheep. At the same time, this is what led Jews to have an impact on the world out of all proportion to their numbers. Jews constitute only the tiniest fragment – one fifth of one per cent of the population of the world – but they make up an extraordinarily high percentage of leaders in any given field of human endeavour.

To be a Jew is to be called on to lead.]4[

FOOTNOTES:

]1[For the original illustration of this idea, please see Rabbi Sacks' comments on Shifrah and Puah in "Women as Leaders")Shemot 5781(.

]2[This idea reappeared in Protestant Christianity in the phrase "the priesthood of all believers," during the age of the Puritans, the Christians who took most seriously the principles of what they called the Old Testament.

]3[See Josephus, Against Apion 1:22.

]4[In the upcoming essay for parshat Kedoshim, we will delve further into the role of the follower in Judaism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can we be both followers and leaders?

2. Do you think that, as a people, we need to prioritise being better followers or greater leaders?

3. How will you answer the call to lead?

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bo/the-far-horizon/ Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/yitro/a-nation-of-leaders/

"Be Prepared!"

By Yossi Goldman * © Chabad 2023

Seven weeks after the Exodus from Egypt, the Children of Israel stood at Mount Sinai. They were told there would be a great Revelation; the Almighty would descend and give them His holy Torah and the Jewish way of life.

But before they could receive the Torah, they required shloshet yemei hagbalah, "three days of separation," — a period of physical and spiritual purification. After all, it's not every day that the Almighty Himself comes calling!

Every spiritual occasion requires preparation. Before we pray, we wash our hands. Before reciting the Shema, we cover our eyes to focus our minds and hearts on this moment of meditation. Before the silent devotion of the Amidah, we take three steps backwards. Chassidim put on a gartel, a black belt, to "gird one's loins," before approaching G d in prayer. Before we perform most mitzvahs, we recite a blessing.

In fact, one of the only mitzvahs I can think of that does not require a blessing is giving tzedakah, charity, lest one get carried away with spiritual preparations that delay helping the person in need.

Likewise, in life. A wedding only takes a few hours but involves months of preparation. The excitement is mostly in the time preceding the actual simcha. Planning, making all the arrangements, deciding on everything from a venue to a menu … it's all part of the fun.

Delivering a baby takes a few hours)if you're lucky and there are no complications(, but the process of childbirth began nine months earlier.

Essentially, every important life occasion involves preparation which becomes part of the experience itself. Without it, we would miss out on most of the anticipation, excitement, the adrenalin, and all the fun. The preparation is not only a prelude to the event but part and parcel of the actual experience. Without it, we would miss out on so much of the excitement.

I remember traveling from South Africa to New York and surprising my dear mother, of blessed memory. When she opened the door and saw me, she was totally stunned. It was indeed a great and happy surprise for her. But afterwards she asked me not to play that trick again. When I asked why not, she said that I had deprived her of weeks of eager anticipation.

So when it came to receiving the Torah from G d at Mount Sinai, the 49 days of preparation, and particularly those three days of intense purification, were absolutely necessary.

And so it is in our own lives.

Take Shabbat for example. There are many who observe Shabbat, but they miss out on Erev Shabbat. Erev Shabbat refers to Friday, which is dedicated to preparing for the holy day. It's not only for shopping or baking challah and cooking up a storm. It's not only for getting the house and dinner ready. Erev Shabbat is also the time to prepare ourselves accordingly. Unlike so many of us who fall into Shabbat at the very last minute.

In fact, isn't it fascinating how nobody is ready for Shabbat until the last minute? It doesn't seem to matter whether Shabbat begins at 4 p.m. in the winter or at 8 p.m. in the summer. If it weren't for the proverbial "last minute," no one would ever be ready!

Actually, I shouldn't say no one. There are many good people out there who get it right and do prepare in plenty of time for Shabbat.

Many years ago, in the old Jewish neighborhood of Yeoville, Johannesburg, we were invited for Friday night Shabbat dinner to one of the Emanuel families living there. The Emanuels were of German extraction and had played a significant role in shaping Orthodox Jewry in the early days of Johannesburg, when the religious community was very small and nowhere as big and dynamic as it is today. Interestingly, our hosts asked us not only to come for dinner, but to please come to their home much earlier so that we could be there when the mother of the home would kindle the Shabbat candles.

I must tell you, it was a memorable experience! The Emanuel tradition was for the whole family to gather around the Shabbat table, dressed in their Shabbat finery, before the mother lit the Shabbat candles. They were all there to say "amen" to her blessing and watch as she offered her silent prayer for her family with her hands covering her eyes. It was such a beautiful contrast to the way I — and millions of others — rush into Shabbat with only moments to spare. Well over 40 years later, that image is still clear in my mind and continues to inspire me.

Whether it is Shabbat, a blessing, a mitzvah, or a joyous celebration, let's make an effort to do like the Boy Scouts: "be prepared!"

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5804881/jewish/Be-Prepared.htm

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Yitro: Women First

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Women First

> *Moses ascended to G-d. G-d called out to him from the mountain, saying, "You must say the following to the House of Jacob and relate it to the Israelites."*)Ex. 19:3(

G-d here instructs Moses to teach the Torah first to the women)"the House of Jacob"(and then to the men)"the Israelites"(.

While women's role in rearing children exempts them from constant study of the Torah, they are required to master the Torah's laws and theology that they must know in order to lead proper spiritual lives. Indeed, because of their crucial role in forging the spiritual foundation of their children's lives, the necessity for women to study the Torah takes precedence over that of the men.

With regard to the more abstract realms of Torah study, since we have more leisure time than formerly, women should study those aspects of the Torah formerly deemed men's province. This will ensure that they develop their intellectual abilities in accord with the Torah's logic and purity, and conversely, it will encourage them to seek intellectual excitement and fulfillment in Torah study rather than in secular philosophy and culture.

This development in women's Torah study is both a foretaste and a preparation for the imminent Messianic Redemption. At that time, women will participate in drawing Divine wisdom from the Torah on an equal footing with men.

– From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #3

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Universal and the Particular

The quintessential Jewish expression of thanks, gratitude and acknowledgment is Baruch Hashem, meaning "Thank God," or "Praise be to the Lord." Chassidim say of the Baal Shem Tov that he would travel around the little towns and villages of Eastern Europe, asking Jews how they were. However poor or troubled they were, invariably they would reply, Baruch Hashem. It was an instinctive expression of faith, and every Jew knew it. They might have lacked the learning of the great Talmudic scholar, or the wealth of the successful, but they believed they had much to thank God for, and they did so. When asked what he was doing and why, the Baal Shem Tov would reply by quoting the verse: "You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:4). So every time a Jew says Baruch Hashem, he or she is helping to make a throne for the Shechinah, the Divine Presence.

The words Baruch Hashem appear in this week's parsha. But they are not spoken by a Jew. The person who says them is Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law. Rejoining Moshe after the Exodus, bringing with him Moshe's wife and children, and hearing from his son-in-law all that had happened in Egypt, he says, "Praise be to the Lord [Baruch Hashem], who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians" (Ex. 18:10).

Three people in the Torah use this expression – and all of them are non-Jews, people outside the Abrahamic covenant. The first is Noach: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem" (Gen. 9:26). The second is Avraham's servant, presumed to be Eliezer, whom he sends to find a wife for Yitzchak: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Avraham, who has not abandoned His kindness and faithfulness to my master" (Gen. 24:27). The third is Yitro in this week's parsha.[1]

Is this significant? Why is it that this praise of God is attributed to Noach, Eliezer and Yitro, whereas from the Israelites, with the marked exception of the Song at the Sea, we seem to hear constant complaints? It may be simply that this is human nature: we see more clearly than others what is lacking in our lives, while others see more clearly than we do the blessings we have. We complain, while others wonder what we are complaining about when we have so much to be thankful for. That is one explanation.

It is, though, possible that a more fundamental point is being made. The Torah is signalling its most subtle and least understood idea: that the God of Israel is the God of all humankind, even though the religion of Israel is not the religion of all humankind. As Rabbi Akiva put it: "Beloved is humanity, for it was created in the image of God. Beloved is Israel, for they are called children of God."[2]

We believe that God is universal. He created the universe. He set in motion the processes that led to stars, planets, life, and humanity. His concern is not limited to Israel. As we say in the prayer of Ashrei, "His tender mercies are on all His works." You do not need to be Jewish to have a sense of reverence for the Creator or recognise, as Yitro did, His hand in miraculous events. It would be hard to find another religious literature that confers such dignity on figures who stand outside its borders.

This is true not only of the three notable figures who said Baruch Hashem. The Torah calls Avraham's contemporary, Malkizedek, king of Shalem, a "Priest to God Most High." He, too, blessed God: "Blessed be Avram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand" (Gen. 14:19-20).

Consider also, the fact that the title of our own parsha this week, which contains the Ten Commandments as well as the most significant event in all of Jewish history, the covenant at Sinai, carries the name of a non-Jew. What is more, immediately prior to the revelation at Sinai, the Torah tells us how it was Yitro the Midianite Priest who taught Moshe how to organise the leadership of the people.

These are remarkable expressions of spiritual generosity to those outside the covenant.

Or consider Tishri, the holiest month of the Jewish year. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, as well as reading about the birth of Yitzchak, we read of how an angel came to the aid of Hagar and Yishmael. "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid. God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation" (Gen. 21:17-18). Yishmael was not destined to be a carrier of the covenant, yet he was rescued and blessed.

On Yom Kippur, in the afternoon, after we have spent most of the day fasting and making confession, we read the book of Yonah, in which we discover that the Prophet uttered a mere five Hebrew words ("In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed") and then the entire population – Assyrians, Israel's enemies – repented. Tradition takes this as the model of collective repentance.

On Succot we read Zechariah's prophecy that in days to come all the nations will come to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of rain (Zech. 14:16-19).

These are three stunning examples of universalism. They do not imply that in the fullness of time everyone will convert to Judaism. Rather, that in the fullness of time everyone will recognise the one God, Creator and Sovereign of the universe. That is quite a different thing.

This idea that you can stand outside the faith and still be acknowledged by people within the faith as someone who recognises God, is very rare indeed. Far more common is the approach of one God, one truth, one way. Whoever stands outside that way is Godless, unsaved, the infidel, unredeemed, a lower class of humanity.

Why then does Judaism distinguish between the universality of God and the particularity of our relationship with Him? Answer: because this helps us solve the single greatest problem humanity has faced since earliest times. How can I recognise the dignity and integrity of the 'other'? History and biology have written into the human mind a capacity for altruism toward the people like us, and aggression toward the people not like us. We are good, they are bad. We are innocent, they are guilty. We have truth, they have lies. We have God on our side, they do not. Many crimes of nation against nation are due to this propensity.

Which is why Tanach teaches otherwise. Noach, Eliezer and Yitro were people of God without being members of Israel. Even the people of Nineveh became an example of how to heed a Prophet and repent. God blessed Yishmael as well as Yitzchak. These are powerful lessons.

It is hard to think of a more compelling principle for the 21st century. The great problems humanity faces – climate change,

economic inequality, cyberwarfare, artificial intelligence – are global, but our most effective political agencies are at most national. There is a mismatch between our problems and the available solutions. We need to find a way of combining our universal humanity with our cultural and religious particularity.

That is what the Torah is doing when it tells us that Noach, Eliezer and Yitro said Baruch Hashem. They thanked God, just as we, today, thank God. God is universal. Therefore humanity, created in His image, is universal. But the revelation and covenant at Mount Sinai were particular. They belong to our story, not the universal story of humankind.

I believe this ability to be both particular in our identity and universal in our commitment to the human future is one of the most important messages we, as Jews, have to deliver in the 21st century. We are different, but we are human. Therefore let us work together to solve the problems that can only be solved together.

[1] There are two other oblique examples. Laban calls Avraham's servant, "You who are blessed by the Lord" (Gen. 24:31). Avimelech king of Gerar says of Yitzchak, "You are blessed by the Lord" (Genesis 26:29). Again note that neither of the speakers is part of the covenant.

[2] Mishnah Avot 3:14.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And now, if you will surely hearken to my voice and observe My Covenant, then you shall be for Me a chosen treasure (segulah) from amongst all the nations, because all of the earth is Mine And you shall be for Me a Kingdom of Priest-teachers and a holy nation… (Ex. 19:5,6)"

In our Biblical portion of Yitro, we have the Religious Covenant between God and the Israelites, a Divine agreement that if this newly-formed emerging nation will accept the moral and ritual commandments, they will become God's treasured people, a holy nation of priest-teachers to all of humanity. Hence the prophetic fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, chosen because he was commanding his household after him to act with compassionate righteousness and moral justice, that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 18:18-19; 12:3).

From this perspective, the Covenant at Sinai may be seen as the Bar-Bat Mitzvah of the Jewish Nation at the very dawn of their history. Indeed, it is a commitment –consecration ceremony, which can be ratified only after the Israelites publicly accept the challenge – or the gift – which God is placing before them, "And (the Israelites) said, 'all that the Lord has spoken we shall perform and internalize' – and then Moses took the blood (of the earlier sacrifices) and sprinkled it upon the nation , and he said, 'behold, the blood of the Covenant, which the Lord has cut with you on all these words.'" (Ex. 24:7-9) As should be expected, this ratification comes after the lengthy portion of Mishpatim, replete with a sampling of the moral and ritual commandments which have always been seen by our Sages as part and parcel of the Revelation at Sinai.

This ratification of the Covenant includes the youth of Israel who brought whole burnt offerings and peace offerings – and a celebratory meal for the leadership (Moses, Aaron, Nadav, Avihu and the Seventy Elders), at which they ate and drank in the presence of the Divine. (Ex. 24:11). Biblically, sacrifices of whole burnt offerings and peace offerings are generally identified with Festival celebrations (for example, Num. 10:10).

As we have seen, there is also the sprinkling of blood upon the nation, which is reminiscent of the circumcision ceremony, by which every male baby enters into the Covenant of Abraham and must include the loss of some blood from the male sexual organ of propagation; so it is that every single birth, male and female, is accompanied with the significant loss of blood: our Talmud teaches that "women are considered to be naturally circumcised," because with every birth they put their lives on the line and shed much blood!

The profound reason for this is difficult, but very true.

Every worthwhile idea or ideal requires commitment (mesirut nefesh), even commitment unto death. It was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said that anyone who has not found an ideal for which he would sacrifice his life is not living a worthwhile life! As the prophet Ezekiel taught, "And I see that you are rooted in your blood, and I say to you "by your blood shall you live, by your blood shall you live" (Ezek. 16:6).

The great paradox of the biblical story of the binding of Isaac was God's telling Abraham that only if he was willing to risk his future through his son Isaac would he be worthy of having a future with covenantal seed. God Himself (as it were) is invested in Israel's commitment, even commitment unto death, to the Covenant, because unless Israel succeeds in teaching the world ethical monotheism, our global village will have no future! That is why in picturing God's participation in the celebratory meal at Sinai, what I believe the Bible is trying to express metaphorically is that God has chosen us as His partners, to be His witnesses to the world, to help Him save humanity from self-destruction.

The Talmud records (B.T. Tamid 32a) that "Alexander of Macedon asked the Elders of Tzfat: 'What ought a person do if he wishes to die?' They responded, 'Let him attempt to keep on living,' because he will surely die sooner or later; nobody has yet left this world alive! 'And what ought a person do if he wishes to remain alive?' They responded, 'Let him slay himself' for the sake of an eternal value, of a lofty ideal, and he will continue to live as long as the value or ideal remains alive in the world."

To be a committed Jews means that although you may be engaged in a dangerous occupation, there is no more privileged way to live your life. Yes, it is a great joy to be Jewish. And even if you experience a temporal "oy," that is certainly worth the eternal "joy" of participating in God's vineyard dedicated to perfecting the world.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Midah K'neged Midah Punishment is a Big Chesed

When Moshe told Yisro all that happened to Klal Yisrael, Yisro responded: "Blessed is Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharoah; Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt." (Shemos 18:10). Yisro then concluded: "Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods, for in the very matter in which (the Egyptians) had conspired against them (asher zadu aleihem)…!" (Shemos 18:11).

Rashi says that Yisro was speaking from experience because he was a Priest of Idolatry. In his search for the Truth, Yisro first tried all the other religions of the world, and now he came to the recognition that Judaism was the true religion of the All-Powerful G-d. Yisro says that he recognized this fact "because of the matter asher zadu aleihem." What do those words – asher zadu aleihem – mean?

Rashi says that Pharaoh attempted to destroy the Jews in water (drowning their male children in the Nile) and, in the end, the Egyptians were destroyed in water (when they drowned in the Yam Suf). Yisro saw the greatness of the Ribono shel Olam in the poetic justice of that punishment. The Egyptians did not receive just any punishment, but they died in exactly the same way they caused the Jews to die. Rashi adds that the Rabbis comment that the word zadu comes from the same root as "vayazed Yaakov nazid" (Yaakov cooked lentils) – as if to say – they themselves were cooked in the pot that they planned to cook the Jews.

I saw an interesting comment on Yisro's statement "Now I know that Hashem is Gadol (greater) than all the Elohim". The word Gadol has a special connotation in Yiddishkeit. In Parshas V'Eschanon, on the pasuk "Hashem Elokim you have begun to show me Your greatness (godlecha) and Your mighty Arm…" (Devorim 3:24), Rashi explains that "Godlecha" refers to Your Attribute of Goodness. So too, it is written "Now please magnify (Yigdal Nah) the Power of Hashem…" (Bamidbar 14:17).

The word Gadol, in reference to the Ribono shel Olam, refers to a specific Divine Attribute. It refers to His Attribute of Chesed

(Kindness). This should come as no surprise to us. We need to know this to fulfill our obligation of reciting Shemoneh Esrei. In the first bracha of Shemoneh Esrei, it is essential to know the meaning of the words. We say "HaKel haGadol haGibor v'haNorah". Each one of these descriptions has a specific connotation. Gadol connotes His Attribute of Chesed. Gibor refers to the Might and Power of the Ribono shel Olam. Each word means something specific.

When Yisro said, "Now I see the greatness of the Almighty," what specific greatness did he mean? Offhand, we might think Yisro should not have used the word GADOL, but rather GIBOR – he drowned the Egyptians. He gave them what they deserved. This seems like the Attribute of Justice (Midas HaDin). The Hebrew word to express Midas HaDin is Gevurah – Gibor. Gadol is Midas HaChesed, the Attribute of Kindness. Why then, did Yisro say "Now I know that Hashem is Gadol" when he should have said "Now I know that Hashem is Gibor"? This seems like a manifestation of His strict Gevurah, not of His Kindness!

Apparently, Yisro felt that the drowning of the Egyptians was a manifestation of the Kindness of the Ribono shel Olam. The reason for that is because it was a classic example of "Midah k'neged Midah" (measure for measure): They tried to drown you, so they are going to drown themselves. The reason the Almighty punishes people 'measure for measure' is because when the Ribono shel Olam metes out punishment to a person, it is not merely to punish him. It is not out of revenge. Hashem punishes us because he wants to straighten us out and correct our erroneous ways. However, how are we supposed to know what are we doing wrong? This is a terribly pressing question. People suffer all kinds of tzores. One of the most common questions is, "So what should I do? What should I correct?"

This is the tragedy of not having Prophets today. If we had prophets, and a person could go to the Navi and ask "Why is this happening to me?" the Navi could tell him exactly why it was happening. "This is what you are doing wrong!"

Today we are in a cloud. But there are times when the punishment matches the crime. When that happens, the Ribono shel Olam is hinting to us what we are doing wrong! This is a tremendous Kindness. The Ran writes in the Droshos HaRan that when retribution comes in the same form as the crime, we can recognize that it is happening by Divine Providence, and then it will be clear how to make amends. Unfortunately, though, it is not always so simple and not always so obvious.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz once told a story in a shmooze about a match that was proposed for a young lady with a tremendous bochur, but the bochur had a limp. When the Shidduch was proposed to the mother of the girl, she rejected it. "I don't want a bochur with a limp. He may be the best bochur in the Mir Yeshiva, but I don't want a son-in-law who limps." She rejected the Shidduch. Shortly thereafter, this woman fell and broke her leg. She came to Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz and asked, "What did I do wrong that this happened to me?"

I don't know if he told her this to her face, but Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz rightly said in this shmooze that this was as simple as the nose on her face. Of course, it is not always this obvious. But the Droshos HaRan emphasizes that Divine Providence is evident when the punishment comes in the exact area where the sin was committed.

The Navi Yeshaya writes "…I am the L-rd your G-d who teaches you for benefit (l'lamdecha l'ho'il), He shows you the road upon which you shall walk" (Yeshaya 48:17). He teaches you so that there will be a benefit to the lesson. We do not have Neviim to talk to us today, but we need to try to look for the connection between what has happened and why it happened. If I received this particular klop, then maybe it somehow has to do with the particular way I am acting.

The Ramchal writes that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is interested in the Tikun (correction/ improvement) of His creations. Divine punishment is not like putting a person in jail for fifteen years to let him rot for the evil crime he has committed. That is not how the Ribono shel Olam punishes people. He punishes people with the intention that they should improve. "He does not push away the wicked with two hands; on the contrary He purifies them in the furnace like a metallurgist takes away the impurities of metal."

That is what Yisro is saying: Now I realize that Gadol Hashem – it is a great kindness He did by executing 'measure for measure' judgment against the Egyptians for their sins. Now they became aware of what they did wrong!

Of course, we might ask, how did knowing what they did wrong help the Egyptians? They met their final fate by drowning in the water. What good does that knowledge do for them after they are dead?

The Ibn Ezra writes on the pasuk "And the Egyptians shall know that I am Hashem" (Shemos 14:18) that this refers to the Egyptians who were left and observed what happened to their fellow Egyptians who drowned at the Red Sea. He also adds that even those who drowned, in the instant before they expired they recognized the Hand of G-d and the appropriateness of their punishment. At that moment they had an opportunity to do Teshuva.

The tragedy with the Space Shuttle Challenger occurred a long time ago, in January 1986. I remember reading an editorial at the time—perhaps in the Wall Street Journal. Someone made an interesting observation. The conventional wisdom at that time was that when the Challenger exploded, the crew did not know what hit them. They all died instantly. People felt consoled "Well, at least they did not suffer."

However, someone pointed out that it is no big bonus for them to have died in a flash without knowing what hit them, and without even having an instant to formulate their "last thoughts". It is advantageous for man to have "hirhurei Teshuva" (thoughts of spiritual remorse) in his last moments on earth. It is no Chesed to die without being given that opportunity.

The Ibn Ezra says that the Egyptians may have drowned, and they may not have had more than a moment or two to formulate their last thoughts. But they did have the opportunity to recognize that they were drowning and to perhaps ask "Why is this happening to me?" There were Egyptians who "got it" and figured out that this was not a coincidence. For a split second or maybe two, the Egyptians had a recognition that "I am Hashem" who metes out just punishment. They went to their deaths with those thoughts, and maybe they even had a hirhur of Teshuva. Even that brief opportunity for improvement represents the Good and Kindness (Gadol) that Yisro recognized in Hashem's 'measure for measure' punishment.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is the best entry point through which more people can engage better with their Judaism? Parshat Yitro commences with the words, "Vayishma Yitro," – "Yitro heard." (Shemot 18:1). But the Torah doesn't tell us what exactly it was that Yitro heard. What prompted this priest of Midyan to join the Israelite camp in the wilderness and to embrace a life of commitment to Torah? Three answers are given in the Talmud, Masechet Pesachim.

Rabbi Yehoshua tells us that Yitro heard all about 'milchemet Amalek,' the war that the Amalekites launched against our people in their attempt to annihilate us.

According to the second view, Rabbi Elazar Moda'i tells us that Yitro heard all about Matan Torah – how Hashem gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai.

According to the third view, that of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov, Yitro heard all about Kriat Yam Suf, the miraculous parting of the waters of the sea.

These three reasons are fascinating. According to the first, what changed Yitro's life was when he heard about an attempt to annihilate the Jewish people. Today we are all too aware of the tragic phenomemnon of antisemitism and while it's true that antisemitism can sometimes strengthen Jewish identity, that's not our raison

d'etre. We're not here just to survive as a people. We have something to live for.

That is why the second reason is suggested – that what Yitro heard about was Matan Torah, the fact that we are privileged to have a Divinely given guide to life, to enable us to walk in Hashem's ways and to have a fulfilling, happy and meaningful existence through Torah.

That's also why, according to the third view, Yitro heard about the miraculous intervention of God at the sea. If only we would open our eyes we would also appreciate that Hashem is with us, sustaining us miraculously on every single day of our lives.

The Talmud here is speaking about effective entry points, and today we are aware that we need to create such entry points for more people to engage more effectively with their Jewish roots. There are many types of entry point. For example, one could be a beautiful shabbat meal. Another could be a spiritually uplifting shul service. For another person, an entry point could be playing football for a Jewish team, joining a Jewish security group, visiting a place of Jewish historical interest or just reading a Jewish history book. There are so many different ways for people's eyes to be opened and for them to be connected to their people and to their faith.

So which one was the entry point which worked for Yitro? We're not exactly sure. But one thing is for certain: Yitro had an extraordinary experience as a result of which his life was shaped for the better and if it could happen to Yitro, it can happen to anyone.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Proving God's Existence

In his very first Halacha-Jewish law of his Mishne Torah (Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah 1:1), Maimonides states that it is foundational for a Jew to know that there is a God. But this command, to believe in God, is not found anywhere the Torah. Most of the commentators subsume this commandment in the first words of the Ten Commandments in our Torah Portion, as part of "I am the God your Lord, who took you out of the Land of Egypt, from the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:1). But the Baal Halachot Gedolot specifically omits belief in God as one of the 613 -Mitzvot-commandments. Logically, he seems to be correct: If a Jew does not believe in God, what is the purpose of commanding him or her to believe? And, if he or she already believes, there is no need for a commandment. Most people are not sure if they believe in a God since He has not made His existence obvious as of late, and there seems to be no concrete proof. This essay will attempt to examine if God indeed can be "proved", and why it is more logical to believe than not to believe.

Can God's Existence Be Proven? - The short answer to this essential question of life is "no." By its very definition, God's absolute existence cannot be proven, and that is precisely how God and Judaism desire the situation to remain. Doubt is a necessary part of faith, and the entire structure of Judaism would be altered if God's existence could be undeniably demonstrated. Why is this so?

First, the nature of "proof" itself needs to be examined. One definition of the concept of "proof" is "evidence that compels the mind to accept an assertion as true." Normally, when we speak of evidence in the 21st century, it signifies physical evidence (like forensic evidence in a murder trial), based on accepted scientific methodology. And therein lies the first problem with proving God's existence. Proving something physical using scientific proof is a valid approach in the physical world. But since God, by definition, is a non-physical, spiritual being, proving God's existence scientifically is impossible. As a non-physical being, God cannot be seen, felt, touched, or measured, which are all qualities needed in using the scientific method to prove anything in the physical world. Therefore, utilizing physical evidence to prove the non-physical existence of God is, logically and practically, unachievable, and "proving" God's existence in this manner is impossible.

In addition to this obstacle, there is a very "Jewish" reason that God's existence cannot and should not be proven. One of the mainstays of Jewish belief is that every human being has complete free will to act as he or she pleases. Without this concept of true free will, there would be no morality or notion of reward and punishment. Not only is physical free will guaranteed for each human being, but in today's world, psychological free will is also a must, in order not to "force" a human being to act one way or another, even due to non-physical pressure. Therefore, if God's existence could be proven beyond the shadow of a doubt and every person in the world would be completely convinced 100% that there is a God, people would be afraid to act in an immoral fashion due to worry about punishment. This would compromise free will, and ethical behavior would take place everywhere, not because people believe it is the right way to act, but only because of their fear of punishment from God. This is not how God wishes us to run our lives. Therefore, there must always remain some small doubt about God's existence and active involvement in the world, to allow people to make moral decisions of their own free will, and to be rewarded or punished for these decisions.

If God cannot be proven, what then is left to do? Although God's existence cannot be ascertained as fact, many ideas seem to show that the existence of God is a much more logical supposition than concluding that God does not exist. Therefore, a few arguments are offered below in a condensed form, showing why it is more logical to assume that God exists and that He is actively involved in the world, rather than to harbor a belief in a world that is completely random, lacking the existence of the Divine.

The Cosmological Argument - Logically, there are three explanations for the existence of the universe and the world (earth): (1) it came into existence by itself, randomly, (2) someone (or some being) actually created it, or (3) it was always there. Since everything else that exists in the physical realm on earth has a cause or creator, then it is much more logical to say that the world itself was also created rather than that it just happened suddenly, accidentally, or by itself. Today, most scientists, including those who do not necessarily believe in God, seem to agree that the universe came into existence in one instant, which is referred to as "The Big Bang." However, scientists have not been able to explain how or why or who caused the Big Bang at that particular moment. This argument says that if there was a Big Bang, then it is logical to also believe that there had to be a Big Banger, God. The question, that logically follows is, "Then who created God?" This is discussed by Aristotle and Maimonides in the description of the Prime Mover, the one thing in the world that cannot be moved and was not created by something else, (i.e., God Himself) (Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed II:1). In addition, when speaking about creating anything in the world, everything that is referred to is a physical object in the universe, including the universe itself. Since, by definition, God is not a physical being, the question of who created God, a spiritual entity, is not an equivalent one, but is, rather, a non-starter. A non-physical, spiritual being *can* be eternal without causing conflict.

The Teleological Argument - If, after a great avalanche, a person travels to that area and finds in the giant rocks a letter "H" formed by many boulders sitting on the ground, he or she may think it is a great coincidence. But as the individual keeps traveling, he or she then finds exactly 50 feet further (again formed by boulders) the letter "E". Fifty feet later, the letter "L" is formed in similarly, then after another 50 feet there is another "L," and finally 50 feet further on there is an "O." It certainly could be analyzed as a great coincidence, a random accident, that the boulders all happened to fall this way and just happened to be placed exactly 50 feet apart and coincidentally spelled out the word "HELLO". But it is far more logical to believe that an intelligent being intentionally formed these letters and then placed them there for someone to see and read. This, essentially, is the Teleological argument. The design and perfection in nature and the world could indeed be accidental. But it is more logical to believe that a designer created it that way intentionally. If the person then continues walking and sees more words, such as "HOW ARE YOU?' and then "HAVE A NICE DAY,"

with each letter sitting exactly 50 feet apart from the next, the more a person observes, the more he or she has to conclude that all this is not an accident, but it was put there intentionally. Of course, the opposite theory is that a billion monkeys with a billion computers in a billion years will eventually type out Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and this is certainly a possibility, especially with so many chances to get it wrong before getting it right. But it seems to be far more logical that all the design in the world and nature was purposeful rather than accidental. A few concrete examples of this idea (macro and micro) should elucidate this argument further.

The Earth's size is perfect for life to exist as it does. The Earth's dimensions and corresponding gravity hold a thin layer of mostly nitrogen and oxygen gases, extending only about 50 miles above the Earth's surface. If Earth were smaller, an atmosphere would be impossible, like the situation of the planet Mercury. If Earth were larger, its atmosphere would contain free hydrogen, like Jupiter's atmosphere does. Earth is the only known planet equipped with an atmosphere of the right mixture of gases to sustain plant, animal, and human life. The Earth is located in the right distance from the sun. Consider the temperature swings the earth encounters, roughly -30 degrees to +120 degrees (Fahrenheit). If the Earth were any further away from the sun, we would all freeze. Any closer - and we would burn up. Even a fractional variance in the Earth's position to the sun would make life on Earth impossible. The Earth remains at this perfect distance from the sun while it rotates around it at a speed of nearly 67,000 mph. It is also rotating on its axis, allowing the entire surface of the Earth to be properly warmed and cooled every day. It is far more logical to say that all this was created intentionally to allow life to thrive on this planet, rather than conclude that all these details are mere accidents of nature.

Similarly, water is colorless, odorless, and without taste, and yet no living thing can survive without it. Plants, animals, and human beings consist mostly of water. (About two-thirds of the human body is water.) The characteristics of water are uniquely suited to life: It has an unusually high boiling point and low freezing point. Water allows us to live in an environment of fluctuating temperature changes while keeping our bodies at a steady 98.6 degrees (Fahrenheit). Water is a universal solvent; this property means that thousands of chemicals, minerals, and nutrients can be carried throughout our bodies and into the smallest blood vessels. Water is also chemically neutral; without affecting the makeup of its substances, water enables food, medicines, and minerals to be absorbed and used by the body. Water has a unique surface tension: Therefore, in plants, water can flow upward against gravity, bringing life-giving water and nutrients to the top of even the tallest trees. Water freezes from the top down and floats, so fish can live in the winter. 97% of the Earth's water is in the oceans. But on our Earth, there is a system designed that removes salt from the water and then distributes that water throughout the globe. Evaporation takes the ocean waters, leaving the salt, and forms clouds that are easily moved by the wind to disperse water over the land for vegetation, animals, and people. It is a system of purification and supply that sustains life on this planet, a system of recycled and reused water. The chances that this universal life-giver, water, developed all these characteristics randomly rather than by design is less logical than saying God created water in this manner for life to be sustained.

The Moral Argument - In Nazi Germany, it was both legal and "ethical" to hurt or even kill a Jew, based on that society's system of "morals." If there is no being higher than all other human beings dictating what is considered moral and ethical, then human beings can indeed disagree about what is considered moral, so that (in certain societies) the killing of innocents will be deemed correct and the right thing to do. Only if a God exists who establishes a morality for all humankind, greater than any one country's or any one society's laws, can there be universal moral standards. In effect, the Nuremberg trials of 1946 established this concept of a greater morality that must be observed by all human beings (and that must be based on the idea of a deity) when it established that German officers and judges should not have obeyed the laws of Nazi Germany and that they were morally wrong and could be held accountable for doing so.

The Beauty Argument - If all existence is truly an accident, then anything that we call beautiful (like a sunset, a butterfly, a flower, etc.) is only due to a random combination of colors, shapes, and forms. It is not "meant" to be truly beautiful, as it occurred randomly. Thus, all beauty in the world is not actual beauty, but a random coincidence of nature. It is far easier to believe that the beauty that people enjoy daily in nature was intended to be beautiful and intended to be enjoyed by man.

The Meaning of Life Argument - If God does not exist and the world just developed randomly, then there is no specific purpose to my life, your life, or any human being's life. No more or less than any flower, each human being is born and then dies, without any goal, objective, or rationale for that existence. Any purpose we give to our lives is not real without a God since there is no intention and purpose in the universe. It is very difficult to live 70 or a 100 years on earth and believe that there is no specific purpose to one's existence. Only if one believes in a God who put each person in the world to achieve a specific objective, can life have true meaning.

The Argument of Jewish Eternity - King Fredrick the Great once asked his Lutheran pastor to provide him with concrete proof of God's existence in just two words. The pastor answered, "The Jews." The continued existence of the Jewish people defies logic. With the destruction of the central focus of their religion (the Temple), banned from their land (the Land of Israel), and as a hated minority in almost every country they lived in, which resulted in their expulsion from more than eighty countries, the Jewish people should have disappeared from history, certainly faster than the Greeks, Romans and every other culture that dominated the world at one point or another. Yet the Jewish people and their culture survive intact today, while these other great civilizations have disappeared. The survival of the Jews points to God's invisible Hand in history. The illogic of Jewish existence points to Divine guidance and a covenant that would not let the Jews, as a people, disappear.

The Seven-Day Week - Almost every aspect of time measurement is connected to an astronomical phenomenon: The twenty-four-hour day measures the time it takes for the earth to rotate exactly one time on its axis vis-a-vis the sun. A month is approximately the time it takes for the moon to circle and revolve around the earth. A year measures the time that the earth revolves around the sun. Only one measurement does not correspond to any astronomical event – the week. The 29 ½ day month could have been divided many ways (three ten-day periods, five six-day periods, etc.) Why, then, is it that in almost every society in the world, since man's existence and recorded history, has a seven-day week?

The only explanation and earliest mention of a seven-day week is the Creation of the World. Thus, the fact that from the thousands of societies that have existed throughout history, almost all cultures have observed the seven-day week. (There are very few exceptions which prove the rule, such as one small tribe in Nigeria with a four-day week, the Javanese in Indonesia with a five-day week, another tribe in West Africa that tried a six-day week, and one group in ancient Japan that experimented with a ten-day week.) This almost universal agreement goes back to an understanding that this unit of time signifies the time that it took God to create the universe and set nature into motion. The Jews celebrate this fact every week with the observance of the Shabbat, but the very idea of a seven-day week demonstrates an acknowledgment of God's Creation. Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi brings up this argument (Kuzari, Section 1:57-60) to show that God must have created the world in seven days, and since all people at the beginning of recorded time knew about this, they adopted the seven-day week as their unit of measurement.

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all**

the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Humility: A Prerequisite for Receiving the Torah: Rabbi Nadav Nizri

In our portion, the Torah relates Matan Torah, the giving of the Torah; hence, I would like to discuss the unique quality of Har Sinai (or, more precisely, the quality our Sages attributed to Har Sinai): humility.

These are the words of the famous Midrash that quotes the Tanna (Mishnaic scholar) Bar Kappara:

"Bar Kappara explained as follows: What is the meaning of [the verse in Psalms] – 'Why look you askance, mountains of humps?' A Divine call sounded and said unto them – 'Why do you wish to challenge Sinai? You are all lacking and wanting in comparison to Sinai. As is written 'mountains of humps' [harim gavnunim]. A hunchback, giben, is considered a ba'al mum (one who has a blemish). Rav Ashi says – an arrogant person is also considered a ba'al mum."

It follows then that humility is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. A similar notion is expressed in the tractate of Derech Eretz (8:1):

"Why is the Torah likened to water? In much the same way the water does not flow from a low place to a high place, but flows from a high place to a low place, so too, the Torah can be found among those who have a lowly spirit."

Notwithstanding this demand for humility and "a lowly spirit", we find, quite surprisingly, that in some instances, our Sages made statements which don't seem to be in keeping with the words of the Mishna. For example, when Rav Nachman bar Yaakov – an Amora (Talmudic scholar) of the second generation, who also headed the yeshiva in Nehardea (city in Babylon) – was told that another Amora had torn up the former's shtar (lender's deed), he responded thus: "It's as though a child has torn up my deed, because when it comes to monetary laws – all else are mere children in comparison to me." Or another example relating to the words of Shimon ben Azzai (tractate of Bechorot 58:1): "Ben Azzai says: In comparison to me, all the Torah scholars are inconsequential ["as a garlic peel"] except for this bald man (Rabi Akiva)."

One might think that the above examples are nothing more than slips-of-the-tongue on the part of the Tanna or the Amora. However, from the way our Sages referred to these particular persons, it is quite evident that both were looked upon as exemplary and prominent figures in their time. Of Ben Azzai we are told (tractate Berachot 57:2): "One who sees Ben Azzai in his dream should anticipate piety."

As to Rav Nachman, we are told in Ta'anit (5:2) that when he hosted the Amora from Eretz Yisrael, Rabi Yitzhak, the latter blessed Rav Nachman and likened him to a tree that has sent deep routes into an underground water source ["Ilan bemah avarecheka?"]. The words of this blessing are well-known: "As to you – with what shall I bless you? With Torah? You have Torah. With wealth? You have wealth. With children? You have children. But may it be His will that your descendants be just like you."

These descriptions leave no room for doubt: both Rav Nachman and Ben Azzai were considered to be role models. Hence, the question must be asked: If humility is a precondition for Torah – which is the very reason the Torah was given specifically on Mt. Sinai, the lowliest of all mountains, symbolizing humility, as noted by our Sages – how is it then that some of our greatest Torah scholars did not possess this very quality? (There are numerous examples attesting to this throughout the Talmud.)

It is here that I wish to propose an entirely different take on humility. In what might seem like a stark contrast to the Mishna we saw in the tractate of Derech Eretz, which stated that the prerequisite for acquiring Torah is "a lowly spirit" (the same notion is mentioned in the tractate of Avot, Chapter 5, Mishna 19), I would like to suggest that humility denotes understanding our strengths: no less (as in lowliness of spirit) and no more (i.e., having pride, which is considered to be a blemish, as explained above).

At the end of the tractate of Sotah, both the Mishna and the Talmud describe a process called 'the decline of the generations', which was set into motion by the destruction of the Temple, and continued after the death of the Tana'im, the great Mishnaic scholars. The last Mishnaic portions in this tractate give an account of both physical and spiritual decline. One particular kind of deterioration that is mentioned there relates to the qualities of humility and fear of sin: "When Rabi died (Rabi Yehuda HaNassi, compiler of the Mishna), the qualities of humility and fear of God disappeared." The Talmud expands on the Mishna and says: "Rav Yosef remarked to the one who was learning these mishnayot: 'Don't say [there is no more] humility, because I exist, and I am humble. Rav Nachman said to the one who was learning the mishnayot: 'Do not say [there is no] fear of sin because I exist and I am fearful of sin.'"

It is evident from this discussion that some Amoraim attested to their being humble or fearful of sin. Ostensibly, this is a paradox: if humility is a good trait, then one who attests to his own humility is filled with pride and cannot be humble! However, in keeping with what I said earlier – our Sages wished to stress the point that we should steer clear of false humility. Lowliness of spirit does not mean depicting yourself falsely. Humility means knowing your own worth.

This definition for humility, a precondition for receiving the Torah, which involves neither self-deprecation nor self-glorification, reminds me of a saying by a Japanese Zen master, Eihei Dōgen Zenji (AKA Dōgen): "If you cannot find the truth right where you are, where else do you expect to find it?" Dōgen is, in fact, telling us that in order to attain an illumination or understanding (in our case this would be receiving the Torah), we don't have to try and find ourselves anywhere but in the here and now.

In the sixth chapter of the tractate of Avot, the Mishna enumerates 48 ways through which Torah can be acquired. The seventh is humility. The twenty sixth is one who knows his worth.

May we all merit to attain humility which has neither arrogance nor any self-degradation. Rather – such humility that makes us worthy of Kabbalat Torah, in that it acknowledges our worth.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

The Thrill of a Lifetime*

Our sidra this morning tells us of the reunion of Moses with his father-in-law, Jethro, and with Moses' wife Tzipporah and his children who had remained behind in Midian while Moses was experiencing the adventure of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. After Moses tells Jethro of all that had happened to the Jewish people, we read, "vayiḥad Yitro," "Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel" (Exodus 18:9). Now, the word "vayiḥad" means more than "rejoice." I would translate it "and Jethro was thrilled." Both words, "vayiḥad" and "thrilled" mean "joy to the point where you feel your skin being pierced with sharp pleasure." The Hebrew "vayiḥad" comes from the word "ḥad," to feel a sharp sensation, and the word "thrill" comes from the Middle English "thrillen," which also means to be pierced or "drilled" with joy. So Jethro experienced great, almost ecstatic joy.

Why was he so happy? What was so thrilling about his experience? A reading of Rashi leaves us with the feeling that Jethro's joy was not unqualified. A non-Jew himself, he could not gloat over Pharaoh's downfall. Why, then, "vayiḥad"? I believe that we may find the answer to this question by a psychological analysis which yields morally instructive results. In order to appreciate it, we must pick up, as it were, stray hints that the Torah leaves for us in order to build from them a perspective on the attitudes and lives of the protagonists in this great story.

In the beginning, Moses takes his family from Midian to Egypt, a trip that Jethro does not find to his liking (see Abarbanel on Exodus

4:18). Later, Moses sends his wife Tzipporah and his two children back to Midian to stay with his father-in-law Jethro, while he, Moses, continues with his work. We who read the Bible know the real reason for their separation. Moses was now involved in perhaps the greatest single enterprise in all of history. He was the father of all prophets of all the ages and, as such, experienced constant and uninterrupted gilui Shekhina, divine revelation. In order to be at all times prepared for the revelation of God, he could not live in the normal manner of most human beings. His mind and heart and soul had to be free from all private entanglements. He was the public figure par excellence, and therefore, in order to do justice both to his mission and to his wife and children, he was forced to send them back to his father-in-law Jethro for the duration of this great historical operation of the Exodus from Egypt.

But Jethro did not know this. One must put oneself in Jethro's position and imagine how he felt. Here was this young man, Moses, who had come fleeing from the Egyptian police and had found a home with Jethro, the high priest of Midian. Jethro gave the young fugitive a home, gave him one of his daughters for a wife, put him into business tending his sheep. And then young Moses goes back to Egypt, for he has an itching ambition to succeed. And now that he has succeeded, he seems to have shirked all his familial duties, and abandoned his obligations. How bitter must have been the heart of old Jethro. Thus does our sidra open with "vayishma Yitro": "Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt." Moses has reached the climax of his ambition, yet his family has not heard a word from him. He has apparently forgotten than he has left a wife and two little children behind. And Jethro thinks to himself: This Moses has probably developed the psychology of a conqueror. He probably thinks he has outgrown me, my daughter, and his children. Now that he has beaten Pharaoh, he has no doubt adopted the attitude of Pharaoh, who was able to say with such bloated arrogance (Exodus Rabba, Va'era 8:1), "li Yeori ve'ani asitani," the Nile is mine and I am a self-made man – no one can tell me to do anything. Perhaps Jethro attributed to Moses the kind of arrogance that comes naturally to conquerors that we know existed later in the Roman Empire, when the Romans' most solemn celebration was the festival of Triumph, with its manic excitement, its bloodthirstiness, its corruption.

No wonder the Torah tells us, just before the reunion, that when Jethro brought along Tzipporah and the two children, that the children's names were Eliezer and Gershom. The Torah explains why Moses gave them these names (Exodus 18:3-4). The older one was called Gershom, "ki ger hayiti be'eretz nokhriya," "I was a stranger in a foreign land." The younger one he called Eliezer because "Elohei avi be'ezri," "the God of my father helped me." Why this information at this late date? It is an insight into Jethro's feelings, a clue to his innermost thoughts. Jethro remembers that Moses was once a humble, human personality, who tasted the bitterness of loneliness, of being an unknown and unwanted alien. He once knew that he has not only a God, but a father. Now, the same individual, Jethro thinks to himself, is sitting on top of the world – no longer remembering that he himself was a "Gershom," an alien, and probably forgetting both father and father-in-law.

And so, the old man Jethro, broken in spirit and heavy in heart, takes his hat in hand and proceeds to the confrontation with proud, ungrateful, successful Moses. Jethro is ready to accept humiliation, to crawl before his triumphant and haughty son-in-law and plead with him to take back his wife and children. This is the pathetic message that Jethro send to Moses, "ani ĥotenkha Yitro ba elekha, ve'ishtekha ushenei vanekha imah," "Moses, I, your old father-in-law Jethro, am coming back to you, and I am bringing along your wife and your two young children." Remember us, Moses? Remember the voices from your past? We are here again, pleading with Your Excellency to take us back.

But then – a remarkable thing happens. When Moses receives the message, he surprisingly does not act like a triumphant, supercilious, egomaniac conqueror. Rather, he runs towards Jethro, bows low before him, kisses him, greets him, and brings him to his own tent. And there, he tells him the story of all that had happened since they last met, "And Moses related to his father-in-law all that God had done to Pharaoh and to Egypt" (Exodus 18:8). How shocked Jethro must have been – Moses does not gloat over what he had done to Pharaoh as a result of his superior mind and military skill and shrewdness and wisdom. He tells him, rather, what God had done to Pharaoh and Egypt, "al odot Yisrael," "for the sake of Israel!" Moses does not say, "God has done this because of me," but because of Israel.

What a jolt this must have given to Jethro's preconceptions. For when he came, it was because "vayishma Yitro," Jethro heard all that God had done "leMoshe uleYisrael," for Moses and Israel. The reports that had come to him were not only concerning Israel, but primarily concerning the great successes and triumphs of their leader Moses. And now that Moses himself tells the story – there is no mention of Moses' name! It is only "al odot Yisrael," "for the sake of Israel" (see Malbim ad. loc.).

And so Jethro realized how terribly wrong he was, how dreadfully mistaken – this man is not only not arrogant, but he is a genuine human being, a profound anav; not only is he not coldly sub-human, but he has such marvelous qualities, almost superhuman! This is a man who possesses greatness, warmth, a golden character. How lucky I am to be his father-in-law, he now thought. And Jethro was so overcome with emotion, so deliriously happy at discovering his mistake, that "vayihad Yitro," Jethro was thrilled – goose-pimples began to form in his flesh and a shiver ran down his spine, because he now found himself face to face with the greatest individual he has ever met in all his life. This is a thrill – the thrill of a lifetime. It is the high point of Jethro's life – the discovery that there was such superb greatness in a man who was close to him and in whom he had never detected it to such an extent.

What a remarkable character this Moses was. He had a total lack of self-consciousness. He did not even act "modestly," telling Jethro "it wasn't really my doing." Rather, he simply "forgot" himself and the role he played. Only one possessed of this kind of character, this utter lack of self-consciousness, could by himself write out the words spoken by the Lord, "veha'ish Moshe anav me'od," "The man Moses was very meek" (Numbers 12:3), and not even be aware of the fact that these words are describing him. For anivut, meekness, the quality of Moses, is much greater and more difficult to achieve than shiflut, lowliness or humility. The shafel may be virtuous in that he is always painfully aware of his inadequacies and limitations – but he is still concerned with himself, whether positively or negatively. Whereas the anav, the man who is unselfconscious, is not even aware of a self that is inferior. His ego has been subdued to the point of forgetfulness. What a thrilling experience to meet an individual of this kind!

If we now turn back to the sidra we have a new understanding of the first words Jethro uttered after his thrilling experience. Jethro said, "Blessed is the Lord who has saved you from the hand of Pharaoh and from the hand of Egypt, and who has saved the people from under the hand of Egypt." Why the redundancy? There are two things Jethro thanks God for. The last half of this verse refers to the political and military deliverance of the people of Israel, their physical redemption – "who has saved the people from the hand of Egypt." But the first half refers to a yet greater miracle – "Blessed is the Lord who has saved you from the hand of Pharaoh and from the hand of Egypt," who has delivered the people of Israel from the plague of leaders like Pharaoh, from the tragedy and misfortune of being led by people who are obsessed with their own importance, who become intoxicated with their own egos and their own power, and who rapidly degenerate in character and personality to the point where they become inconsiderate, ungrateful, and insensitive megalomaniacs. The Jews were saved not only from the Egyptians – they were also spared the excruciating burden of a Pharaoh-type leader.

This, then, is the thrill of a lifetime. Not everyone, of course, can attain such sustained heights of character as Moses did. Assuredly not. But the fact remains that some of it is not only desirable but indispensable for civilized living. We cannot be human unless we experience moments of self-forgetfulness, of utter selflessness and altruism. When we meet such character in other people, we too experience the "vayiĥad," the thrill. Therefore, we must try to develop such traits in ourselves. If a man is always out for himself, he becomes coarse to the point of inner vulgarity. We must make special effort to develop, at least on occasion, the quality of Moses' lack of self-consciousness.

How is that done? How can such heights be attained, even temporarily? The best way to forget yourself is to keep someone else in mind. That means to do things for others in a completely selfless manner. In Hebrew we call this gemilat ĥasadim, the doing of favors. I do not mean merely the objective act of ĥesed, of generosity. Rather, I refer to gemilat ĥesed, the subjective act of losing yourself in an act of helpfulness for someone else. This does not mean that is wrong to give charity for personal popularity and wide acclaim – if not for these factors, Jewish philanthropy in America would probably collapse. But there ought to be special moments when we ignore our egos and immerse ourselves only in the act of ĥesed. Perhaps this is the real meaning of gemilat ĥesed – the word gemilat comes from the same root as the word "vayigamel," "and he was weaned." The selfless act of kindness is one that is weaned from ubiquitous egotism, it is a mature act of ĥesed, the kind given wholeheartedly, without expectation or desire for thanks or a favor in return.

Try that sometime. Secretly make somebody happy – without intruding with your own personality. Perhaps do it anonymously. Make it possible for someone to experience that change of view that Jethro did, growing from a feeling of frustration, bitterness, and disappointment – having lost faith in his fellow men – and moving that person to the point where he will be thrilled by your helpfulness without egotism. No greater joy exists than that.

This, then, was the thrill of Jethro – to learn that it is possible for a man to have every excuse for being arrogant, and yet to find that he is incredibly selfless and compassionate.

With man as with God, "kol makom she'ata motzei anvetanuto ata motzei gedulato," "wherever you find his meekness, you find his greatness" (Pesikta Zutrata, Devarim, Eikev 15a). The greatness of man consists in transcending his own petty involvements with his self. This is true greatness – for it is a paradox, yet true: the more you think of yourself, the less there is to think of. The more you forget yourself, the more you will find the real and enduring value of yourself – for the way to find yourself is first to lose yourself in something worthy. And it is by losing yourself in a noble mission – in loyalty to Israel, in prayer to God, in extended mature kindness to your fellow human beings – that each of us can experience the thrill of a lifetime.

**Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Exodus, co-published by OU Press and Maggid Books*

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

Torah Unfettered

The Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei haTorah, perek 8) designates the revelation at Sinai as the ultimate perception of G-d and the absolute cornerstone of our faith. It is obvious that this revelation was a result of it being the occasion for the giving of the Torah, as the truth of Torah rests on this very event.

However, if this is indeed the momentous event in Klal Yisroel's history, we are puzzled greatly. Why has the place where this happened been totally lost to us, and there never was any point made in marking it at all [whereas the crossing into Eretz Yisroel was marked by erecting stones]? Why is this place not at all sacred today, while the place of the akeidah is the most sacred of all places? Shouldn't the place where Torah was given remain eternally sacred, as the Torah itself is?

Furthermore, the exact date on the calendar of mattan Torah is also unclear; it could be the sixth or seventh of Sivan. Pesach is as exact as can be, while Shavous is a bit murky!? Not only is the date of the giving of the Torah unclear, but the Torah never even mentioned it as the reason for celebrating Shavous! We have to put the pieces together ourselves and connect it.

There is another curious distinction, and that is that the Jewish nation has three "royalties": Monarchy, Priesthood, and Torah. The first two are fixed as regards to the tribe that it is attributed to, in addition to the fact that succession of the child of a monarch or kohein gadol is seen as optimal [and obviously, a kohein's son is a kohein]. Regarding Torah, neither of the two is true; no tribe is meant to have a monopoly on it, nor is progeny succession automatic (see Nedarim 81a.)

We see a perplexing pattern, where Torah, our most sacred possession seems to have the smallest "footprint".

It would therefore appear that our very reasoning is wrong. It is not despite, but because Torah is our ultimate spiritual gift, that it does not have a real physical imprint. The world of mitzvos has a physical context, and therefore it is somewhat limited. It has a time, a place, or an object that serves as its context. Torah, because it is completely spiritual, does not tie itself to any particular time, place or person. It happened to have been given on a particular spot, but that spot does not become its "location". So too regarding the time when it was given, and no person ties Torah down to his family.

This concept can perhaps be broadened to offer some perspective on the turmoil of the last two years. We seem to deal well with ruchniyas when there is a fixed schedule, everything is on track, and there are no surprises. Baruch Hashem we can feel some pride in how well things functioned all these years. But our world turning topsy turvy has greatly weakened our ruchniyas. Shuls are struggling to regain mispallim, shiurim their students, and serious issues of bein adam lachaveiro plague us. This has been a test for us in seeing how strongly our "ruchniyas" world is tied to its physical mooring. If our performance demands a routine to keep it going, then it is tied a lot more to the physical than we are comfortable admitting.

Let us remember, Torah was given in a desert, a place with no fixed coordinates. The dvar Hashem exists in its own right and is not dependent on time, place or person.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

AHHHHHHHHHH!

Now Moshe's father-in-law, Yisro, the chieftain of Midian, heard all that G-d had done for Moshe and for Israel, His people that HASHEM had taken Israel out of Egypt. (Shemos 18:1)

What put Yisro on the map? How did he merit to come join his son in law Moshe and the Jewish Nation in the desert? What special skill did he possess? The answer may not be so complex. The verse mentions one thing.

What is the most important word in the Torah? True, all words are important! However, there is one word that is so important that it is the cure for many ills, personal and societal. If it's hard to conjure up the answer it's probably because the meaning of that word has become obscured.

A Jew was riding on a train traversing the Siberian tundra. Seated next to him was a soldier of the Czar quietly boiling and seething with deep hatred toward the Jew. In one moment, he let loose his anger to the Jew who, unaware of the danger, was staring into one of his holy books. He barked, "What makes you people so smart?" The Jew was startled. He realized his life was at risk and he had better give the correct answer. Without hesitation, with help from heaven, he responded with perfect calm, one word, "Herring!" (That little bony fish) The soldier sternly inquired, "Do you have any?" The Jew acknowledged that he had a few pieces remaining which the soldier demanded with authority should be handed over to him.

Taking a big risk, the Jew refused and insisted he be compensated 20 Rubles for the now desirable herring. The soldier hurriedly threw the money at him and took hold of the prize. In one gulp, like a hungry bear, he swallowed the whole lot of them. After wiping his mouth brutishly, he turned to the Jew, who had calmly returned to his books, and protested, "20 Rubles for those few pieces of fish?! Where we are going to in Moscow, I can get five times that amount for the same price!" At that point the Jew turned to him with a full face and declared, "You see, it's starting to work already!"

Perhaps the secret is in something like the herring- the hearing. What makes you people so smart? The hearing! Hear O' Israel…

That statement is the clearest expression of the mission of the Jewish People, singularly and collectively! Not only is it the declaration at each doorpost of the Jewish home or the continuous cry of loyal Jewish tongues twice daily for thousands of years. It's the cry of the universe! LISTEN!

Isn't it what husbands are telling their wives and wives to their husbands often with desperation?! It's what parents are telling children and what children are telling parents. SHEMMAA! Listen! It's what the teacher and student hope each from one another. It's what THE ALMIGHTY shouts to His people, "SHEMA Yisrael" -Listen Israel… It's also what we request in prayer daily, "Shema koleinu- HASHEM ELOCHEINU…Hear our voices HASHEM our G-d!

Here's a concept I've shared with my children at bedtime for years and recently I saw that the Vilna Gaon (Mishlei 4:1) defines the word SHEMA in the same three ways. Perhaps my approach is more playful but as I recently discovered, not less true. The word "SHEMA" with its three letters onomatopoetically sounds out three ideas that together may help us get our arms around that giant of a word- "SHEMA" SHHH- Listen! Quiet down for a moment! Remove all external distractions. Focus undisturbed! (Not so easy!) MMMM- Understand! Hear well what's being said. Let the message be absorbed gently and thoughtfully into your system. Finally- AHHHH- Accept! Stop resisting what you know to be true in your heart of hearts! Surrender to an idea that is bigger than you! Be ready to act upon and live up to it. If only the word- "SHEMA" would be heard, understood, and accepted properly and exercised practically. What a different world and what a different life it would be and who knows how wise we would be.

I said this at a Sephardic Shabbaton and a Yemenite fellow told me afterward, "Rabbi you are wrong!" He explained that the Yemenites pronounce a guttural letter AYIN that makes it sound like you just inhaled a ping pong ball. "It's not AHHHH! It's AHGGGG!"

I realized how right he is. Harder than hearing and understanding is the accepting. It starts out AHGGGG and then eventually we accept, embrace, and even revel in what we understand and then it's AHHHHHHHH!

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Servant Leadership

One of the landmark books in the field of leadership was written in 1977, entitled Servant Leadership. In this book, Robert Greenleaf writes how the essence of leadership is service.

There's a big difference between a leader who wants to lead and then decides to serve, as opposed to a person who wants to serve and, out of a spirit of service, becomes a leader. This is the essence of leadership, a desire to serve and make a difference in the lives of others.

One of the things which attracted me to the writings of Rav Kook, the first chief rabbi of pre-state Israel, often signed his letters "Eved LeAm Kadosh al Admat Kodesh" – a servant of the holy people in the holy land. He saw himself as a servant, and perhaps more than anyone in the modern era taught about the principle of the Klal, the collective – that the purpose of the individual is to serve the Klal and the greater good.

The truth is that thousands of years before this is exactly what we see is the hallmark of the greatest servant leader of all – Moshe Rabbeinu.

We see two examples of it in this week's parasha. Moshe goes out to give honor to his heathen father-in-law, and welcomes him to Mount Sinai. We notice it is Aharon and the elders of the people who sit at this festive meal to welcome him. Where was Moshe? Rashi famously brings the Midrash that he was there serving them. The great Moshe Rabbeinu was serving his heathen father-in-law, understanding not just the meaning of hospitality but what it meant to be a leader.

Straight afterwards, we see when the people were in need of judgment, Moshe was sitting from early morning until late evening, non-stop judging the people until he gets the advice from his father-in-law. We see the drive of Moshe Rabbeinu is to serve the needs of the people.

This is the great hallmark of leadership. The essence of knowing that we exist to serve the Klal, the collective. And woe betide the generation where the Klal exists to serve them, when individual leaders use others as a way of self-aggrandizement and self-leveraging, as opposed to ensuring they only exist to serve the Klal.

May we all be, every one of us, be servant leaders. See the needs of others. Exist for the needs of others. Ensure that we make a difference to all the communal needs before us and the Klal, and thereby make the world a better place.

BS"D

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> date: Feb 9, 2023, 7:12 PM subject: Rav Frand - Torah is Acquired Through Effort, Not Brain Power

Parshas Yisro **Torah is Acquired Through Effort, Not Brain Power**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1280 The Shul Kiddish Shabbos Morning: Two Interesting Shailos. Good Shabbos! There is an interesting Ohr HaChaim haKadosh in Parshas Yisro. Parshas Yisro contains the narration of the giving of the Aseres Hadibros (Ten Commandments) on Har Sinai, which is the most fundamental event in the history of the Jewish people, even more fundamental than Yetzias Mitzrayim (the exodus from Egypt). And yet, the first part of the parsha (and the source of the its name) is about Yisro and the method he proposes to Moshe Rabbeinu for streamlining the process by which the people resolved disputes and received answers to their questions. The Ohr HaChaim asks: Why does the setting up the judicial system suggested by Yisro precede Kabalas HaTorah?

The Ohr HaChaim answers that the Ribono shel Olam wanted to relay a message to that generation and every subsequent generation. Hashem is informing us that there are plenty of smart people in the non-Jewish world and it behooves us to take advantage of their wisdom and expertise.

We should not think that Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people because they were so smart. We might have chauvinistically claimed that others are not worthy of receiving and dealing with the Divine Wisdom contained in the Torah. The Ohr HaChaim points out that there are many very smart—even brilliant—non-Jews in the world.

The last time I checked, Bill Gates is not Jewish. Warren Buffet is not Jewish either. You can go through history and find brilliant non-Jews in every generation. Michelangelo was not Jewish. Neither was Aristotle. There are plenty of great people in the world who are not Jewish. Some are very, very smart.

The Ohr HaChaim says that it is instructive that a story of a non-Jew who takes stock of the situation, and proclaims, "You are doing this all wrong!" precedes Kabbalas Hatorah (the Revelation at Sinai). This demonstrates that we were not chosen for our brains. The Ribono shel Olam chose us to be His people as part of a Divine Kindness, and because of His love for our patriarchs. We were chosen for our yichus (lineage). We are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov whom the Ribono shel Olam loved.

There is another lesson here, beside the fact that brain power was not the reason why we merited Torah:

There is a parallel parsha to Parshas Yisro, and that is Parshas Devorim. At the beginning of Sefer Devorim, the Torah recounts this whole story. Moshe complains that he is overburdened with his duties of leadership: "How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?" (Devorim 1:12). This is then followed by the solution to his challenge: "Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and well known to your tribes and I shall appoint them as your heads." (Devorim 1:13). To which the people respond positively: "The thing that you have proposed to do is good" (Devorim 1:14).

Rashi there (Pasuk 14) sheds a somewhat negative light on the people's acceptance of the plan: The people's response should not have been "Great idea!" Their response should have been "Moshe Rabbeinu, we want you!" "We are willing to wait in line for four hours, if necessary, because we want to learn Torah from you!" Moshe was suspicious, Rashi adds, that perhaps the people were so enthused about the proposal because they thought they would be able to bribe or otherwise gain the favor of these "district judges" who they felt would perhaps not be as incorruptible as Moshe Rabbeinu.

So, perhaps this parsha, which seems so positive in Parshas Yisro (everyone was happy; great idea!), was not such a slam-dunk best policy solution. Even if at the end of the day, Moshe would have had to convince the people "No. This is a good idea." – at least their initial response should have been "We do not like the idea because, Moshe Rabbeinu—we want you!"

I saw a very interesting insight into this comment of Rashi in the sefer Yad HaTorah. The reason that Rashi provides why they should have said that they prefer to learn Torah from Moshe was "Because you pained yourself for this" (nitzta'arta aleha). You were on that mountain for forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. Therefore, your Torah is superior because you suffered over it. It was not brain power that made Moshe's Torah superior to that of his students. It was his shvitzing over it.

It was not brain power in Parshas Yisro which caused Hashem to choose us and it was not brain power in Rashi in Parshas Devorim which should have caused them to prefer Moshe's Torah over that of his disciples.

This is a key lesson. The way a person acquires Torah is not through brain power. It is not necessarily acquired by the smartest kid in the class. It is be acquired by the person who shvitzes, who works the hardest.

The Ponnevezer Rav said a fantastic thing. Why were there people in Europe who, compared to today (with rare exceptions), were such great gedolim? We do not have someone like Rav Chaim Ozer. We do not have a Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk or a Rav Chaim Soleveitchik of Brisk. This is not to knock anyone, but is this because they were so much smarter in pre-war Europe? The Ponnevezer Rav answered that the reason they were so much bigger was because they shvitzed for it. They were moser nefesh for it.

Today, we sit in air-conditioned Batei Midrash. We have everything at our fingertips. It is beautiful. I am not belittling it. The amount of Torah today exceeds what existed in Europe. Europe was not utopia. But the gedolim emerged as a result of their shvitzing.

Rav Shach—before he arrived to Eretz Yisroel—owned one shirt. He washed the shirt on Erev Shabbos so he would have something clean to wear for Shabbos. He slept on a bench in the Beis Medrash. There were days when he literally starved for lack of food. That does not exist today. The key to Torah acquisition is not brain power, but rather the pain and effort that a person endures in the acquisition of Torah.

Moshe Lost His Job to Emphasize That the Mesorah is Exact

The pasuk says, "…thus say to the House of Yaakov and tell the Children of Israel." (Shemos 19:3) Rashi comments "in this language and in this sequence." Hashem tells Moshe to give over His message precisely as he is being told it. Similarly, two pesukim later, Rashi comments on the

expression "…These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel" (Shemos 19:5): "Neither more nor less."

We would think that there would be no need to tell Moshe Rabbeinu. "Say it this way – neither more nor less, this is exactly how you need to say it!" Is it not obvious that Moshe Rabbeinu should and will transmit Hashem's 'script' to Bnei Yisrael exactly as Hashem tells him? What is Rashi saying here?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky addresses this issue in his sefer. The principle he sets forth is basically an idea found in the Droshas haRan. There is a very famous teaching of Rav Nissim ben Reuven of Girona (1320-1380). Why is it that Moshe Rabbeinu, the leader of Klal Yisrael, had a speech impediment? We would think that the person who took the Jews out of Mitzrayim, gave them the Torah, and led them for forty years in the wilderness should be articulate. At least we would assume he should be a good speaker!

The Droshas haRan writes that Hashem wanted Moshe to have a speech impediment because He wanted that the people should accept him and listen to him, not because of his 'golden tongue' or because of his oratorical skills. Therefore, he was the leader of the people, not because of his power of speech but because he was Moshe Rabbeinu – the messenger of Hashem.

When the Ribono shel Olam told Moshe "I want you to give Torah to Klal Yisrael," He emphasized "I do not want a 'sales job' over here." There are people who are born salesmen. Someone walks into a car dealership wanting a stripped-down Corolla and walks out with a Lexus that has every single feature. Why? Because a slick salesman sold him a bill of goods. It is the same when you go buy a refrigerator. You want a basic model refrigerator. You wind up buying a model with an ice-maker that takes your blood pressure and does everything for you! Slick salesmen!

The Ribono shel Olam is emphasizing to Moshe: I do not want any sales jobs over here. I want them to accept the Torah as it is. "This is it." Therefore, "nothing more and nothing less."

Rav Yaakov uses this idea to answer a question that troubles all the meforshim. Moshe Rabbeinu made one slip-up in his life. He hit the rock rather than speaking to it (according to Rashi's interpretation of the aveira (sin) of Mei Merivah). Essentially, Moshe Rabbeinu was fired for that! Because of that one slip-up, Moshe was unable to be the one to continue to lead Bnei Yisroel into Eretz Yisroel! Rav Yaakov explains why. It was vital that the Torah be transmitted exactly as given by Hashem. Once there is any addition or subtraction or modification to the word of Hashem, people can start speculating – "well, maybe other parts of it are not from Hashem either! Maybe this is Moshe's own editorial comment." To bring home this crucial idea that precisely the entire Torah is from Hashem, the one time that Moshe did do something not EXACTLY as commanded, he lost his job.

This Torah is the Word of G-d. It is not the word of Moshe Rabbeinu and not the word of anyone else. It is the Dvar Hashem.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Yisro is provided below: # 042 Kiddush: To Sit or Not to Sit # 085 Christianity in Halacha # 133 Honoring In-Laws # 180 The Mitzvah of Kiddush for Men and Women # 226 The Fearless Judge: A Difficult Task # 270 Parental Wishes vs. Staying in Israel # 316 The Reading of the "Aseres Hadibros" # 360 Dolls and Statues: Is There An Avodah Zarah Problem? # 404 Making a Bracha on a Makom Neis # 448 Lo Sachmod # 492 Eating Before Kiddush # 536 Newspapers on Shabbos # 580 Women and Havdalah # 624 Resting Your Animal on the Shabbos # 668 Kiddush B'mkom Seudah # 712 The Kiddush Club # 756 The Kosel Video Camera # 800 Avoda Zara and The Jewish Jeweler # 844 Yisro and Birchas Hagomel # 888 What Should It Be – Hello or Shalom? # 932 Saying The Shem Hashem While Learning – Yes or No? # 975 Kiddush on Wine: Absolutely Necessary? #1019 Unnecessary Brachos #1063 Ma'aris Ayin: The Power Lunch In A Treife Restaurant #1106 Must You Treat Your Father-in-Law Like Your Father? #1149 Kiddush Shabbos Day – On What? What Do You Say? #1192 I Keep 72 Minutes; You Keep 45 – Can You Do Melacha for Me? #1236 "I Want Your House and I'll Make You an Offer You Can't Refuse": Muttar or Assur? #1280 The Shul Kiddish Shabbos Monring: Two Interesting Shailos #1281 Kiddush Shabbos Day – Must Everyone Drink the Wine? #1324 Saying Kaddish: All Aveilim Together or Each One Individually on a Rotating Basis? #1368 Davening For Personal Needs on Shabbos? #1412 Must One Keep Their Father's Minhagim or What Bracha Do You Make on Potatoes #1456 I Haven't Accepted Shabbos Yet, You Have. Can I Make Kiddush For You? #1500 The Case of the Son-in-Law Who Wants More Support Money From His Father-in-Law. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information.

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from: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com>
date: Feb 9, 2023, 11:35 PM
subject: Rabbi Reisman's Chumash Shiur

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman – Parshas Yisro 5783

1 – Topic – A Thought from Rav Moshe in the Kol Rom

As we prepare for Shabbos Parshas Yisro. Let me share with you a fundamental question and then a beautiful answer. The question is back in Parshas Shemos Moshe Rabbeinu asked the Ribbono Shel Olam in what Zechus are the Jews going to go out of Mitzrayim. The Ribbono Shel Olam said in 3:12 (תַּעַבְדוּן אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים, עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה). He said that in a few weeks in Parshas Yisro you are going to be standing on Har Sinai. (בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת-הָעָם, מִמִּצְרַיִם, תַּעַבְדוּן אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים, עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה). Rashi says (וְשָׁאַלְתָּ מַה זְּכוּת יֵשׁ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיְּהֵא נִגְאָל, שֶׁיֵּצְאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם). You asked in what merit will the Jews go out of Mitzrayim? In the Zechus that they will stand by Har Sinai. Beautiful!

That seems to contradict the idea that we had in Parshas Bo that Klal Yisrael left in the Zechus of the Dam Milah and the Dam Pesach. As it says in Yechezkel 16:6 (וָאֹמַר לָךְ בְּדָמַיִךְ חֲיִי). They were Arumim from Mitzvos, they had no Mitzvos (as explained in Rashi in Parshas Bo 12:6). They went out in the Zechus of the Dam Pesach and Dam Milah (דַּם פֶּסַח וְדַם מִילָה). There seems to be a contradiction in Chazals as to in what merit Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim.

I would like to share with you a beautiful Yesod from Rav Moshe which is printed in the Kol Rom (Page Shin Zayin, Os Yud on 12:6) and it will answer the question. Rav Moshe there deals with the following. He says that in Mitzrayim the Egyptians had the sheep as their Avodah Zora. HKB"H told Klal Yisrael in 12:21 (מִשְׁכוּ, וּקְחוּ לָכֶם מִצֹּאנְכֶם, וְשַׁחֲטוּ אֶת-הַפָּסַח). (מִשְׁכוּ יְדֵיכֶם מֵאֱלִילֵיכֶם, וּקְחוּ לָכֶם צֹאן שֶׁל מִצְוָה). You take a sheep as a sacrifice. Separate yourself from this sheep, Avodah Zora of Mitzrayim.

Rav Moshe asks what kind of business is this, a sheep as an Avodah Zora? Jews are going to fall for such silliness, such Narishkeit? Halalu Avodah Zora, they had an Avodah Zora of the sheep? It is the most absurd thing that could be. In what way did they serve the sheep? We are told that the Mitzrim were not even shepherds, they didn't eat the sheep, they didn't Shecht the sheep, they didn't even pasture the sheep, they just let the sheep roam around the country. Like people say they do in other countries with cows Biz'man Hazeh. You think that there are Jews there, that there will be Jews who will fall for this Avodah Zora? It is such an absurdity that to think that Klal Yisrael would fall to that is absolutely senseless, and it is.

Rav Moshe has the unique understanding of the Avodah Zora of the T'leh (sheep) in Mitzrayim and why Klal Yisrael was attracted to it. Rav Moshe said there are two types of Taiva. There is a Taiva Gashmi, a desire from physical pleasure and there is a Taiva Ruchni, there is a desire to be an elevated person. It is innate in a human being to on the one hand have very physical pleasures, eating, drinking, touching. At the same time, there is a part of a person that G-d created with a holy soul and the soul wants to do things that are spiritual.

Klal Yisrael is commanded, that desire to be a good, spiritual, moral person. Devarim 28:9 (וְהָלַכְתָּ, בִּדְרָכָיו) has to be done in the way HKB"H says and it

has to follow the guidelines of the Torah. A Jew can't just say I want to do good things and decide on his own what he wants to do.

You might think that it is a wonderful thing to cook supper for someone. But if it is Shabbos and you cook supper for someone, the person is Chayuv Sekila. You have to follow the rules.

In Mitzrayim, the Avodah Zora of the sheep was this. The Egyptians like all human beings had a certain desire to be kind. They looked at the sheep, the sheep are a particularly defenseless and helpless creature. It doesn't have horns to fight back with, it could barely bite, it can barely move. It is a defenseless and helpless creature. The Frumkeit of Mitzrayim was do not disturb, let the sheep do what he wants. If he wants to cross the street, stop the traffic and let him cross the street. Don't have shepherds for that. Beraishis 46:34 (כִּי-תוֹעֲבַת מִצְרַיִם, כָּל-רֹעֵה צֹאן). The Mitzrim don't like shepherds, the sheep got to do what he wants, leave him alone.

HKB"H took Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe Rabbeinu was a (רֹעֵה צֹאן), he was a shepherd. He understood that the sheep are there for the benefit of human beings. HKB"H took Moshe Rabbeinu and He said go to Klal Yisrael and tell Klal Yisrael that they are going to go out of Mitzrayim. Moshe Rabbeinu said in what Zechus? HKB"H said do you know what Zechus? (תַּעַבְדוּן אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים, עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה). The Jewish people are going to separate themselves from the very ambiguous desire to do good which is when a person doesn't recognize the Torah from Shamayim, and he is going to put himself under the guidance of the Ribbono Shel Olam. Therefore, in Mitzrayim they were told (מִשְׁכוּ, וּקְחוּ לָכֶם). Separate yourself from this idea that the Egyptians have of doing good because something feels good, sounds good. No! Do what I tell you. Shecht a Korban, smear the blood on the Mashkof and the Mezuzos. Why? Because the Ribbono Shel Olam said so. That is the Zechus of (תַּעַבְדוּן אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים, עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה). A Zechus that a person does good according to the rules of the Torah. That is the (בְּדָמַיִךְ חְיִי בְּדָמַיִךְ חְיִי). The fact that Klal Yisrael is so devoted to the Ribbono Shel Olam, and they follow the way of serving Hashem (עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה), that is the idea of Klal Yisrael separating itself from the ambiguous desire to be good to the very channeled, focused idea of doing things that are right because the Ribbono Shel Olam tells us it is right.

Rav Moshe warns that even today there is a certain drive to do good which is dangerous. Sometimes it causes Sholom Bayis problems, if a person has ideas of what is right and wrong and he pushes things that have no source, they have no basis. Rav Moshe warns about it.

Rav Moshe mentions in the same piece in Kol Rom, that there are people who when they learn they want so much to be Gedolim that they start saying Chiddushei Torah before they finish the Masechta. They start pushing themselves to be Gedolai Yisrael but without the work that is needed, without the knowledge of what is to come. They might be trying to answer a question and it may be on the next page. Zagt Rav Moshe, Moshe Rabbeinu closed his eyes. By the Sneh he closed his eyes. He was afraid to look at the Ribbono Shel Olam. Nadav and Avihu looked at the Ribbono Shel Olam with open eyes. You might think that is better. No! The answer is you need a Shibud, you need to submit to Ratzon Hashem. That is the drive L'tov that has to be channeled right.

I will add on my own. Why is it only adolescents that we see that sometimes get this bug to do what is right. They push themselves, some of them overdo it. Many do it in an incredibly wonderful way. They are devoted to spending hours in learning. We see it in adolescents. Why don't we see it in retired people? Shouldn't people becoming retired suddenly become OCD about Kiyum Hatorah, shouldn't we see them obsessing about spending every minute right? Shouldn't we see them pushing to use their time properly? After all, their time is running out. There is a desire to do good. We have to push and make it happen. And so, that is a thought on this week's Parsha from Rav Moshe.

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from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> date: Feb 9, 2023, 7:11 PM
subject: **Tidbits for Parashas Yisro**
In memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

Reminders

During Kerias HaTorah of Parashas Yisro, the minhag of most Ashkenazi congregations is to stand when the Aseres HaDibros are read. Most Sephardic congregations are particular to not follow this practice.

This week is the fifth week of Shovavim. Next week, that of Parashas Mishpatim, is the final week of the Shovavim weeks.

Daf Yomi: Erev Shabbos is Nazir 18.

Daf Yerushalmi: Berachos 89. The siyum on Yerushalmi Masechta Berachos is this Wednesday, February 15th, Mazal Tov! Masechta Pe'ah (72 blatt) begins next.

Mishnah Yomis: Erev Shabbos is Eiruvin 4:6-7.

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to do the same!

Parsha in a Paragraph

YISRO: Yisro arrives at the Jews' encampment along with Moshe's family • Moshe greets him in distinguished fashion; Yisro praises Hashem • Yisro witnesses Moshe's schedule and suggests a system of judges • Moshe implements Yisro's system • Moshe escorts Yisro as he leaves • The Jews arrive at Har Sinai • Moshe ascends the mountain • Moshe prophetically tells Bnei Yisrael that they are the chosen nation and must actualize their potential • Bnei Yisrael respond with "Naaseh" • Hashem tells Moshe that He will reveal Himself to ensure the eternal faith of Bnei Yisrael • Bnei Yisrael prepare for the revelation for three days • Moshe sets boundaries around the mountain • Hashem's glory descends on Har Sinai in an awe-inspiring manner • Moshe warns Bnei Yisrael not to approach • The first two commandments are spoken by Hashem • The remaining commandments are said by Moshe • Aseres Hadibros - See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvos • The event elicits intense fear and trembling • Prohibition against making idols • Laws regarding construction and ascension of the altar

Haftarah: The Parashah discusses Kabbalas HaTorah, the awesome event at Har Sinai, which was an amazing spectacle of the glory of Hashem. The Navi Yeshaya relates the great heavenly spectacle that he saw in his nevuah. (Yeshaya 6:1 - 7:6)

Taryag Weekly Parashas Yisro: 72 Pesukim • 3 Obligations • 14 Prohibitions

1) Recognize and believe in Hashem's existence and His eternal omnipotence. 2) Do not believe in any other godly power. 3) Do not create or commission the formation of an idol. 4) Do not perform Temple services for another god. 5) Do not perform the services for another god. 6) Do not swear with Hashem's Name in vain. 7) Sanctify the Shabbos. 8) Do not perform melachah on Shabbos. 9) Honor your parents. 10) Do not commit murder. 11) Do not commit adultery. 12) Do not kidnap. 13) Do not testify falsely. 14) Do not attempt to acquire or covet another's possessions. 15) Do not create a statue or form of a human. 16) Do not construct an altar by carving stone. 17) Do not ascend the altar via stairs or with wide strides.

For the Shabbos Table

"לֹא תַחְמֹד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ {ס} לֹא־תַחְמֹד אֵשֶׁת רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וַאֲמָתוֹ וְשׁוֹרוֹ וַחֲמֹרוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ"

"You shall not covet your fellow's home; You shall not covet your fellow's wife, servant, maidservant, ox, donkey or anything that belongs to your fellow man" (Shemos 20:14)

In the prohibition of coveting another's possessions, the Torah first details various items and then concludes by prohibiting "anything that belongs to your fellow man." Why does the Torah first list these various items if the conclusion is that everything is prohibited?

Rav Yaakov Galinsky zt"l explains that it seems to be a difficult task for a human being to not desire something he likes. To address this, the Torah writes sage advice on how to curb jealousy. "V'chol (everything) asher l'reiecha" explains that although your friend's home seems so appealing, you must take all of the homeowner's life circumstances and burdens into account - "all that is his." One would need to accept problems, issues, worries, and challenges that accompany this coveted item.

We can understand each person's unique circumstances and provisions with a parable from the Chofetz Chaim. A man enters a shop seeking to purchase an ax with which to chop firewood. The proprietor has no axes in stock, but

the salesman offers him a quality saw used for cutting metal, and he implores the man to buy it. The man responds, "I am a woodchopper and have no need for blacksmith tools." The Chofetz Chaim explains that one must recognize that Hashem provides each person with a custom-tailored package of wife, slave, etc. he needs for his unique mission. Then, after the Torah lists these individual items, it guides us to understand that each of these possessions is uniquely suited to its owner. Through acceptance of this reality, jealousy dissipates quickly and easily, as one views his situation from its correct perspective.

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from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> via www-theyeshiva.ccsend.com reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net to: internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Feb 9, 2023, 2:05 PM

Why I Am a Proud Jew Three Truths which Compelled Jethro to Join Our People

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson The Story of Jethro

The opening of the weekly portion tells the story of the Pagan priest Jethro who chooses to come to the wilderness to spend time with the fledgling Jewish nation.

"Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard of all that G-d did for Moses and His people Israel; that G-d had taken Israel out of Egypt."[1] He took his daughter and two grandchildren and traveled to the wilderness to Moses and the new Jewish nation.

The Talmud asks this question: What did Jethro hear which inspired him to come to the Sinai desert?

The Talmud cites three opinions:[2]

זבחים קטז, א: מה שמועה שמע ובא? רבי יהושע אומר: מלחמת עמלק שמע ובא... רבי אלעזר המודעי אומר: מתן תורה שמע ובא. רבי אליעזר אומר: קריעת ים סוף שמע ובא.

Rabbi Joshua says, he heard of the war of Amalek against the Israelites and he came. Rabbi Elazar Hamudaei says, he heard of the giving of the Torah and he came. Rabbi Eliezer says: He heard about the splitting of the sea and he came. [3]

This seems strange. The Torah clearly states what Jethro heard: "And Jethro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard of all that G-d did for Moses and His people Israel; that G-d had taken Israel out of Egypt!" That is why he picked himself up and traveled to the Sinai desert. Why does the Talmud ask, "What did he hear that made him come?" And why does the Talmud offer different reasons than those stated in the biblical text?

Also, what is the logic behind these three Talmudic opinions? Must we always argue about everything? Why do these eminent Sages attribute Jethro's sacrifice to another factor?

A Player, Not a Fan

The question that perturbed the Talmudic sages was this.

Prior to his arrival, Jethro was living in great honor and distinction. At the height of his career as the religious leader of Midian, Jethro was surrounded by riches and glory, as was the destiny of the Pagan priests of yore. Yet he left behind all of it, only to arrive in a barren wilderness, eager to hear the words of Torah. [4]He no longer saw himself as a Priest of Midian; instead, he identified himself as the father-in-law of Moses.[5]

Note the question of the Talmud: "mah shmuah shama uba?" what did Jethro hear which compelled him to COME? Why would a person of such stature abandon everything in order to pursue an attraction to Torah? What compels an aristocratic spiritual leader to abandon his comfortable habitat and glorious lifestyle and come join a nation of nomads in a desert? Yes, the Torah tells us that he heard what G-d did for Israel and that he took them out of Egypt. But Jethro could have been content with hearing the stories from far, watching them on CNN or Fox News, reading the blogs, and following the Jews on Facebook. What motivated him to say goodbye to his past and become one of three million Jews?

You can sit on your couch on Sunday and be a fan of one team or another; you can be an admirer, a cheerer, a supporter. But why did Jethro feel the need to undergo a metamorphosis from spectator to player? Why did he have to link his fate to the Jewish fate?

For this, the sages present three alternative answers. For one, Jethro witnessed the war of Amalek against the Israelites; for the other, Jethro heard of the Torah. For the third, he heard of the splitting of the sea. These three events capture the three timeless features which embody the Jewish story.

The Mystery of Hate

"Rabbi Joshua says, he heard of the war of Amalek against the Israelites and he came."

The war of Amalek represented the timeless enigma of anti-Semitism. Here was Amalek, a strong and secure nation, unprovoked and unthreatened, yet this Amalekite nation found it necessary to declare war on a young nation that has just set itself free from decades of brutal persecution and suffering. The Jews have been in Pharaoh's massive concentration camps for 86 years—beaten, crushed, and murdered mercilessly. Their infants were plunged into the Nile River, as the men were subjected to slave labor and torture. Now, these people were finally free. Merely a few weeks after their liberation, Amalek declared a sudden bloody war on Israel.

It was not a territorial dispute which ignited the conflict, as Amalek did not even make the claim that the "Jews were occupying his homeland." The Jews were traveling in the wilderness, remote from Amalek's territory. Nor were there any political, economic, or military motivations, as Israel was minding its own business and not intending even to visit Amalek's country. Pharaoh at least had the excuse of fearing that the Jews would take over Egypt. What was Amalek's excuse to come and kill Jews?

The answer is: He did not need an excuse. This was not rational, calculated hatred. He just hated them because of their very being.

When hate is rational, based on some fear that has some logic to it, even if it is unjustified, then it can be reasoned with and brought to an end. If I hate you because I feel that you undermine by business, or you don't respect me in the company, the hatred has a cure. If I can see that you mean me no harm, or that you too have been operating out of fear, we can mend the relationship.

But how about unconditional, irrational hatred? What happens if I hate you because of your very existence? Such hate cannot be reasoned with. Amalek had no reason—not even an unjustified reason, based on unjust fear or insecurity—to attack Israel. This was irrational, groundless hate. As long as Jews existed, Amalek could not feel wholesome. With irrational hate, it is impossible to reason. It has no cause, no logic. Therefore it may never go away.

This is what Jethro observed. He realized that for some odd reason the Jew inspires irrational venom and animosity in the hearts of certain peoples. They hate the Jews simply because they are Jews. Something about the Jew drives them mad. And their hatred does not distinguish between Jewish adults or infants. Amalek, just like Haman and Hitler, sent two-month-old babies to the gas chambers with the same glee as he executed 50-year-old accomplished Jewish leaders. Jethro, an assiduous student of history, realized that there must be something incredibly holy, Divine, and good about the Jew which evokes such hatred toward him or her in the heart of every despot.[6] For Jethro, this was enough to know where to cast his lot.

Show me your enemies and I will tell you who you are. Draw up a list of Israel's foes—from the days of yore to this very day—and you will see that they were and are all ruthless tyrants who would sell their own people for their greed and hunger for power. Stalin, Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Gamel Abdal Nasser, Yasser Arafat, Osama Bin Laden, Hafez Al Asad, Hassan Nasrallah, and Qassem Soleimani were not—and are not—only enemies of Israel and the Jews. They constitute and remain a threat to every good and decent person the world over. Seeing who hates Jews can be a powerful, if a bit strange, source of Jewish pride.

The Grandeur of Torah

"Rabbi Elazar Hamudaei says, he heard of the giving of the Torah and he came."

Rabbi Elazar Hamudei's point of view is that though anti-Semitism can teach us about the moral stature of the Jewish people, this was not enough. What enthralled Jethro about the Jewish story was not just that some people hated Jews with an irrational passion, but that G-d loved them, and He gave them His Torah. When Jethro heard of the powerful institutions of Judaism—its obsession with education, charity, justice, compassion, loving the stranger, respecting the slave, feeding the poor, honoring the old, giving dignity to the sick and the mentally challenged; when Jethro learned of the Mitzvos of Torah—Shabbos, Mikvah, Kashrus, Tefilin, prayer, study; when he discovered the ethical foundations of Judaism—that no one is above the law, that each person was created in G-d's image and has infinite dignity, that history has a purpose, and that each of us was conceived in love to fulfill a mission—when the Midianite chief Pagan priest learned of all this, he fell in love with Torah and joined the People of the Book.

Now, 3300 years later, we often take for granted the contribution of the Torah to civilization. But Jethro did not. He understood what the Irish Tomas Cahill would articulate in his book "The Gifts of the Jews:"

"We can hardly get up in the morning or cross the street without being Jewish … The religion of the Hebrews—a tiny, marginal desert tribe—changed the worldview of Western civilization … The West's most deeply held beliefs about life, human nature, God, and justice are all owed to the ancient Israelites.

"In the ancient world of the 'ever-turning Wheel,' the countless gods and goddesses of the old mythologies played out their dramas in the world above. These gods were lustful, jealous, and greedy, and humans were of little import. Man had no freedom to choose a destiny, and no divinely inspired laws and ethics to guide him." According to Cahill, the Hebrews "developed a whole new way of experiencing reality… It may be said with some justice that theirs is the only new idea that human beings have ever had."

Many Jews I know would be uncomfortable with these words written by an Irish gentile. We take for granted the quality of life shaped by Torah values and rituals over millennia. Shabbos creates happier homes; Mikvah inspires more stable and meaningful marriages; Torah education creates more balanced teenagers, less drugs, and fewer suicides. The emphasis on tradition and history diminishes the generational gap between parents and children. The laws of Jewish burial, sitting shivah, and saying kaddish are deeply comforting during times of loss. The sense of community helps people in times of crisis. All of these concepts were new and novel ideas and Jethro, a brilliant man of ideas, understood the majestic grandeur of Torah. This is what inspired him to link his destiny to the Nation of Torah.

The Super-Natural Quality

"Rabbi Eliezer says: He heard about the splitting of the sea and he came."

Rabbi Eliezer takes it a step further. If it was only for Torah itself, Jethro could have remained on his hammock in Midian, sipping a pinna-colada and watching a Torah webcast on TheYeshiva.net, or reading a good Jewish book. What inspired him to leave his natural environment to join a crowded wilderness with millions of Hebrews? When he heard of the splitting of the sea.

The splitting of the sea demonstrated to Jethro another component of the Jewish story: The people of Israel transcended the laws of nature and the deterministic patterns of history. The largest seas, mightiest oceans, and fiercest tsunamis would not drown them. They would confront many overwhelming seas throughout their history, they would encounter impossible odds, and yet they would cross every sea and come out on the other side, stronger, more vibrant, more alive, and determined. A nation that endured crusades, inquisitions, pogroms, massacres, gas chambers, crematoriums, and suicide bombings—and yet inexplicably emerged, pulsating with a love for life and a zest for peace, this is a people whose narrative transcends the formulas of natural history.

Jethro understood what the great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, articulated in a 1908 article: "The Jew is that sacred being who has brought down from heaven the everlasting fire, and has illuminated with it the entire world. He is the religious source, spring, and fountain out of which all the rest of the peoples have drawn their beliefs and their religions. The Jew is the emblem of eternity. He, who neither slaughter nor torture of thousands of years could destroy, he who neither fire, nor sword, nor Inquisition was able to wipe off the face of the earth. He, who was the first to produce the Oracles of God. He, who has been for so long the Guardian of Prophecy and has transmitted it to the rest of the world. Such a nation cannot be destroyed. The Jew is as everlasting as Eternity itself." [7]

Jethro understood that to experience this immortality he must leave his mansion in Midian and join the nomads in the desert. To become part of a story that transcends nature, you must transcend your own nature and actively join the symphony of eternity.

Jethro was not Jewish. Yet he made an awesome sacrifice in order to join the Jewish people and internalize Torah. We were given this gift by birth. Will we not leave our comfort zones to embrace it, celebrate it, study it, and make it part of our lives?

[1] Exodus 18:1. [2] Zevachim 116a [3] Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105, foremost commentator on the Torah) asks the same questions and answers: Of the splitting of the Red Sea and the war against Amalek. Interestingly, he combines two of the three answers in the Talmud. [4]Rashi questions why the Torah finds it necessary to specify the obvious fact that Jethro came to Jews who were in the wilderness? We already know where they were! Citing the Midrash Mechilta, Rashi explains that the location is emphasized in order to praise Jethro. Prior to his arrival, Jethro was living in a place of great honor and distinction, and yet his heart moved him to go out to the wilderness, to a place of desolation, to hear the words of Torah. [5] See Rashi to Exodus 18:1. [6] At a public address on Purim 5725 (1965) the Lubavitcher Rebbe brilliantly explains the parable in Talmud Megillah 14b about the owner of the mound and the owner of the pit to capture the truth and enigma of anti-Semitism.

[7] Quoted in J.H. Hertz, A Book of Jewish Thoughts, Oxford University Press, London, 1926, p. 135.

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from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <info@rabbisacks.org> date: Feb 9, 2023, 10:45 AM subject: To Thank Before We Think (Yitro)

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ZTL

The Ten Commandments are the most famous religious and moral code in history. Until recently they adorned American courtrooms. They still adorn most synagogue arks. Rembrandt gave them their classic artistic expression in his portrait of Moses, about to break the tablets on seeing the Golden Calf. John Rogers Herbert's massive painting of Moses bringing down the tablets of law dominates the main committee room of the House of Lords. The twin tablets with their ten commands are the enduring symbol of eternal law under the sovereignty of God.

It is worth remembering, of course, that the "ten commandments" are not Ten Commandments. The Torah calls them asseret hadevarim (Ex. 34:28), and tradition terms them asseret hadibrot, meaning the "ten words" or "ten utterances." We can understand this better in the light of documentary discoveries in the twentieth century, especially Hittite covenants or "suzerainty treaties" dating back to 1400–1200 BCE, that is, around the time of Moses and the Exodus. These treaties often contained a twofold statement of the laws laid down in the treaty, first in general outline, then in specific detail. That is precisely the relationship between the "ten utterances" and the detailed commands of parshat Mishpatim (Ex. 22–23). The former are the general outline, the basic principles of the law.

Usually they are portrayed, graphically and substantively, as two sets of five, the first dealing with relationships between us and God (including honouring our parents since they, like God, brought us into being), the second with the relations between us and our fellow humans.

However, it also makes sense to see them as three groups of three. The first three (one God, no other God, do not take God's name in vain) are about God, the Author and Authority of the laws. The second set (keep Shabbat, honour parents, do not murder) are about createdness. Shabbat reminds us of the birth of the universe. Our parents brought us into being. Murder is forbidden because we are all created in God's image (Gen. 9:6). The third three (don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness) are about

the basic institutions of society: the sanctity of marriage, the integrity of private property, and the administration of justice. Lose any of these and freedom begins to crumble.

This structure serves to emphasise what a strange command the tenth is: "Do not be envious of your neighbour's house. Do not be envious of your neighbour's wife, his slave, his maid, his ox, his donkey, or anything else that is your neighbour's." At least on the surface this is different from all the other rules, which involve speech or action.[1]

Envy, covetousness, desiring what someone else has, is an emotion, not a thought, a word, or a deed. And surely we can't help our emotions. They used to be called the "passions," precisely because we are passive in relation to them. So how can envy be forbidden at all? Surely it only makes sense to command or forbid matters that are within our control. In any case, why should the occasional spasm of envy matter if it does not lead to anything harmful to other people?

Here, it seems to me, the Torah is conveying a series of fundamental truths we forget at our peril. First, as we have been reminded by cognitive behavioural therapy, what we believe affects what we feel.[2] Narcissists, for instance, are quick to take offence because they think other people are talking about or "dissing" (disrespecting) them, whereas often other people aren't interested in us at all. Their belief is false, but that does not stop them feeling angry and resentful.

Second, envy is one of the prime drivers of violence in society. It is what led Iago to mislead Othello with tragic consequences. Closer to home, it is what led Cain to murder Abel. It is what led Abraham and then Isaac to fear for their lives when famine forced them temporarily to leave home. They believed that, married as they were to attractive women, the local rulers would kill them so that they could take their wives into their harem.

Most poignantly, envy lay at the heart of the hatred of the brothers for Joseph. They resented his special treatment at the hands of their father, the richly embroidered cloak he wore, and his dreams of becoming the ruler of them all. That is what led them to contemplate killing him and eventually to sell him as a slave.

Rene Girard, in his classic Violence and the Sacred,[3] says that the most basic cause of violence is mimetic desire, that is, the desire to have what someone else has, which is ultimately the desire to be what someone else is. Envy can lead to breaking many of the other commands: it can move people to adultery, theft, false testimony, and even murder.[4]

Jews have especial reason to fear envy. It surely played a part in the existence of antisemitism throughout the centuries. Non-Jews envied Jews their ability to prosper in adversity – the strange phenomenon we noted in parshat Shemot that "the more they afflicted them the more they grew and the more they spread." They also and especially envied them their sense of chosenness (despite the fact that virtually every other nation in history has seen itself as chosen).[5] It is absolutely essential that we, as Jews, should conduct ourselves with an extra measure of humility and modesty.

So the prohibition of envy is not odd at all. It is the most basic force undermining the social harmony and order that are the aim of the Ten Commandments as a whole. Not only though do they forbid it; they also help us rise above it. It is precisely the first three commands, reminding us of God's presence in history and our lives, and the second three, reminding us of our createdness, that help us rise above envy.

We are here because God wanted us to be. We have what God wanted us to have. Why then should we seek what others have? If what matters most in our lives is how we appear in the eyes of God, why should we want anything else merely because someone else has it? It is when we stop defining ourselves in relation to God and start defining ourselves in relation to other people that competition, strife, covetousness, and envy enter our minds, and they lead only to unhappiness.

If your new car makes me envious, I may be motivated to buy a more expensive model that I never needed in the first place, which will give me satisfaction for a few days until I discover another neighbour who has an even more costly vehicle, and so it goes. Should I succeed in satisfying my own envy, I will do so only at the cost of provoking yours, in a cycle of conspicuous consumption that has no natural end. Hence the bumper sticker: "He who has the most toys when he dies, wins." The operative word here is "toys", for this is the ethic of the kindergarten, and it should have no place in a mature life.

The antidote to envy is gratitude. "Who is rich?" asked Ben Zoma, and replied, "One who rejoices in what he has." There is a beautiful Jewish practice that, performed daily, is life-transforming. The first words we say on waking are Modeh ani lefanecha, "I thank You, living and eternal King." We thank before we think.

Judaism is gratitude with attitude. Cured of letting other people's happiness diminish our own, we release a wave of positive energy allowing us to celebrate what we have instead of thinking about what other people have, and to be what we are instead of wanting to be what we are not.

[1] To be sure, Maimonides held that the first command is to believe in God. Halachot Gedolot as understood by Nachmanides, however, disagreed and maintained that the verse "I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt" is not a command but a prelude to the commands.

[2] This has long been part of Jewish thought. It is at the heart of Chabad philosophy as set out in Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi's masterpiece, Tanya. Likewise, Ibn Ezra in his commentary to this verse says that we only covet what we feel to be within our reach. We do not envy those we know we could never become.

[3] René Girard, Violence and the Sacred (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979).

[4] See Helmut Schoeck's classic, Envy: a Theory of Social Behaviour (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969). See also Joseph Epstein, Envy (New York: New York Public Library, 2003).

[5] See Anthony Smith, Chosen Peoples (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

From: **Michael Hoenig** <**MHoenig@herzfeld-rubin.com**> Date: Tue, Feb 7, 2023 at 2:30 PM

Tzipporah's Greatness - Parshas Yisro –

... Tzipporah's Gadlus, inspired by a topic mentioned by Rav Yisrael Reisman in a Shiur last year. Tzipporah comes with Yisro and reunites with Moshe after a long separation. Yet, not much is said about her in the Parsha text.

My essay discusses sublime Keshorim re Tzipporah that most folks don't know. This great woman, actually savior of Moshe's life, deserves better recognition of her greatness. If you elect to include this piece in the Parsha Sheet, please let me know. Blessings ! Mike

Subject: Fwd: Tzipporah's Greatness - Parshas Yisro -

In a Shiur on Jan. 20, 2022 on Parshas Yisro, Rav Yisroel Reisman focused on the Gadlus of Tzipporah's status as Moshe's wife. Citing Meforshim, he explained that Moshe and Tzipporah complemented each other, providing strengths to each other when the other lacked them or needed them. There was an absence of complaints. There was harmony. This kind of marriage is most desirable.

Why focus on Tzipporah ? Because Parshas Yisro announces a reunion of husband and wife after a long separation. The Parsha relates how Yisro brought Tzipporah with him but there's not much elaboration on this special moment in the lives of the couple. We need to understand how special Tzipporah was as a marriage partner. The Shiur makes one think more about her. Was she simply an ordinary Midianite woman, a Giyoress without Yichus ? Or did she possess qualities and character that elevated her status?

Many are unaware that Tzipporah reportedly was a Gilgul of Hevel's twin sister . Moshe was a Gilgul of Hevel. So, their reunion in Parshas Yisro is, on some level beyond our comprehension, momentous. Further, Yisro was a Gilgul of Kayin who, some say, killed Hevel in his desire for Hevel's sister. Imagine how "fitting" it is, kabbalistically speaking, that Yisro (Kayin) gives Tzipporah (Hevel's twin) to Moshe (Hevel) as wife .

Tzipporah, separated from Moshe for a long time was not Zocheh to see first-hand or participate in Yetzias Mitzraim, Krias Yam Suf and the Shir Shel Yam.

But, now, in our majestic Parsha, Tzipporah returns to Moshe and who brings her ? Yisro. The Gilgulim cast huge shadows and there are Tikkunim here (of course, that I'm not qualified to fully comprehend). Rav Reisman's Shiur inspired thoughts about how perfectly complementary Tzipporah's and Moshe's marriage truly was. They fit together. They belonged together. It seems more understandable when one recognizes they also had profound family keshorim in the world of the sublime.

Chazal say that a Gilgul of Tzipporah, who had personally missed out on Krias Yam Suf and Shiras HaYam, was none other than Devorah ! Some suggest that Devorah's witnessing of the drowning of Sisrah's chariots in the water's inundation plus her recitation of Shiras Devorah is a remedy, a Tikkun for the Chissaron that Tzipporah had to endure. Indeed, some suggest that Barak's "strange" insistence that Devorah, a woman, accompany him to the battlefront was some kind of a Shlichus to effect , on a Gilgul level, the Tikkun for the majestic experiences Tzipporah had missed .

Rav Reisman's point about the perfect specialness of Tzipporah's and Moshe's marriage inspires one to ponder additional , sublime "plot thickeners". A Midrash suggests that Tzipporah and Bisyah (Bas Paroh) were twin sisters . Seemingly, they were infants found by Yisro and Paroh. The latter each decided to adopt and raise one of them. Tzipporah was adopted by Yisro and Bisyah by Paroh. In this version of events, it may be "smoother" (Gilgul-wise) that Tzipporah (Hevel's sister) is not Yisro's (Kayin's) birth-daughter but, rather, adopted.

Further, Bisyah (Tzipporah's twin) saves Moshe's life. She does so when involved in Geirus and accepting the Ol Malchus Shomayim. Yisro, too, comes to Moshe (with Tzipporah) to be Nisgayer.

At the "incident at the Malon" (Shemos 4:24-26), Tzipporah (Hevel's twin) dramatically saves Moshe's (Hevel's) life. So, we see that Tzipporah is no ordinary Midianite-shepherdess-spouse. "Gilgully-speaking", she is quite "Yichusdik" to be Moshe's wife. Plus, she's actually his life-saver. So the poignant points stressed in Rav Reisman's Shiur about Tzipporah's Gadlus and wifely perfection echo hidden, sublime, kabbalistic notions most of us are not familiar with, let alone understand.

As mentioned, in the "incident at the Malon", Tzipporah truly shines. Heroically so . The whole Inyan is complicated and Chazal offer no unanimity on the scenario's details. When studying that episode intensively, one is struck by a number of Remozim/Keshorom/clues right there, in this ambiguous, mysterious text. Very briefly, here are just a few. One of the striking aspects is the very text, the words used.

4:24 immediately refers to "BaMalon". Employing Chilufei HaOsios, the rearranged letters of BaMalon spell : MOL BE'NO . It was about Milah of the son. Indeed, Malon also spells NAMUL . Kind of fascinating.

Tzipporah goes into action in 4:25 to save Moshe's life. The rearranged letters of her name spell "PO TZOR" -- here is the flint. The very next word after her name is "TZOR", the flint, with which to do the Milah.

Tzipporah's rearranged letters also spell "RITZPAH", the floor or ground. In 4:25, it says "VaTiga LeRaglav", which Artscroll says means "she touched it (the Orlah) to his feet." (Machlokes whose feet). But Rashi doesn't view it as benign touching. Rashi says Hishlichto Lifnei Raglav Shel Moshe -- She Cast (The Foreskin) Before The Feet of Moshe. She threw it down. Rashi reflects one of the views in Yerushalmi Nedarim 3:9. Another opinion there says Tzipporah cast it at the feet of the Malach, the angel. The point is she threw it on the floor, the ground, at the feet --- THE RITZPAH . This act evokes Tzipporah's meaningful statements about Chassan Domim (at 4:25,26).

Given Tzipporah's exalted status in sublime kabbalistic realms, it is important that we gain further appreciation of this significant Torah personality , especially in light of the reunion described in our Parsha. It's so interesting that Bisyah, Tzipporah, Devorah , Moshe, Yisro are all connected -- in the higher Neshama world above and here via our Torah study.

Fw From Hamelaket@gmail.com

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Moshe ben Yechezkel Shraga. Lure of Martyrdom

You shall not have the gods of others before me (20:3). Rashi (ad loc) clarifies that the verse cannot be explained according to its simple translation ("You shall not take other gods before me") because it would be denigrating to Hashem to even refer to them as gods in the same context. Rather the word "acheirim – other") is to be translated as "gods who act as 'other' to the ones that worship them." In other words, gods who act as "strangers" to those who worship them; no matter how much the worshipers pray they will never be answered.

For thousands of years, much of mankind worshiped powerless idols; but what is the pathology of serving a god who doesn't answer? The answer is – and herein lies the difference between Judaism and the other major religions – the allure of self-sacrifice is very attractive. Whether it's a vow of poverty, celibacy, or the jihad of suicidal bombing, becoming a martyr is a very self-serving way of elevating oneself. Worshiping a god who ignores you allows one to feel that the worship is 100% genuine.

In Judaism we are supposed to understand that Hashem loves us and cares about us and only wants what is good and best for us. While we aren't supposed to serve Hashem in order to get a reward, it is critical that we understand that there will be one because we have a relationship with Hashem.

Similarly, in a marriage we don't do things quid pro quo for our spouse, we do it out of love – all the while knowing that our spouse does the same for us. Self-sacrifice is antithetical to all we believe because being in a relationship with a god who ignores you is akin to being in an abusive relationship. The rare occasions when Judaism calls for self-sacrifice is only to preserve the integrity of the relationship, never as an avenue of serving Hashem.

Shabbos...Day of Rest? And the seventh day is the Shabbos of Hashem your God; you shall not do any work […] For in six days Hashem made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day […] (20:10-11).

There are two versions of the Aseres Hadibros (Ten Commandments) in the Torah. In the one that appears in this week's parsha, it indicates that the reason one must not do any work on Shabbos is because Hashem "rested on the seventh day." Yet in the second version of the Aseres Hadibros, in Parshas V'eschanan, the Torah states the reason as "remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that Hashem your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and with a stretched out arm; therefore Hashem commanded you to keep the day of Shabbos." Seemingly, there is a contradiction as to why we are commanded to keep Shabbos.

Additionally, both versions of the Aseres Hadibros begin with "I am Hashem your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." One must wonder why Hashem didn't describe himself as "Hashem, Creator of the world." Would that not be a much better verification of His omnipotence and the ultimate reason we must follow His commandment?

On the possuk, "And the locusts went over all the land of Egypt, and alighted on all the borders of Egypt" (10:14), the Bal Haturim comments that the word "vayanach – alighted" appears only twice in the Torah; here and in this week's Aseres Hadibros. What is the similarity between the two occurrences?

Clearly, the Torah is telling us that the word doesn't mean that Hashem rested on the seventh day, it means Hashem alighted, or came down, on the seventh day. Just as the locusts came down on Egypt, so too Hashem comes down to our world on Shabbos. The reason Shabbos is a day on which work is prohibited is because on Shabbos Hashem comes down to this world to be with us.

With this we can understand that there is no contradiction between the two versions of the Aseres Hadibros concerning why we keep Shabbos. When Hashem took the Jewish people out of Egypt He Himself came down to take us out, as the Torah states: "For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and

beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgement; I am Hashem" (12:12). Thus, the two times that Hashem came into this world for the benefit of the Jewish people are the reasons that we must keep Shabbos. This is why Hashem describes himself as "the one who took you out of Egypt." It isn't to verify His omnipotence, rather it is a lasting description of His love of the Jewish people. He begins the Aseres Hadibros with this to set the tone; He doesn't just want us to follow his rules, we are meant to have a relationship with Hashem. This is why we constantly quote "zecher l'yitzias Mitzrayim," because it is a reminder of the ultimate manifestation of Hashem's love for us.

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Fw from Hamelaket@gmail.com

Rav Kook Torah Yitro: Serving the Community Rabbi Chanan Morrison

"Moses sat to judge the people. They stood around Moses from morning to evening." (Exod. 18:13) From the account in the Torah, it would seem that Moses spent all his time judging the people. Yet it was clear to the Sages that this could not be the case.

Overworked Judges The Talmud (Shabbat 10a) relates that two dedicated judges worked such long hours that they were overcome with fatigue. (It is unclear whether this was a physical weakness from overwork, or a psychological depression from time lost from Torah study.) When Rabbi Hiyya saw their exhaustion, he advised the two scholars to limit their hours in court: *"It says that Moses judged the people from morning to evening. But could it be that Moses sat and judged all day? When did he have time for Torah study? Rather, the Torah is teaching us that a judge who judges with complete fairness, even for a single hour, is considered to be God's partner in creating the world. For the Torah uses a similar phrase to describe Creation, 'It was evening and morning, one day' (Gen. 1:5)."* Rav Hiyya's statement requires clarification. If judging is such a wonderful occupation — one becomes a partner with God! — then why not adjudicate all day long? And in what way is the work of a judge like creating the world?

Personal Well-Being vs. Public Service Great individuals aspire to serve the community and help others to the best of their abilities. The two judges felt that they could best serve their community by bringing social justice and order through the framework of the judicial system. Therefore, they invested all of their time and energy in judging the people. For these scholars, any other activity would be a lesser form of divine service. However, their dedication to public service was so intense that it came at the expense of their own personal welfare, both physical and spiritual. Rabbi Chiyya explained to the scholars that while their public service was truly a wonderful thing, it is not necessary to neglect all other aspects of life. If one only judges for a single hour, and spends the rest of his time improving his physical and spiritual well-being so that he can better serve in his public position, then his entire life is still directed towards his true goal. It is clear that personal growth will enhance one's community service. Better an hour of productive activity in a fresh, relaxed state of mind and body, than many hours of constant toil in a tired and frenzied state.

Two Parts of the Day What is the connection between Moses' judging "from morning to evening" and the description of the first day of Creation, "It was evening and morning, one day"? The day is one unit, made up of two parts — daytime and night. The daytime is meant for activity and pursuing our goals, while the night is the time for rest and renewal. Together, daytime and night form a single unit, constituting a "day." The balance of these two aspects — activity and renewal — is particularly appropriate for those who labor for the public good. The hours that we devote to physical and spiritual renewal help us in our public roles; they become an integral part of our higher aspiration to serve the community. *Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 130-132. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, pp. 4-5. Copyright © 2023 Rav Kook Torah*

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Yisro Seitzei תשפ"ג פרשת יתרו

Rabbi A Leib Scheinbaum

זכור את יום השבת לקדשו Remember the *Shabbos* day to sanctify it. (20:8) I think the primary essence of *Shabbos* is to be derived from the word *l'kadsho*, "to sanctify it." This does not in any way mean to belittle the importance of *zachor*, "remember," the *Shabbos*. Clearly, one who does not remember, who does not observe *Shabbos* according to *halachah*, can hardly sanctify it. The suggestion, however, is that *Shabbos* observance without focusing on its sanctity, by concentrating on the positive aspects of rest, and how this time should be spent spiritually elevating ourselves, undermines the essence of *Shabbos*. *Shabbos* is a day of elevation, of spiritual growth, which is achieved through the medium of rest. We have the opportunity to rest our bodies, but, more importantly, our minds. *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*, was a Torah giant whose sage advice in all areas of concern to *Klal Yisrael* was sought after and followed. This was especially true concerning the area of *kiruv rechokim*, Jewish outreach to the unaffiliated. A seasoned *kiruv* professional who worked for Peylim reminisced about the numerous times that he met with this slight, unassuming *gadol*, a quiet Torah giant whose love for Torah and *Klal Yisrael* motivated him to give of his precious time toward enhancing the lofty work of Jewish outreach. He responded to the *halachic* queries of *baalei teshuvah* and advised them concerning their attempt to navigate the transition between a lack of Jewish practice to a committed life of Torah and *mitzvos*. He was sensitive to the fears and practical challenges confronting the penitent, and he guided the professionals about how to best reach these once alienated Jews. "From where does one begin?" was one of the most pressing questions that occupied everyone's mind. To demand complete *mitzvah* observance without compromise would quite possibly sink the ship in port. The overwhelming responsibilities, obligations and lifestyle changes necessary to become wholly observant could, for the most part, be a game changer and should be done slowly. One takes tiny steps, and, every so often, he stops to rest. The goal may be a long way off, but in this way, he has the possibility of achieving his goal. *Rav* Shteinman replied, "Three *mitzvos* and one *t'nai*, stipulation: *Tefillin*, *Tzitzis*, *Shabbos* and (the *t'nai*) *kashrus*, Jewish dietary laws." He explained that *tefillin* is a powerful *mitzvah* which can be fulfilled in just a few minutes; it places no heavy demands on one's time. *Tzitzis* is a *mitzvah* that one fulfills every minute that he wears the *tallis katan*. It makes no public demands on him. He can put it on under his shirt, and no one need be aware. Third is *Shabbos* observance. Here, *Rav* Shteinman qualified his words. It is not only about observance. If a hopeful *baal teshuvah* is given a list of "do nots," the negative overload will be too much. He must not think that Judaism is the religion of "no." He must explore the positive aspects of *Shabbos*, for which *shul* attendance is a prerequisite. Yes, encourage him to attend services, to listen and join in the singing and chanting of the tunes, to observe firsthand how a Jew *davens* to Hashem, and the meaning of talking to Hashem. A *baal teshuva* needs to experience the beauty and sanctity of *Shabbos* in order to appreciate the prohibitive commandments connected to observance. Only when he sees and experiences the majesty and sanctity of *Shabbos*, the *l'kadsho*, can he later go on to accept the *zachor* and become a full-fledged *Shabbos* observer. One can better concentrate on the *sur mei'ra*, turn from evil, after he has tasted the *asei tov*, do good. The *mitzvah* itself will protect the individual who is sincere in his *mitzvah* observance. *Chazal* (*Pesachim* 8a) state, *Shluchei mitzvah einan nizakim*, "An emissary dispatched to do a *mitzvah* will not be harmed." When, and under which circumstances this applies, is not our present focus. Rather, the very idea that a *mitzvah* protects suggests that, when we perform a *mitzvah*, we connect with Hashem, Who sees to it that no negativity should surface as a result of the *mitzvah*. This serves as a preface to a story that *Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky, a.h*. related, which incidentally pertains to *Shabbos*. A young woman became *a baalas teshuvah*, returned to religious observance, despite having been raised totally assimilated. She had been estranged from Torah life and *mitzvah* observance. It was all foreign to her. Bit by bit, ever so slowly, she felt comfortable with observance, except for one thing. Having smoked cigarettes her entire adult life, she just found it nearly impossible to give up smoking on *Shabbos*. She made the attempt a number of times. Despite her determination to succeed, however, she always fell short. She even became ill as a result of abstaining

from cigarettes. The *rabbanim* that were involved in her return to observance turned to *Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl*, wondering if he would render a *halachic* decision/dispensation concerning her problem. *Rav* Elyashiv's immediate response was, "Check her lineage, I suspect that she is not Jewish." The *rabbanim* were taken aback by this strange reply, but, when the *gadol ha'dor*, preeminent Torah giant of the generation, speaks, one listens. They investigated and, after a complete background check, it was discovered that, indeed, her mother was not Jewish. They immediately arranged for her conversion to Judaism, to which she readily agreed. All of a sudden, her addiction to smoking on *Shabbos* ceased. Obviously, everyone involved sought an explanation. *Rav* Elyashiv explained that *Chazal* teach that it is prohibited for a non-Jew to observe *Shabbos*. This woman was wholly sincere in her desire to serve Hashem. As a result, the Almighty created a situation whereby she would be unable to give up smoking, thus preventing her from transgressing His will.

כבד את אביך ואת אמך למען יאריכון ימיך Honor your father and mother, so that your days will be lengthened. (20:12) Every *mitzvah* is accompanied by *halachos*, laws, and customs which guide its fulfillment. If one does not adhere to them, the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* is nullified. Some *mitzvos* have numerous *halachos*, while others are simple and basic. The *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*, honoring one's parents, which is one of the most difficult *mitzvos* to carry out properly, has a considerable amount of laws and criteria which must be met in order to appropriately execute this *mitzvah*. Determining what is included in the term *kavod*, honor, and what is not and who is deserving of honor (i.e. an abusive parent) are beyond the scope of this paper. I would like to address what I feel is a commonsensical application of this *mitzvah*: making a phone call. Yes, making a simple phone call can be the fulfillment of *kibbud av v'eim*. As parents age and their lives become less complicated (or so we think), in some instances to the point of boredom, it would be nice to hear from their children. The phone call need not be long and drawn out. A simple, "How are you? Just checking up to see how you are doing. Can I get or do anything for you?" – or just to call and share your or your family's experiences – is sufficient. In our highly technological society, personal face-to-face, mouth-to-mouth conversation is at a premium. We are so busy, so consumed with ourselves, that we often forget our obligation to acknowledge and pay tribute to the people who brought us into the world and cared for us. In a normal family setting this is how it should be, and, for the most part, it is. We (sadly) see exceptions, for reasons which we find a way to rationalize. These are "complicated" exceptions. Unfortunately, it gets worse. Some children have convinced themselves, or have been convinced by others, individuals who are either ill or evil, that it is acceptable not to speak to parents for whatever reason they have contrived. I read an article authored by a secular activist who, in a public forum, asked adults who had ceased speaking to parents to explain their decisions. One woman in her late 20's responded that she had not been in touch with her mother for ten years. When questioned concerning the reason for her extreme behavior, she replied that her mother, albeit loving her, was domineering. She felt that her mother would dominate her life if she would speak to her. The writer sensed that someone else had catalyzed this woman's decision, such as an incompetent therapist, who placed his stamp of approval on his patient's selfish, hurtful decision. Obviously, this therapist had been an accessory to an act of malfeasance, both to the parents and to his patient. This is an insubordination on the part of the adult child concerning the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*. As I have reiterated a number of times, the Torah enjoins us to honor our parents, not love them. Understandably, some parents are victims of their own issues, which result in their inability to execute their roles properly. It may be difficult to love such biological progenitors (I did not use the word "parents," because the true meaning of the term may not apply), but honoring them is an irrevocable Divine imperative. *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl*, writes (*Orchos Yosher*) that, for many *mitzvos* and transgressions, the reward or punishment is reserved for the World to Come. *Kibbud av v'eim,* however, does not brook such postponement. The Almighty punishes or rewards for the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim* in this world. Therefore, in all likelihood, the way one acts towards his/her parents might very well be the precursor for the manner in which their children will act toward them. Someone who was asked to speak to a group of youngsters asked *Rav* Chaim, "What *mitzvah* should I emphasize and encourage them to perform to its fullest extent?" His almost immediate response was: *kibbud av v'eim*. He was further asked, concerning a boy who had just turned *bar mitzvah*, which *mitzvah* he should be *mekabel*, accept upon himself, to carry out scrupulously. *Rav* Chaim replied that his father, the *Steipler Gaon, zl*, was asked the same question, and he replied that it should be *mitzvas kibbud av v'eim*. *Horav Chaim Brim, zl*, was wont to say, "The barometer for ascertaining one's level of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, is in the manner in which he fulfills the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim."* Need we say more? From the time that he was *bar mitzvah*, *Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl*, would personally read *Megillas Esther* for his mother, who had difficulty hearing. He made a point to read loudly and clearly, meticulously emphasizing every *trop*, cantillation note. He did it this way, so that she would not be compelled to make use of a hearing aid. *Rav* Shlomo Zalmen's son related that, years later, when he read the *Megillah* for his grandmother, he observed that she no longer heard anything at all. When he mentioned this to his father, the sage replied, "It never entered my mind that she had the ability to listen in accordance with *halachah*. Everything that I did was so that my mother should be calm and feel good about listening to the *Megillah*." Maintaining a parent's self-esteem is also *kibbud av v'eim*.

Sponsored in loving memory of Vivian Stone חיה לאה בת שמעון ע"ה נפטרה ח"י שבט תשס"ט By her children Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©*All rights reserved prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

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Bedeviled by Stirring Events – or Some Insights on the Melacha of Losh Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

I was recently asked the following question:

"My daughter was taught that we cannot make deviled eggs on Shabbos because adding mustard and shaping them is considered 'kneading' the yolks. But I remember my mother always mixed hard boiled eggs with minced onion and oil on Shabbos morning shortly before the meal. Could my mother have been wrong?"

As our readership is aware, the Torah prohibits melachos on Shabbos not because they are taxing, but because these activities are significant and important (Bava Kamma 2a). As the Yerushalmi relates, after toiling for three and a half years to understand all the prohibited activities of Shabbos, Rabbi Yochanan and his brother-in-law, Reish Lakish, concluded that each of the 39 major melachos (avos) has at least 39 sub-categories, tolados, which are also prohibited min haTorah (Yerushalmi, Shabbos, beginning of 7:2). As is clear from the passage, these eminent scholars realized that the Torah prohibited these types of significant activity. As Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch notes, the Torah does not prohibit avodah, which connotes hard work, but melacha, which implies purpose and accomplishment (Commentary to Shemos 20:10).

One of the melacha activities prohibited on Shabbos is losh, kneading (Mishnah Shabbos 73a). Although building the Mishkan did not involve kneading dough, dying the cloth used in its construction required kneading a thick paste (see Rashi, Shabbos 73a and Shabbos 156a). (Some Rishonim contend that we derive forbidden melachos also from activities performed for the service of the Mishkan and the Beis HaMikdash, and not only from the Mishkan's construction. According to these opinions, the melacha of kneading could be derived from the meal offerings of the Mishkan that involved the kneading of dough [Rav Hai Gaon, quoted in introduction to Maasei Rokei'ach and by Eglei Tal].)

WHAT IS LOSH? The concept of losh is to combine fine powders or similar small items into a unit by adding liquid (Shevisas Hashabbas). Thus, mixing clay for pottery, or cement and sand into concrete, violates the Torah prohibition of losh (see Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 8:16; Rashi, Shabbos 74b). Similarly, mixing oatmeal or reconstituting instant mashed potatoes violates the Torah prohibition of losh (in addition to whatever prohibitions of cooking may be involved).

Similarly, preparing certain other food items might fall under the rubric of losh. For example, the Gemara discusses whether one may mix bran with water to feed one's animals. Although bran and water do not form dough, this question is discussed because adding water makes the bran stick together (Shabbos 155b). The Tanna'im dispute whether one may add water to bran on Shabbos to feed one's animals, Rebbe prohibiting because he feels that this constitutes a Torah violation of losh, whereas Rabbi Yosi ben Rabbi Yehudah maintains that adding water to bran involves only a rabbinic prohibition and is permitted in order to feed one's animals, if performed in an indirect way. This introduces a new concept in the laws of losh – that one may perform a rabbinically prohibited activity in an indirect way, in order to prepare food or feed on Shabbos (Shabbos 155b-156a). Performing a prohibited activity in an indirect way is called a shinui or kil'achar yad (literally, using the back of one's hand), and is usually prohibited miderabbanan. However, under extenuating circumstances, Chazal relaxed the prohibition.

Losh applies only when mixing fine items that stick together to form a unit. It does not apply when adding liquid to large items even if they stick together, since they do not combine into one item (Taz, Orach Chayim 321:12). Therefore, one may use oil or mayonnaise to make a potato salad or tuna salad on Shabbos, if the pieces of potato or tuna are large enough to prevent the salad appearing like a single mass.

BATTER VERSUS DOUGH The Gemara implies that there is a halachic difference between a belilah rakkah, the consistency of batter, and belilah avah, the consistency of dough. By "batter" we mean a mix that does hold together, so it is not a liquid, yet is fluid enough that one can pour it from one bowl to another (Chazon Ish, Orach Chayim 58:9). Creating a batter involves only a rabbinic violation, whereas mixing a consistency like dough, which is thick enough that one cannot pour it, has stricter rules, often involving a Torah violation.

If the mix does not hold together at all, then one may make such a mixture without any concerns because it is considered a liquid (Chazon Ish, Orach Chayim 58:9).

DEVILING THE EGGS Based on the above discussion, it would appear that one may not mix egg salad or deviled eggs on Shabbos without a shinui, and possibly not even with a shinui. The mix created when making these foods cannot be poured, and therefore does not qualify as a "batter" but as "dough," which may entail a Torah prohibition of mixing on Shabbos. Ordinarily, food preparation on Shabbos that involves a Torah prohibition is not permitted, even with a shinui.

However, a standard appetizer in many parts of Europe for the Shabbos day meal was to chop up and stir together hard-boiled eggs, onion and schmaltz, a dish called zwiebel eire or "eggs and onions" that required preparation immediately before serving. Was it permitted to mix "eggs and onions" on Shabbos or did this violate the prohibition against kneading on Shabbos, since the finished product was mashed egg and onion held together with fat? Although it would seem to be prohibited to prepare this food on Shabbos, this food was commonly prepared every Shabbos morning prior to serving. Does this mean that all these observant Jews were violating the Torah's command? When we consider that this was the standard appetizer eaten by thousands of Jewish households every Shabbos for hundreds of years, it is difficult to imagine that millions of eggs and onions were prepared in violation of the laws of Shabbos!

Several halachic authorities raise this question, providing a variety of approaches to explain why one may blend eggs and onions on Shabbos. Could the reason to allow it apply to contemporary deviled eggs or egg salad?

Some contend that this was permitted only when the pieces of egg and onion were both large enough to prevent the mix from having a dough-like consistency, but rather looked more like large pieces stuck together. However, the prevalent approach was to chop the eggs and onions into a very fine consistency, in which case the above-mentioned leniency was not applicable. Other authorities permitted mixing and stirring them together only with a shinui, although apparently the prevalent custom was to mix it without any shinui at all.

RAV SHELOMOH KLUGER'S APPROACH Rav Shelomoh Kluger, a great luminary of nineteenth-century Poland, proposed a highly original reasoning to legitimize the preparing of the eggs and onions on Shabbos. Regarding various halachos of the Torah, predominantly the laws of tumah and taharah, only seven substances are considered liquids -- wine, blood, olive oil, milk, dew, honey and water. Rav Kluger contended that the halachos of losh are also dependent on the use of one of these seven liquids to create the "dough" (Shu"t Ha'elef Lecha Shelomoh, Orach Chayim #139). According to this novel approach, no losh prohibition is involved if one uses mayonnaise or any oil other than olive oil, nor if one makes dough on Shabbos using only juice other than grape juice.

We should note that following this line of reasoning, not only may one prepare the famous eggs and onions mixture, but one may also prepare deviled eggs or egg salad on Shabbos, provided one does not use olive oil as the liquid. Although some may prefer use of olive oil for its cholesterol and other medical benefits, this would not justify violating the laws of Shabbos.

However, Rav Kluger's approach is not without its detractors. For one thing, as he himself points out, his approach disputes the statement of a highly-respected earlier authority, the Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav 321:12), who contends that losh is violated when one mixes foods together with goose schmaltz (in his era, a common ingredient in European homes). This demonstrates clearly that any substance that causes items to stick together violates losh, at least according to some widely-accepted opinions. For the most part, later authorities have not accepted Rav Kluger's contention limiting losh to the "seven liquids."

Rav Shelomoh Kluger applied a second reason to permit the preparation of eggs and onions on Shabbos. He theorized that losh only applies to the earth itself or to items that grow from the ground -- thus precluding eggs from the prohibition of losh. Although this approach only resolves the losh consideration germane to the eggs in the mixture but not to the onions, Rav Kluger further contended that the onions are also exempt from losh since the eggs are the main ingredient. He maintained that when mixing several items, of which losh applies only to some, halacha considers only the major ingredient and ignores the rest (Shu"t Ha'elef Lecha Shelomoh, Orach Chayim #139).

This second approach of Rav Shelomoh Kluger is also not without its detractors. Both the contention that losh applies only to items that grow from the ground, and the further supposition that one ignores the lesser item are challenged by later authorities (see Tzitz Eliezer 11:36:3, quoting Yad Yosef).

OTHER APPROACHES Other reasons are quoted to permit making eggs and onions on Shabbos, including a suggestion that there is no losh prohibition to stir in an ingredient added for taste, even if it indeed causes the food to hold together. (This position is quoted by the Tzitz Eliezer 11:36 in the name of an anonymous great scholar; however, the Tzitz Eliezer rejects this argument.) According to this approach, one might argue that one may make deviled eggs on Shabbos since the mustard is primarily added for flavor. On the other hand, one could argue that one's intent is to create a consistent filling, which is losh.

Others permit the mixing of eggs and onions because they do not form into a gush, that is, a single unit (Shu"t Be'er Moshe 6:44). According to this reasoning, deviling eggs is forbidden since one is indeed forming units of seasoned mashed egg yolk.

RAV SHELOMOH ZALMAN AUERBACH'S APPROACH Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach presents a different reason to permit mixing eggs and onions on Shabbos, which requires a small introduction. At the time of the Gemara, neither Post nor General Mills had yet cornered the market on breakfast cereal, and people were forced to prepare their own breakfast. The Cheerios of the day involved mixing a specialty flour called kali, made from toasted kernels, with oil, water and salt. The Gemara quotes an opinion that permits mixing kali on Shabbos, provided one uses a minor shinui while doing so (Shabbos 155b). Several authorities question why the Gemara is so lenient in this instance (Nishmas Adam; Biur Halacha). Allow me to explain the basis of their concern:

Usually, a shinui may be used on Shabbos in only one of two circumstances:

1. To prepare food that, without the shinui, involves only a rabbinic prohibition.

2. To prepare the food in a radically different way from how it is usually prepared. An example of this is crushing foods on Shabbos with the handle of a knife. Although it is prohibited min haTorah to chop items fine on Shabbos, since crushing with a knife handle is a very different method from mashing or grinding with mortar and pestle, Chazal permitted it (Shibbolei Ha'leket #92, based on Shabbos 141a).

Thus, we are faced with the following anomaly: The Gemara permits mixing kali on Shabbos, seemingly permitting a Torah prohibition of losh by means of a minor deviation from the normal method, which is usually not a sufficient reason to be allow it.

The Biur Halacha (321:14 s.v. Shema) responds to this question with two different novel approaches to explain why this is permitted:

1. Mixing food that is already cooked or toasted, and therefore ready to eat, does not violate the prohibition of losh. Chazal prohibited doing so because it looks like kneading, and therefore it is permitted with a shinui, as are many other food preparations.

2. The Biur Halacha suggests an alternative approach: there is no violation of losh while one is eating. This is similar to a concept found by other melachos, notably selecting and grinding, that permits performing these activities immediately before consuming them. As such, preparing kali at breakfast time would be permitted.

This approach has its detractors, since no early authorities note that this lenience applies to losh, and logically there is a big distinction between selecting and grinding, which are processes that are absolutely essential to normal eating, and kneading, which is not essential (see Magen Avraham 321:24).

RETURNING TO EGGS AND ONIONS Based on both approaches of the Biur Halacha, Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach notes that preparing eggs and onions should be permitted because this food cannot be prepared before Shabbos, and becomes ruined if not prepared shortly before eating. A similar approach to explain the custom of mixing eggs and onions is presented by the Tehillah Le'David (321:25).

In addition, Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach reasons that losh is a process that one does while eating, since one mixes food together in one's mouth (Shulchan Shelomoh 321:16). This author does not understand the last statement of Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach, since the processing of food that takes place in one's mouth, chewing, reduces food to small particles and does not combine small particles into larger ones, which is the essence of losh. According to Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach's approach, preparing eggs and onions requires a shinui, meaning that one should add the ingredients to the bowl in an inverted order than one usually does, and should also preferably stir the mix in an unusual fashion, such as not in normal circular strokes but with alternative crisscross motions instead.

However, the approaches mentioned earlier permit mixing eggs and onions without any shinui at all. When reading later halachic works, one finds many poskim who feel that one should avoid preparing eggs and onions on Shabbos, and certainly not without a shinui, whereas others are suspicious of those who question such a time-hallowed practice (Be'er Moshe; Tzitz Eliezer).

We should also note that the first approach presented by the Biur Halacha should permit not only the famous eggs and onions, but also preparing either egg salad or deviled eggs on Shabbos. Furthermore, according to his second approach, it is permitted to prepare them immediately before the meal, even though the egg salad or deviled eggs will not be served until much later in the meal, similar to the rules of boreir. Both of the Biur Halacha's heterim require using a shinui while mixing the ingredients, i.e., by adding ingredients in a different order than usual and by not using the usual circular motions while stirring.

The Torah commanded us concerning the halachos of Shabbos by giving us the basic categories that are prohibited. Shabbos is a day that we refrain from altering the world for our own purposes. Instead, we allow Hashem's rule to be the focus of creation by refraining from our own creative acts (Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch's Commentary to Shemos 20:10). By demonstrating Hashem's rule even over non-exertive activities such as kneading, we demonstrate and acknowledge the true Creator of the world and all it contains.

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PARSHAT YITRO - Ma'amad Har Sinai

A wedding ceremony? Well, not exactly; but many sources in Chazal compare the events at Ma'amad Har Sinai to a marriage between God (the groom) and Am Yisrael (the bride).
[See for example the last Mishnah in Mesechet Taanit!]

In this week's shiur, as we study the numerous ambiguities in Shmot chapter 19, we attempt to explain the deeper meaning of this analogy, as well as the underlying reason for those ambiguities.

INTRODUCTION

Thus far, Sefer Shmot has discussed the story of Yetziat Mitzraim, and hence - how God had fulfilled His covenant with the Avot. However, that covenant included not only a promise of redemption, but also the promise that Bnei Yisrael would become God's special nation in Eretz Canaan. As Bnei Yisrael now travel to establish that nation in that 'Promised Land', God brings them to Har Sinai in order to teach them the specific laws [mitzvot] that will help make them His special nation.

Therefore, the primary purpose of Bnei Yisrael's arrival at Har Sinai was to receive God's LAWS. Nevertheless, the Torah describes in no less detail the 'experience' of how those laws were given. In the following shiur, we undertake a careful reading of Shmot chapter 19 (i.e. the events that precede the Ten Commandments), highlighting its complexities, in an attempt to better appreciate Chazal's understanding of Ma'amad Har Sinai.

> [Before you continue, it is highly recommended that you quickly review chapters 19 and 20 to refresh your memory, noting its flow of topic. (While doing so, try to notice how many psukim are difficult to translate.) For a more comprehensive preparation, see the Questions for self-study (sent earlier this week).]

THE 'PROPOSAL'

Shmot chapter 19 opens as Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai - presumably, to receive the Torah. However, before the Torah is given, God first summons Moshe to the mountain, instructing him to relay a certain message to the people. As you review these psukim (19:3-6), note how they form a 'proposal':

"Thus shall you say to Beit Yaakov and tell Bnei Yisrael:
You have seen what I have done to Egypt... so NOW:
IF - you will OBEY Me faithfully and keep My COVENANT...and be my treasured nation, for all the Land is Mine.
THEN: You shall be for Me a 'mamlechet Kohanim v'goy kadosh' [a kingdom of priests and a holy nation]..." (19:4-6)

The 'if / then' clause proves that these instructions constitute a proposal (and not just a decree) - to which Bnei Yisrael must answer either 'yes' or 'no'. And that's exactly what we find:
"And the people answered together and said, 'Everything that God has spoken we shall keep,' and Moshe brought the people's answer back to God." (see 19:7-8)

Clearly, Moshe Rabeinu acts as the 'middle-man' - who must relay the people's answer to this 'proposal' back to God.
[In regard to what would have happened had Bnei Yisrael answered 'no', see the Further Iyun section.]

Let's take a minute to discuss the meaning of the two sides of this 'proposition'.

The first part of the '**IF**' clause - "if you will OBEY Me" - makes sense, as God must first clarify if Bnei Yisrael are indeed now ready to follow His laws; in contrast to their previous 'refusals' (see Yechezkel 20:5-9, Shmot 6:9 & 15:26). However, the precise meaning of the second clause - "and if you will keep My COVENANT" is uncertain, for it is not clear if this 'covenant' refers to something old - i.e. 'brit Avot'; or something new - i.e. 'brit Sinai.

SOMETHING 'OLD' or SOMETHING 'NEW'

It would be difficult to explain that the word 'covenant' in this pasuk refers to 'brit Avot', for brit Avot doesn't seem to include any specific action that Bnei Yisrael must keep. More likely, it refers to 'brit Sinai' - whose details will soon be revealed, should Bnei Yisrael accept this proposal.

However, this ambiguity may be intentional, for this forthcoming "brit Sinai" could be understood as an 'upgrade' of "brit Avot". In other words, 'brit Avot' discusses the very basic framework of a relationship (see Breishit 17:7-8), while 'brit Sinai' will contain the detailed laws which will make that original covenant more meaningful.

If so, then the proposition could be understood as follows: Should Bnei Yisrael agree to obey whatever God may command, and to remain faithful to this covenant, and act as His treasured nation (see 19:5) - **THEN,** the result will be that Bnei Yisrael will serve as God's 'model' nation, representing Him before all other nations [a "mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh"/ see 19:6].

As a prerequisite for Matan Torah, Bnei Yisrael must both confirm their readiness to obey God's commandments while recognizing that these mitzvot will facilitate their achievement of the very purpose of God's covenant with them.

Whereas a covenant requires the willful consent of both sides, this section concludes with Bnei Yisrael's collective acceptance of these terms (see again 19:7-8).

MAKING PLANS (and changing them)

Now that Bnei Yisrael had accepted God's proposal, the next step should be for them to receive the specific MITZVOT (i.e. the laws that they just agreed to observe). However, before those laws can be given, there are some technical details that must be ironed out, concerning **HOW** Bnei Yisrael will receive these laws. Note how the next pasuk describes God's 'plans' for how He intends to convey these mitzvot
"And God said to Moshe, 'I will come to you in the thickness of a CLOUD, in order that the people HEAR when I SPEAK WITH YOU, and in order that they believe in you [i.e. that you are My spokesman] forever..." (19:9)

It appears from this pasuk that God plans to use Moshe Rabeinu as an intermediary to convey His laws to Bnei Yisrael, consistent with Moshe's role as His liaison heretofore. Nonetheless, God insists that the people will 'overhear' His communication with Moshe, so that they believe that these laws truly originate from God, and not from Moshe.

At this point, in the middle of pasuk 9, we encounter our first major difficulty in following the flow of events. Note that God has just informed Moshe of HOW He plans to convey His laws. Hence, we would expect Moshe to convey this message to Bnei Yisrael (just as he did in 19:7). However, when we continue our reading of 19:9, something very strange takes place:
"...Then Moshe reported the PEOPLE'S words to God." (19:9)

What's going on? The second half of this pasuk seems to omit an entire clause - for it never tells us what the people responded. Instead, it just says that Moshe relayed the people's response back to God, without telling us WHAT the people said!

BE PREPARED!

This question is so glaring (and obvious) that Rashi, taking for granted that the reader realized this problem, provides an answer based on the Midrash that fills in the 'missing details'.
"Et divrei ha'am" [the words of the people]... The people responded: 'We want to hear from YOU [God] directly, for one cannot compare hearing from a "shaliach" (a messenger) to hearing from the King himself, [or they said,]: We want to SEE our King!" (see Rashi on 19:9)

Note how Rashi adds an entire line to this narrative. According to his interpretation, Bnei Yisrael don't accept God's original plan that they would hear the MITZVOT via Moshe. Instead, they demand to hear them directly - from God Himself!

What allows Rashi to offer such a bold interpretation?

Rashi's interpretation is based on an apparent contradiction between God's original plan in 19:9 and what appears to be His new plan, as described in the next two psukim:
"And God told Moshe, 'Go to the people and get them ready... for on the third day God will reveal Himself IN VIEW OF ALL THE PEOPLE on Har Sinai." (see 19:10-11)

Note how God commands Bnei Yisrael to ready themselves, for in three days time they will actually SEE God. This declaration that He plans to reveal himself before the 'eyes of the entire nation' suggests that God now plans to convey His mitzvot DIRECTLY to the people. These instructions appear to describe a NEW PLAN for Matan Torah (in contrast to His original plan that Moshe will act as an intermediary - as described in 19:9).

For the sake of clarity, from now on, we refer to the God's original plan (Dibrot via Moshe) as PLAN 'A' (based on 19:9), and to the new plan (Dibrot Direct) as PLAN 'B (based on 19:11)'.

Rashi claims that God's suggestion of Plan 'B' stems from the people's unwillingness to accept Plan 'A' - for Bnei Yisrael want to hear the Commandments DIRECTLY.

This 'change of plan' can explain why the people now require THREE days of preparation. In order to prepare for this DIRECT encounter, Bnei Yisrael must first attain a higher level of spiritual readiness, as reflected in the three-day preparation period. Note how the details of this 'preparation' continue until 19:15.

In 19:12-13, Moshe is commanded to cordon off the entire area surrounding the mountain. In 19:14-15, Moshe relays these commands to the people. Hence, from now on, we refer to this section (i.e. 19:9-15) as 'PREPARATION'.

Are Bnei Yisrael capable of reaching this level? Are they truly ready to receive the DIBROT directly from God?

If so, why did God not suggest this direct encounter in the first place? If not, why does God now agree to their request?

[As you may have guessed, we have encountered a 'dialectic'.]

To answer these questions, we must analyze the psukim that follow to determine which of these two divine plans actually unfolds.

RUNAWAY BRIDE

According to the new plan, on 'day three' God should reveal Himself on Mount Sinai and speak the DIBROT directly to the entire nation. Let's continue now in chapter 19 and see what happens:
"And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, and there were loud sounds and lightening, and a THICK CLOUD on the mountain, and the SHOFAR sounded very strong, and the people in the CAMP all became frightened." (19:16)

If you read this pasuk carefully, you will most probably be startled by the fact that Bnei Yisrael never came to Har Sinai that morning! Instead, they were so frightened of God's "hitgalut" [revelation] that they remained in the CAMP.
[Our minhag to stay up (and learn Torah) the entire night of Shavuot is based on the Midrash that Bnei Yisrael 'slept in' on that morning. Note how that Midrash is based on this pasuk.]

This background explains the next pasuk, where Moshe goes back to the camp, and brings everyone back to the foot of the mountain (see 19:17). Now it's time to 'try it again'. Let's see what happens:
"And Har Sinai was full of smoke, for God had DESCENDED upon it in FIRE, and its smoke was like a furnace, and the entire mountain shook violently..." (see 19:18)

This pasuk certainly describes God's "hitgalut", and it appears to follow according to PLAN 'B'. Note how God's descends onto the mountain (note the word "va'yered" in both 19:11 and 19:18). Nevertheless, one could also understand the intense smoke as reflective of the protective 'cloud' described in 19:9 (Plan 'A').

The stage has now been set for Matan Torah. The people are standing at the foot of Har Sinai and God has revealed Himself - He has descended upon Har Sinai. Therefore, the next pasuk should describe God's proclamation of the Ten Commandments.

Let's examine that pasuk (19:19) carefully:
"The sound of the shofar grew louder and louder; as Moshe would speak, God would answer him with a KOL." (19:19)

This pasuk is quite ambiguous, for it does not give us even a clue as to WHAT Moshe was saying or what God was answering. It is not even clear as to WHOM Moshe is speaking, to God or to the people!

If Moshe is speaking to the people, then this pasuk would be describing how he conveyed the DIBROT. If so, then Moshe speaking and God responding with a "kol" - implies that the DIBROT were given according to PLAN 'A', as Moshe serves as the intermediary. [Compare with 19:9!]

However, if "Moshe y'daber" (in 19:19) refers to Moshe speaking to God, then it not at all clear what their conversation is about; nor can we make any deduction in regard to how the Dibrot were given! [Note the range of opinion among the commentators on this pasuk!]

PLAN 'B' - MYSTERIOUSLY MISSING!

Rashi's commentary on this pasuk is simply amazing. Again quoting the Midrash, Rashi claims that Moshe is speaking to the people, telling them the Dibrot! However, what's amazing is Rashi's explanation that the clause "Moshe y'daber..." describes the transmission of the LAST EIGHT Commandments, but not the first TWO. This is because Rashi understands that the first two DIBROT were given DIRECTLY from God - in accordance with PLAN 'B' - while the last eight were given via Moshe - in accordance with PLAN 'A'. As this pasuk (19:19) describes PLAN 'A' it could only be referring to the transmission of the last eight DIBROT!
[See also Rambam in Moreh N'vuchim II, chapter 33.]

Note that according to Rashi, chapter 19 intentionally OMITS two key events relating to Plan B:

1) Bnei Yisrael's original request for Plan B (in 19:9), &
2) The story of the two DIBROT given at the level of Plan 'B'.

For some thematic reason that remains unclear, chapter 19 prefers to omit these two important details, leaving us with the impression that Plan 'B' may have never taken place!

Ramban rejects Rashi's interpretation of 19:19 (as do many other commentators), arguing that 19:19 does NOT describe how the Dibrot were given. Instead, Ramban explains that "Moshe y'daber..." describes the conversation between God and Moshe that immediately follows in 19:20-25.
[As usual, Ramban prefers to keep the sequence of events according to the order of the psukim, while Rashi is willing to 'change' the order for thematic considerations.]

LIMITATION/ A FINAL WARNING

To better appreciate this "machloket" between Rashi and Ramban, we must examine the last set of psukim in chapter 19 (i.e. 19:20-25).
"God descended upon Mount Sinai to the TOP of the Mountain and summoned Moshe to the TOP of the Mountain, and Moshe ascended... Then God told Moshe: Go down and WARN the people lest they break through toward God to SEE, and many of them will perish. And even the KOHANIM who are permitted to come closer must prepare themselves..." (19:20-22)
[Btw, note that 20:25 refers to Moshe's conveying this warning to the people, NOT to his conveying the "DIBROT," as is commonly misunderstood. See Rashi!]

According to Ramban, this additional 'warning' is given BEFORE Matan Torah, and serves as the final preparation before the DIBROT are given. However, according to Rashi's interpretation, it remains unclear when, where, and why this conversation (in 19:20-25) takes place.
[Even though Rashi explains 19:19 as depicting the presentation of the DIBROT, he maintains that 19:20-25 takes place beforehand - for it relates to the ceremony described in 24:3-11, which Rashi himself claims to have occurred BEFORE the DIBROT. This "sugya" lies beyond the scope of our shiur.]

In any case, this final 'warning' clearly reflects the mode of transmission of the Dibrot that we have referred to as PLAN 'A' - God will appear only to Moshe (at the top of the mountain), while everyone else must keep their distance down below. Only Moshe will be privy to witness the descent of the "shechina" onto the TOP of the mountain, while Bnei Yisrael are prohibited from ascending to see, "lest they die."

As this section describes how God is now limiting His revelation to the top of the Mountain, we refer from now on to this section (19:20-25) as 'LIMITATION'.

Note how chapter 19 now divides into four distinct sections:

I. PROPOSITION (19:1-8)
II. PREPARATION (19:9-15)
III. REVELATION (19:16-19)
IV. LIMITATION (19:20-25)]

So what happened? Has God reverted to Plan 'A' (that Moshe is to act as an intermediary)? If so, why? On the other hand, if Plan 'B' remains in operation, why does God restrict His revelation to the TOP of the mountain? Could this be considered some sort of 'compromise'?

There appears to have been a change in plans, but why?

Even though chapter 19 does not seem to provide any explanation for what motivated this change, a story found later in chapter 20 seems to provide us with all the 'missing details'.

TREPIDATION [or 'FEAR' STORY ONE']

Towards the end of chapter 20, immediately after the Torah records the DIBROT, we find yet another story concerning what transpired at Har Sinai:
"And the people all saw the KOLOT, the torches, the sound of the SHOFAR and the mountain smoking; the people saw and MOVED BACK and stood at a distance. And they told Moshe: 'Why don't YOU SPEAK to us, and we will listen to you, but God should NOT SPEAK to us, lest we die.'
"Moshe responded saying: 'DO NOT BE FEARFUL, for God is coming to 'test' you and instill fear within you so that you will not sin.'
"But the people STOOD AT A DISTANCE, and Moshe [alone] entered the CLOUD where God was." (see 20:15-18)

This short narrative provides us with a perfect explanation for WHY God chooses to revert from PLAN 'B' back to PLAN 'A'. Here, the reason is stated explicitly: the people changed their mind because they were frightened and overwhelmed by this intense experience of "hitgalut."

But why is this story recorded in chapter 20? Should it not have been recorded in chapter 19?

Indeed, Ramban does place this story in the middle of chapter 19. Despite his general reluctance towards rearranging the chronology in Chumash, Ramban (on 20:14-15) explains that this entire parshia (20:15-18) took place earlier, BEFORE Matan Torah. Based on a textual and thematic similarities between 20:15-18 and 19:16-19 (and a problematic parallel in Devarim 5:20-28), Ramban concludes that the events described in 20:15-18 took place before Matan Torah, and should be read together with 19:16-18!

Thus, according to Ramban, the people's request to hear from Moshe (and not from God) that took place within 19:16-18, explains the need for the 'limitation' section that follows immediately afterward in 20:19-25. [See Ramban on 20:15.]

Rashi and Chizkuni offer a different interpretation. They agree with Ramban that 20:15-18 - the Fear Story - is 'out of place,' but they disagree concerning WHERE to put it. While Ramban places this story BEFORE Matan Torah, Rashi (based on his pirush to 19:19) & Chizkuni (on 20:15) claim that it took place DURING Matan Torah, BETWEEN the first two and last eight commandments.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS - FIRST OR THIRD PERSON

In fact, this creative solution solves yet another problem. It explains WHY the text of the Ten Commandments shifts from first to third person after the second commandment. Whereas the first two commandments (20:2-5) are written in FIRST person, indicating that God conveyed them DIRECTLY to the people [reflective of Plan 'B'], the last eight commandments (20:6-14) are written in third person, suggesting a less direct form of communication [reflective of Plan 'A']. This reflects Chazal's explanation that: "Anochi v'Lo Yihiyeh Lachem, m'pi ha'gvurah shma'um" - the first two commandments were heard directly from God (Makkot 24a); see also Chizkuni 20:2 and 20:15.]

Rashi and Chizkuni's explanation has a clear advantage over Ramban's, as it justifies the 'transplantation' of the Fear story (20:15-18) from its proper chronological location to after the Dibrot. Since this story took place DURING the Ten Commandments, the Torah could not record it beforehand. On the other hand, it could not have been recorded where it belongs (i.e. in between the second and third DIBROT), for the Torah does not want to 'break up' the DIBROT (whereas they form a single unit). Therefore, the Torah records this 'fear story' as a type of 'appendix' to the Ten Commandments, explaining afterward what happened while they were given.

To summarize, in chapter 19, it was unclear whether or not Bnei Yisrael would hear the DIBROT according to PLAN 'A' (as God originally had planned) or at the higher level of PLAN 'B' (as Bnei Yisrael requested). Later, in chapter 20, the Torah describes how Bnei Yisrael were frightened and requested to revert back to PLAN 'A'. Ramban claims that this 'fear story' took place BEFORE Matan Torah, and hence the people heard ALL Ten Commandments through Moshe (Plan 'A'). Rashi maintains that this story took place DURING the DIBROT; hence the first TWO DIBROT were transmitted according to PLAN 'B', while the remainder were heard according to PLAN 'A'.
[Ibn Ezra (see 20:15) takes an opposite approach, maintaining that the fear story is recorded right where it belongs; it took place only AFTER Matan Torah. Therefore, the people heard all Ten Commandments directly from God, as mandated by Plan 'B'.]

A PROOF FROM SEFER DEVARIM

Based on our discussion, we can resolve two adjacent yet seemingly contradictory psukim in the description of Matan Torah in Sefer Devarim:
"Face to face God spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire [PLAN 'B']. I stood BETWEEN God and you at that time to convey God's words to you [PLAN 'A'], for you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain..." (see Devarim 5:4-5)

Once again, the Torah incorporates BOTH PLANS in its description of Matan Torah. Evidently, both plans were in fact carried out, as we explained.

Although we have suggested several solutions to problems raised by chapters 19-20, a much more basic question arises: why can't the Torah be more precise? Why does the Torah appear to intentionally obscure the details of such an important event in our history?

AHAVA and YIRAH

One could suggest that this ambiguity is intentional, as it reflects the dialectic nature of man's encounter with God.

Man, in search of God, constantly faces a certain tension. On the one hand, he must constantly strive to come as close to God as possible ("ahava" - the love of God). On the other hand, he must constantly retain an awareness of God's greatness and recognize his own shortcomings and unworthiness ("yirah" the fear of God). Awed by God's infinity and humbled by his own imperfection, man must keep his distance (see Devarim 5:25-26!).

God's original plan for Matan Torah was 'realistic.' Recognizing man's inability to directly confront the "shechina," God intends to use Moshe as an intermediary (Plan 'A'). Bnei Yisrael, eager to become active covenantal partners, express their desire to come as close as possible to God. They want to encounter the "Shechina" directly, without any mediating agent (Plan 'B').

Could God say NO to this sincere expression of "ahavat Hashem"? Of course not! Yet, on the other hand, answering YES could place the people in tremendous danger, as they must rise to the highest levels of spirituality to deserve such a direct, unmediated manifestation of God.

While Plan 'B' may reflect a more 'ideal' encounter, Plan 'A' reflects a more realistic one. One could suggest that by presenting the details with such ambiguity, the Torah emphasizes the need to find the proper balance between this realism as well as idealism when serving God.

GOD KNOWS BEST

Although God knows full well that Bnei Yisrael cannot possibly sustain a direct encounter, He nonetheless concedes to their request to hear the Commandments directly. Why?

One could compare this Divine encounter to a parent-child relationship. As a child grows up, there are times when he wishes to do things on his own. Despite his clear incapability to perform the given task, his desire to accomplish is the key to his growth. A wise parent will allow his child to try, even though he knows that the child may fail - for it is better that one recognize his shortcomings on his own, rather than be told by others that he cannot accomplish.

On the other hand, although a child's desire to grow should not be inhibited by an overprotective parent, a responsible parent must also know when to tell his child STOP.

Similarly, God is well aware of Bnei Yisrael's unworthiness to encounter the Divine at the highest level. Nevertheless, He encourages them to aspire to their highest potential. As Bnei Yisrael struggle to maintain the proper balance between "ahava" and "yirah," God must guide and they must strive.

Our study of Parshat Yitro has shown us that what actually happened at Ma'amad Har Sinai remains unclear. However, what 'could have happened' remains man's eternal challenge.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. What would have happened had Bnei Yisrael said NO to God's proposition? The Midrash posits that had Bnei Yisrael rejected the offer, the world would have returned to "tohu va'vahu" (void) - the phrase used in Breishit 1:2 to describe the state prior to Creation! [See Shabbat 88a & Rashi 19:17.] From this Midrash, it appears that Bnei Yisrael had no choice but to accept. Why is the covenant binding, if Am Yisrael had no choice?

Any covenant, by its very nature, requires the willful acceptance of both parties. Therefore, according to "pshat," Bnei Yisrael have "bechira chofshit" to either accept or reject God's proposition. Their willful acceptance makes the covenant at Har Sinai binding for all generations. Thus, had Bnei Yisrael said NO (chas v'shalom), Matan Torah would not have taken place! However, such a possibility is unthinkable, for without Matan Torah there would have been no purpose for Creation. Therefore, because the psukim indicate that Bnei Yisrael had free choice, the Midrash must emphasize that from the perspective of the purpose behind God's Creation, the people had no choice other than accept the Torah.

B. Most m'forshim explain that "b'mshoch ha'yovel hay'mah ya'alu b'Har" (19:13) refers to the long shofar blast that signaled the COMPLETION of the "hitgalut" - an 'all clear' signal.

One could suggest exactly the opposite interpretation, that the long shofar blast indicated the BEGINNING of Matan Torah.

Explain why this interpretation fits nicely into the pshat of 19:11-15, that limiting access to the Mountain is part of the preparation for Matan Torah. [What does an 'all clear' signal have to do with preparation?] Explain as well why this would imply that during Matan Torah, Bnei Yisrael should have actually ascended Har Sinai!

Relate this to concept of PLAN 'B' and Bnei Yisrael's request to SEE the "Shchina." Relate to Devarim 5:5 in support of this interpretation. Why would "kol ha'shofar holaych v'chazak m'od" (19:19) be precisely what God meant by "b'mshoch ha'yovel."

Relate to "tachtit ha'har" in 19:17! Use this to explain why the psukim immediately following 19:19 describe God's decision to LIMIT his "hitgalut" to the TOP of the mountain.

C. Compare the details of 19:20-24 to the Mishkan: i.e. Rosh ha'har = kodesh kdoshim; Har = Mishkan; Tachtit Ha'har = azara, etc. Where can Moshe and Aharon enter? What about the Kohanim and the Am? Explain how this may reflect a bit of a 'compromise' between plans A & B.

D. You are probably familiar with Kabbalat Shabbat. Based on the above shiur, explain why our weekly preparation for Shabbat could be compared to Bnei Yisrael's original preparation for Matan Torah.

Relate this to the verses of "l'cho dodi" and its 'wedding like' imagery!

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND SOURCES

A. WHAT WERE "DIVREI HA'AM" in 19:9:

In the shiur we mentioned Rashi's interpretation (based on the Mechilta), that though the Torah does not state this explicitly, Bnei Yisrael insisted on hearing Hashem's word directly, rather than through a mediator. Moshe then reports this request to Hashem. This is also the implication of the Midrash in Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:2. We will briefly review some of the other interpretations offered to resolve the difficulty in this pasuk:

1. The **Abarbanel** takes the same general approach as Rashi, that Moshe here tells Hashem of the nation's desire to hear His word directly. However, he claims that this request actually appears in the psukim (whereas according to Rashi the Torah never records the people making this request).The Abarbanel claims that their acceptance of the "proposition" - "everything that Hashem said - we will do" - included their wish to hear Hashem directly. (He appears to interpret the clause, "im shamo'a tishm'u b'koli… ," which we generally explain to mean, "if you obey Me faithfully," as, "if you will hear My voice." Thus, when they accepted this proposition, they expressed the desire to hear Hashem's voice as well.

This approach appears more explicitly in the Netziv's He'amek Davar (19:8.) Hashem here tells Moshe that as not everyone is worthy of prophecy, He will speak to Moshe "b'av he'anan," which the Abarbanel explains as a physical voice, as opposed to the usual medium of prophecy, which involves none of the physical senses. (This understanding of "av he'anan" appears as well in the Or Hachayim and Malbim.) The nation will thus hear Hashem's voice without experiencing actual prophecy. Moshe then informs Hashem that the people want to hear Hashem speaking to them, rather than to Moshe. This general approach of the Abarbanel appears to be the intent of the Midrash Lekach Tov on our pasuk.

2. The **Ibn Ezra**, like Rashi, understands the "divrei ha'am" in this pasuk as referring to something not explicitly mentioned in the psukim. Whereas according to Rashi that something was the nation's desire to hear Hashem directly, the Ibn Ezra points to the skepticism on the part of segments of Bnei Yisrael. He claims

that "vayaged Moshe et divrei ha'am" means that Moshe had previously made this comment to Hashem, prior to the beginning of this pasuk. It thus turns out that Hashem speaks to Moshe here in response to his report of the "divrei ha'am." Moshe had reported that some among Bnei Yisrael do not believe that a human being can survive a revelation of Hashem; they therefore doubted the fact that Moshe had been appointed God's messenger. Hashem therefore tells Moshe that Ma'amad Har Sinai will result in "v'gam b'cha ya'aminu l'olam" - Bnei Yisrael's complete trust and faith in Moshe's prophecy.

3. Other Rishonim suggest that when Moshe "returns the nation's words to Hashem" (see 19:8) -he does not actually tell Hashem what the nation said; he merely returned to God with the intention of telling Him. It is only in 19:9 that Moshe actually told this to God (see Ibn Ezra in Shmot 19:23 citing Rav Sa'adya Gaon's claim that just as in his day people could not initiate conversation with a monarch, but must rather wait for the king to begin speaking with them, so did Moshe abstain from addressing God until after God spoke with him.)

This explanation is also suggested by Rav Sa'adya Gaon (as explained by Rabbenu Avraham Ben ha'Rambam, and Rabbi Yaakov of Vienna in "Imrei Noam"), the Ba'alei HaTosfot (as quoted in both Hadar Zekeinim and Da'at Zekeinim), Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor, and the Ramban. The Rashbam, too, appears to take this position.

[Two Midrashic interpretations of this pasuk appear in Masechet Shabbat 87a and in the Mechilta on our pasuk.]

This discussion surrounding 19:9 directly impacts another issue, one of the central points of our shiur: does Hashem introduce a "new plan" in psukim 10-11, after Moshe "reports the people's words" to Him? According to Rashi, as discussed at length in the shiur, He clearly did. The same is true according to the Abarbanel's approach. However, according to the second and third explanations quoted here, it would seem that Hashem is not describing here an alternate procedure. Indeed, the Ramban (on this pasuk) explains Hashem's original "plan" as having Bnei Yisrael watch as Hashem appears to Moshe. Thus, pasuk 11, in which Hashem says that He will descend "in the view of the nation," does not mark a change of plans. Similarly, in the introduction to his commentary to Shir Hashirim, as well as in his peirush to Shmot 3:12, the Ramban writes that Hashem's promise to Moshe at the burning bush, that Bnei Yisrael will "serve God on this mountain," involved their "beholding His glory face-to-face." This was God's intention all along.

B. PLAN A & PLAN B

In the shiur we worked with Rashi's view - i.e. God originally had planned to speak only to Moshe, as Bnei Yisrael listened in. In response to the nation's request, however, God switches to "plan B," by which He will address the nation directly.

An interesting variation on this theme is suggested by the Malbim. According to his explanation, plan B, which the people requested, involved their hearing directly from Hashem the entire Torah, not only the Ten Commandments. (The Ramban - 20:14 - writes that Bnei Yisrael feared that this was God's plan, though in actuality He had never intended to transmit the entire Torah to them directly.) Hashem initially agrees, but their sense of terror upon hearing the thunder and lightening signaling God's descent onto the mountain (19:16), and their consequent hesitation to go to the mountain ("vayotzei Moshe" - 19:17), reflected their unworthiness for this lengthy exposure to divine revelation. Hashem therefore presented them directly either the Ten Commandments or the first two. Only Moshe received the rest of the mitzvot directly from Hashem.

We should note that in contradistinction to our understanding of Rashi, the Maharal of Prague (in his Gur Aryeh to 19:9) explains Rashi to mean that Moshe simply confirms Hashem's plan. God tells him that He plans on revealing Himself to Moshe as the nation hears, and Moshe replies, "Indeed, this is what the people want." Apparently, the Maharal understands "hinei Anochi ba eilecha b'av he'anan… " to refer to the same level of "giluy Shechina" that actually occurs, such that there was never any change of plans. (According to the Maharal's approach, it turns out that there is no difference between the approaches of Rashi and the Ramban.)

C. "Moshe Yedaber Veha'Elokim Ya'anenu B'kol" (19:19)

As we saw, Rashi, following the Mechilta, understands this pasuk as referring to the procedure of the transmission of the Asseret Hadibrot. We also noted that the Ramban disagrees, claiming that it describes the manner in which the laws in the following psukim - concerning the "limitation" - were presented. This is the general approach of the Abarbanel and Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor, as well. The Ibn Ezra claims that the pasuk does not reveal what it is that Moshe says here, but it definitely does not refer to the Asseret Hadibrot. The point of the pasuk is to stress that despite the overpowering sound of the shofar, it did not interfere with Moshe's conversation with Hashem. The Or Hachayim writes that Moshe here spoke words of praise to Hashem, and He would then respond. According to all these views, this pasuk does not refer to Asseret Hadibrot, as Rashi claims.

A particularly interesting interpretation is suggested by the Malbim, Netziv and "Hadrash Veha'iyun" (though with some variation). They claim that the sound of the shofar proclaimed, "Moshe yedaber veha'Elokim ya'anenu b'kol." In other words, they place a colon after the word "me'od" in this pasuk. The shofar blast thus informed the people that Moshe will serve as the intermediary in between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael in transmitting the Torah.

D. What Did Bnei Yisrael Hear?

The issue of whether or not Bnei Yisrael heard Hashem speak at Ma'amad Har Sinai involves both parshanut and machshava. In terms of parshanut, as we discussed in the shiur, we must accommodate several psukim: in our parasha - 19:9, which, as discussed, implies that Hashem (at least originally) planned to speak to Moshe as the nation listened; 19:19 - "Moshe yedaber veha'Elokim ya'anenu be'kol," which, if it refers to the Asseret Hadibrot (a point debated by Rashi and the Ramban, as discussed in the shiur), points to the involvement of both Hashem and Moshe in the transmission of the Commandments to Bnei Yisrael; 20:15-18, where Bnei Yisrael retreat from fear; and the transition from second to third person after the second Commandment. We must also resolve the contradiction noted in the shiur between Devarim 4:4 and 4:5. Devarim 5:19-28 strongly implies that Hashem said all the dibrot to the people and then they asked Moshe to serve as an intermediary.

The philosophical issue involves the question as to whether an entire nation can experience prophecy, or is this reserved only for the spiritual elite who have adequately prepared themselves.

We briefly present here the basic positions that have been taken regarding this issue:

Ibn Ezra (20:1) and Abarbanel (here and in Devarim 5:4) maintain that Bnei Yisrael heard all Ten Commandments. This is also the majority view cited in Pesikta Rabbati 22, and the implication of the Yalkut Shimoni - Shir Hashirim 981. Although in Parshat Vaetchanan Moshe describes himself as having stood in between Hashem and the people serving as an intermediary, the Ibn Ezra there explains that this refers to the situation after the Dibrot, when Moshe conveyed the rest of the Torah to Bnei Yisrael.

It emerges from Rashi's comments to 19:19 and 20:1 that Hashem first uttered, as it were, all Ten Commandments in a single moment and then began repeating them one by one. After the second Dibra, however, Bnei Yisrael became too frightened and asked Moshe to serve as their intermediary. This is the position of the Chzikuni, and is found in an earlier source, as well - Midrash Asseret Hadibrot l'Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan, as cited by

Rav Menachem Kasher (Torah Shleima, vol. 16, miluim # 4). In his commentary to Masechet Brachot 12a, however, Rashi seems to imply that Bnei Yisrael in fact heard all Ten Commandments from Hashem.

The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 2:33) maintains that all Bnei Yisrael heard and understood the first two commandments (without any need for Hashem to repeat them). They then asked Moshe to hear the other commandments on their behalf; he therefore heard the last eight Dibrot and conveyed them to Bnei Yisrael. Though the Rambam claims that this is the view of Chazal, many later writers could not find any sources in Chazal corroborating this view. Rav Kasher, however, notes that this is the implication of the Mechilta as quoted by the Da'at Zekeinim mi'Ba'alei ha'Tosfot (20:1; the Mechilta is cited differently in other sources). The Rambam claims that since one can arrive at the first two Dibrot (the existence and singularity of God) through intellectual engagement, even without divine revelation, Bnei Yisrael understood these Dibrot as clearly as Moshe did. This philosophical point sparked considerable controversy and drew strong criticism from later rishonim and acharonim. See Sefer Ha'ikarim 17, the Abarbanel here and in Vaetchanan, Shut ha'Rashba 4:234, and Shnei Luchot Habrit - Masechet Shavuot.

The Ramban (on 20:6), explaining the Mechilta, claims that Bnei Yisrael heard all Ten Commandments but understood only the first two. Moshe then explained to them the final eight. The Sefer Ha'ikarim (ibid.) concurs with this view.

PARSHAT YITRO - Intro to 2nd half of Sefer Shmot

In Parshat Yitro, Chumash enters a new phase as its primary focus now shifts from its ongoing **narrative** to the **mitzvot** that Bnei Yisrael receive at Har Sinai. Nonetheless, the manner in which the Torah presents the **mitzvot** is far more exciting than we would expect. Instead of a formal [organized] 'shulchan aruch' style of presentation, Chumash records the **mitzvot** in a very special manner. In each of our shiurim from Parshat Yitro until Parshat Pekudei, our study of the sequence and progression of the mitzvot will be no less significant than the study of the mitzvot themselves!

INTRODUCTION - STRUCTURE AND THEME IN CHUMASH

When we study Chumash, we encounter two types of parshiot:

(1) Narrative, i.e. the ongoing story;

(2) Mitzvot, i.e. the commandments.

Until Parshat Yitro, i.e. **before** Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai, Chumash consisted primarily of narrative (e.g. the story of Creation, the Avot, Yetziat Mitzrayim etc.). In contrast, beginning with Parshat Yitro, we find many sections consisting primarily of 'mitzvot' (e.g. the Ten Commandments, the 'mishpatim' (chapters 21->23), laws of the mishkan (chapters 25->31), etc.).

The reason for this is quite simple. Sefer Breishit explained **why** and **how** God chose Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation. Sefer Shmot began by describing how God fulfilled His covenant with the Avot, and redeemed His nation from slavery in Egypt. Now, before this nation enters the Promised Land where they are to live as God's nation, they must first receive the set of laws [i.e. Matan Torah] that will facilitate their becoming God's special nation.

Assuming that Bnei Yisrael are to receive ALL of the mitzvot at Har Sinai before they continue on their journey, we would expect to find the following 'logical' order:

I. NARRATIVE

The story of the Exodus from Egypt until Bnei Yisrael's arrival at Har Sinai.

II. MITZVOT

ALL of the mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael receive at Sinai.

III. NARRATIVE

The story of Bnei Yisrael's journey from Har Sinai to the Promised Land.

However, instead of this clear and structured order, we find a much more complicated presentation. First, 'ten commandments' are given at a special gathering (i.e. Ma'amad Har Sinai). After a short narrative, we find an additional set of mitzvot - that comprise most of Parshat Mishpatim. At the end of Parshat Mishpatim, we find yet another short narrative (chapter 24), followed by seven chapters of mitzvot that detail how to build the Mishkan (Teruma / Tetzaveh). This lengthy set of mitzvot is followed by yet another narrative, which describes 'chet ha-egel' (32:1-34:10), which is then followed by yet another set of mitzvot (see 34:11-26), etc. In a similar manner, we find this pattern of a 'blend' of mitzvot and narrative in the rest of Chumash as well.

So why does the Torah present its mitzvot in this complex manner? Would it not have made more sense to present all of the mitzvot together in one organized unit (like 'shulchan aruch')?

In the answer to this question lies the basis for our approach to studying Chumash - for the intricate manner in which the Torah presents the mitzvot 'begs' us to pay attention not only to the mitzvot themselves, but also to the manner of their presentation. Therefore, as we study, we search for thematic significance in the order and sequence in which the Torah presents the mitzvot.

For example, the first step in our study will be to identify the specific topic of each 'parshia' and/or 'paragraph'. Then we analyze the progression of topic from one parshia to the next in search of a thematic reason for this progression.
[Following this methodology will also help us better appreciate the underlying reason for the various controversies among the classic commentators.]

CHRONOLOGY IN CHUMASH

This introduction leads us directly into one of the most intriguing exegetic aspects of Torah study - the chronological progression of 'parshiot' [better known as the sugya of 'ein mukdam u-me'uchar..'].

In other words, as we study Chumash, should we assume that it progresses according to the chronological order by which the events took place, **or**, should we assume that thematic considerations may allow the Torah to place certain parshiot next to each other, even though each 'parshia' may have been given at different times.

In this respect, we must first differentiate once again between 'narrative' and 'mitzvot'.

It would only be logical to assume that the ongoing narrative of Chumash follows in chronological order, (i.e. the order in which the events took place/ e.g. the story of Yitzchak will obviously follow the story of his father Avraham).

Nonetheless, we periodically may find that a certain narrative may conclude with details that took place many years later. For example, the story of the manna in Parshat Beshalach concludes with God's commandment that Moshe place a sample of the manna next to the Aron in the Mishkan. This commandment could only have been given **after** the Mishkan was completed, an event that does not occur until many months later. Nevertheless, because that narrative deals with the manna, it includes a related event, even though it took place at a later time.

The story of Yehuda and Tamar in Sefer Breishit is another example. See chapter 38, note from 38:11-12 that since Tamar waited for Shela to grow up, the second part of that story must have taken place at least thirteen years later, and hence **after** Yosef becomes viceroy in Egypt! Recall that he was sold at age 17 and solved Pharaoh's dream at age 30.

How about the 'mitzvot' in Chumash? In what order are they presented? Do they follow the chronological order by which they were first given?

Because the mitzvot are embedded within the narrative of Chumash, and not presented in one unbroken unit (as explained above), the answer is not so simple. On this specific issue, a major controversy exists among the various commentators; popularly

known as: "ein mukdam u-me'uchar ba-Torah" (there is no chronological order in the Torah).

Rashi, together with many other commentators (and numerous Midrashim), consistently holds that 'ein mukdam u-me'uchar', i.e. Chumash **does not necessarily** follow a chronological order, while Ramban, amongst others, consistently argues that 'yesh mukdam u-me'uchar', i.e. Chumash **does** follow a chronological order.

However, Rashi's opinion, 'ein mukdam u-me'uchar', should not be understood as some 'wildcard' answer that allows one to totally disregard the order in which Chumash is written. Rashi simply claims that a primary consideration for the order of the Torah's presentation of the mitzvot is thematic, more so than chronological. Therefore, whenever 'thematically convenient', we find that Rashi will 'change' the chronological order of mitzvot, and sometimes even events.

For example, Rashi claims that the mitzva to build the Mishkan, as recorded in Parshat Teruma (chapters 25->31) was first given only **after** the sin of the Golden Calf, even though that narrative is only recorded afterward (in Parshat Ki Tisa /chapter 32). Rashi prefers this explanation due to the thematic similarities between the Mishkan and the story of 'chet ha-egel'.

In contrast, Ramban argues time and time again that unless there is 'clear cut' proof that a certain parshia is out of order, one must always assume that the mitzvot in Chumash are recorded in the same order as they were originally given. For example, Ramban maintains that the commandment to build the Mishkan was given **before** 'chet ha-egel' **despite** its thematic similarities to that event!

It should be pointed out that there is a very simple reason why the Torah is written in thematic order, which is not necessarily chronological. Recall that the Torah (in the form that we received it) was given to us by Moshe Rabeinu before his death in the fortieth year in the desert. [See Devarim 31:24-25.] When Moshe Rabeinu first received the laws, he wrote them down in 'megilot' [scrolls]. However, before his death, he organized all of the laws that he received, and the various stories that transpired into the Five Books. [See Masechet Megilla 60a, and Rashi on "Megilla megilla nitna...". See also Chizkuni on Shmot 34:32! It's not clear from these commentators whether God told Moshe concerning the order by which to put these 'megillot' together, or if Moshe Rabeinu made those decisions himself. However, it would only be logical to assume that God instructed Moshe Rabeinu in this regard as well.]

Considering that Chumash, in its final form, was 'composed' in the fortieth year - we can readily understand why its mitzvot and narratives would be recorded in a manner that is thematically significant. Therefore, almost all of the commentators are in constant search of the deeper meaning of the juxtaposition of 'parshiot' and the order of their presentation.

WHEN DID YITRO COME (AND GO)?

Even though this controversy of 'mukdam u-me'uchar' relates primarily to 'parshiot' dealing with mitzvot, there are even instances when this controversy relates to the narrative itself. A classic example is found with regard to when Yitro first came to join Bnei Yisrael in the desert.

Recall how Parshat Yitro opens with Yitro's arrival at the campsite of Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai (see 18:5). The location of this 'parshia' in Sefer Shmot clearly suggests that Yitro arrives **before** Matan Torah, yet certain details found later in the 'parshia', (e.g. Moshe's daily routine of judging the people and teaching them God's laws/ see 18:15-17), suggests that this event may have taken place **after** Matan Torah.

Based on this and several other strong proofs, Ibn Ezra claims that this entire parshia took place **after** Matan Torah ('ein mukdam u-me'uchar'). Ramban argues that since none of those proofs are conclusive, the entire 'parshia' should be understood as taking place BEFORE Matan Torah (i.e. when it is written - 'yesh mukdam u-me'uchar..'.).

Rashi (see 18:13) suggests an interesting 'compromise' by 'splitting' the parshia in half! His opinion would agree with Ramban that Yitro first arrives **before** Matan Torah (18:1-12); however, the details found later (in 18:13-27), e.g. how Moshe taught the people etc. took place at a much later time. This interpretation forces Rashi to explain that the word 'mi-macharat' in 18:13 does not mean the 'next day', but rather the day after Yom Kippur (when Moshe came down from Har Sinai with the second Luchot), even though it was several months later.

But even Ibn Ezra, who maintains that the entire 'parshia' takes place after Matan Torah, must explain **why** the Torah records this 'parshia' here instead. Therefore, Ibn Ezra suggests a thematic explanation - based on the juxtaposition of this 'parshia' and the story of Amalek:

"...And now I will explain to you why this parshia is written here [out of place]: Because the preceding parshia discussed the terrible deeds of Amalek against Israel, now in contrast the Torah tells us of the **good** deeds that Yitro did for Am Yisrael..." [see Ibn Ezra 18:1]

The dispute concerning 'When Yitro came' illustrates some of the various methodological approaches we can take when confronted with apparent discrepancies. In general, whenever we find a 'parshia' which appears to be 'out of order', we can either:

1) Attempt to keep the chronological order, then deal with each problematic detail individually.

2) Keep the chronological order up until the first detail that is problematic. At that point, explain why the narrative records details that happen later.

3) Change the chronological order, and then explain the thematic reason why the Torah places the 'parshia' in this specific location.

MA'AMAD HAR SINAI

Let's bring another example in Parshat Yitro, from the most important event of our history: 'Ma'amad Har Sinai' - God's revelation to Am Yisrael at Mount Sinai.

[Matan Torah - the giving of the Ten Commandments at Har Sinai, together with the events which immediately precede and follow it (chapters 19->24), are commonly referred to as 'Ma'amad Har Sinai'.]

As we explained in our introduction, this 'ma'amad' can be divided between its basic sections of narrative and mitzva:

19:1-25 [Narrative] - Preparation for the Ten Commandments
20:1-14 [Mitzvot] - The Ten Commandments
20:15-18 [Narrative] - Bnei Yisrael's fear of God's revelation
21:19-23:33 [Mitzvot] - Additional mitzvot ('ha-mishpatim')
24:1-11 [Narrative] - The ceremonial covenant
(better known as 'brit na'aseh ve-nishma')

Note that Bnei Yisrael's declaration of 'na'aseh ve-nishma' takes place during the ceremonial covenant recorded at the end of Parshat Mishpatim (see 24:7). In Parshat Yitro, when Bnei Yisrael accept God's proposition to keep His Torah, the people reply only with 'na'aseh' (see 19:8).

If we would follow the simple order of these parshiot (see above table), we would have to conclude that the 'na'aseh ve-nishma' ceremony took place **after** Matan Torah. Nevertheless, Rashi [and most likely your first Chumash teacher] changes the order of the 'parshiot' and claims that this ceremony actually took place **before** Matan Torah. Why?

Rashi ('ein mukdam u-me'uchar') anchors his interpretation in the numerous similarities between chapter 19 and chapter 24. Therefore, he combines these two narratives together. [However, one must still explain the reason why they are presented separately.]

Ramban ('yesh mukdam u-me'uchar') prefers to accept the chronological order of the 'parshiot' as they are presented in Chumash, and explains that this ceremony takes place after Matan Torah.

This dispute causes Rashi and Ramban to explain the details of chapter 24 quite differently. For example, during that ceremony, recall how Moshe reads the 'sefer ha-brit' in public (see 24:7).

According to Rashi, 'sefer ha-brit' cannot refer to any of the mitzvot recorded in Yitro or Mishpatim, as they had not been given yet - therefore Rashi explains that it refers to all of Chumash from Breishit until Matan Torah!

According to Ramban, 'sefer ha-brit' refers to the Ten Commandments. This topic will be discussed in greater detail in next week's shiur on Parshat Mishpatim.

In this week's regular Parsha shiur (sent out yesterday), we discuss in greater detail the events that transpire in chapter 19.

Parshas Yitro: Aseret Hadibrot: The Ten Commandments

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. ASERET HAD'VARIM

The 'Aseret haDibrot ("Ten Commandments", as they are [inaccurately] called [see below]), have always been a source of tension and conflict in Judaism. On the one hand, the Torah explicitly states that the 'Aseret haDibrot comprise the covenant between God and the B'nei Yisra'el (see Sh'mot 34:28, D'varim 4:13). Yet, throughout our history, we have fought those religious approaches that maintain that only these "Ten Commandments" were Divinely given and continue to maintain that the entire Torah, from the Bet of B'resheet, is from God. (This difficulty is what led to the abandonment of the daily public reading of the 'Aseret haDibrot – see BT Berakhot 12a and JT Berakhot 1:5. See also the famous Response of Rambam [#233] to the question of standing up for the public reading of the 'Aseret haDibrot).

Before moving on, a word about the faulty translation of Aseret haDibrot – "Ten Commandments". First of all, this group of Divine commands is not referred to by any numerical grouping until later in Sh'mot (34:28) – where it is called 'Aseret haD'varim – the Ten Statements. The other references in the Torah use the same wording and Rabbinic literature constantly refers to 'Aseret haDibrot (Rabbinic Dibrot being roughly equivalent to the Toraic D'varim).

The word Commandment – (Heb. Mitzvah) implies a Divine directive which either obligates or restricts us. Eating Matzah on Pesach night, avoiding stealing, studying Torah and avoiding eating impure animals (e.g. pigs) are all Mitzvot – Commandments. Each separate action which is obligated or forbidden constitutes an independent Mitzvah (although there are significant debates as to the number of Mitzvot included in some commands which have two separate actions; e.g. hand and head T'fillin, morning and evening K'riat Sh'ma); several Mitzvot may be included in one paragraph, even in one sentence or phrase in the Torah. When we read through the first section of the 'Aseret haDibrot, we find four or five distinct commands (depending on whether we reckon the opening statement as a Mitzvah – see Ramban and, alternatively, Avrabanel on Sh'mot 20:2). It is not only a poor translation to render this group of statements as Ten Commandments – it is also inaccurate. There are between 13 and 15 Mitzvot within the 'Aseret haDibrot. In order to avoid inaccuracies or clumsiness, we will just refer to these verses as 'Aseret haDibrot throughout this shiur.

II. COUNTING UP TO "TEN"

Once we have established the proper translation and understanding – we need to analyze the numeric reality here: If there are ten statements here, where does #1 end, where does #2 end etc.? Convention maintains the following breakdown [I suggest that you follow with a Humash open]:

I. I am Hashem…house of slaves; II. You shall have no other gods…my Mitzvot. III. You shall not take the Name…in vain. IV. Remember…and made it holy. V. Honor…gives you. VI. Don't murder. VII. Don't commit adultery VIII. Don't steal/kidnap (see below) IX. Don't commit perjury X. Don't covet.

This breakdown, which is familiar to us (e.g. the common references to murder as "the sixth commandment [sic]") and which is thematically strong (each statement is a different idea or theme), has one difficulty. First, a bit of terminology. The word "Parashah", which we commonly use to denote a particular week's Torah reading, actually means "paragraph". The Torah, in its Halakhically valid format (in a scroll), is not written with vowels or punctuation – but the Parashiot are separated. Some Parashiot are separated by a partial- line space (Parashah S'tumah), others by a skip to the next line (Parashah P'tuchah).

After being informed that there were Ten Statements that we heard at Sinai (34:28), if we look back at this group of statements we see ten Parashiot – as follows:

I. I am Hashem…my Mitzvot II. Do not take…in vain. III. Remember…and made it holy. IV. Honor…gives you. V. Don't murder. VI. Don't commit adultery VII. Don't steal/kidnap (see below) VIII. Don't commit perjury against your fellow IX. Don't covet your fellow's house X. Don't covet your fellow's…all that belongs to your fellow

The difference is telling – the first statement includes the command to believe in God (as most Rishonim understand the first line) and the prohibitions against idolatry. Oddly enough, coveting, which is the most difficult Mitzvah to explain here, becomes 2 of the 10 statements!
There is yet a third possibility – which I will sketch briefly.

In BT Makkot 23b, we read the famous passage: R' Simlai expounded: We were given 613 Mitzvot at Sinai; as is says: Torah tzivah lanu Mosheh… – and the numeric value of Torah is 611 – (meaning, Moshe commanded us 611 Mitzvot) – and Anokhi vLo Yih'hey lekha ("I am…" and "you shall have no other…." we heard from the Almighty. (= 613)

This distinction, between the first two Dibrot (or first statement – as above) and the rest seems to be based on the grammatical difference – the first two Dibrot are phrased in the first person – "I am Hashem your God…You shall have no other gods before Me…"; however, this distinction obtains throughout the entire second statement. Based on the grammar, we heard this section from God directly – but there are 4 or 5 Mitzvot (depending on your position on "I am…" as Mitzva or not -see Avrabanel, question 7 on this section) in these Dibrot:

1) belief in God 2) not to maintain idols (or beliefs in other gods) 3) not to fashion them 4) not to worship them 5) not to bow down to them.

Which means that besides the 611 taught to us by Moshe, we heard another 4 or 5 from the Almighty Himself. This difficulty might be sidestepped if we break down the statements a bit differently – but it would mean ignoring the grammar of the rest of the "you shall have no other…" statement. (see Ramban s.v. Lo Tisa (20:7) for an explanation of the grammatical switch in the middle of the Dibrot).
I. I am Hashem…before Me; II. You shall make no image…my Mitzvot. III.-X (as above)

In any case, we often refer to the "Ten Commandments" as if their meaning and structure is obvious – and, as noted, it is anything but. There are at least three different ways to break the statements down and we have various ways of interpreting the meaning and import of the various statements.

III. 10 –> 613?

That these 'Aseret haDibrot hold a special place in our historic and religious consciousness goes without saying; the two stone tablets, carved by God and including a graphic version of these Ten Statements were placed in the central vessel of the Mishkan (Sanctuary) – see Sh'mot 25:16. The question must be asked – why these ten? What is so special about these ten statements (and the 13-15 Mitzvot included therein) which merit their unique and sanctified place in revelation and on the tablets?

There have been many approaches which suggest that these ten statements serve as an outline for the Torah; that each of them is a super-category under which other Mitzvot are subsumed – such that all 613 Mitzvot are included (conceptually) in these 'Aseret haDibrot. See, for instance, JT Shekalim 6:1, Rashi on Sh'mot 24:12, R' Sa'adiah Ga'on's Azharot, Ralbag on Sh'mot 20 following v. 14. Perhaps the earliest source for this idea is Philo's De Decalogo.

Although these approaches have much to recommend them, there are some obvious difficulties they generate. In order to "include" all of the commands relating to forbidden foods, the Mishkan, the Kehunah (Priesthood), agricultural laws etc. – we have to utilize a lot of exegetical imagination. Besides this difficulty, the inclusion of "coveting" here is problematic – since it is no way a "category of Mitzvot". There are no Mitzvot which command a limitation of desire – just self-restraint against acting on that desire. (The entire subject of coveting is problematic – see MT Hilkhot Gezelah va'Avedah 1:9).

I would like to suggest another approach to understanding the 'Aseret haDibrot which explains the inclusion of specifically these Ten Statements in the revelation and on the tablets. There are three premises which must be established regarding the 'Aseret haDibro:

IV. PREMISE A: UNDERSTANDING THE MESSAGE MEANS UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

We study Torah in great depth and with passion not only because we are commanded to do so, but also (and perhaps chiefly) because we believe that the Torah, although 3000+ years old addresses and directs us here and today. (I am referring to the non-Halakhic sections of Torah; it goes without saying that the behavior which we are duty-bound to fulfill by virtue of our participation in the Sinaitic covenant is relevant to us at all times. Even those commandments which are not practically implementable today have great significance.) If we are to understand the Torah properly, we have to begin by understanding the time-frame, circumstances and original target audience to whom it was addressed. Just like it is impossible to understand the import of Yeshayahu's message without understanding the background of court-sanctioned oppression in Yehudah, or Eliyahu's message without understanding the nature of Ahav's monarchy and syncretistic worship – similarly, we cannot understand the impact and "message" of the Torah without taking into account the reality of the B'nei Yisra'el at this time in history. By integrating what we know about them and their circumstances at this specific point in time, we can grasp the "ur- message" and learn to apply it to our own lives. [We might consider this a parallel to understanding Halakhic concepts in order to apply them to modern appliances]. It is therefore incumbent upon us to take into account the situation and knowledge of the B'nei Yisra'el prior to their arrival at Sinai in order to understand the 'Aseret haDibrot more fully.

V. PREMISE B: THE DIBROT WERE "INTERRUPTED"

If we look at the verses immediately following the 'Aseret haDibrot, we see that the B'nei Yisra'el could not take the intense experience of direct Divine revelation and asked Mosheh to go up to God to get the rest of the Torah and relay it to them:

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Mosheh , "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." Mosheh said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." Then the people stood at a distance, while Mosheh drew near to the thick darkness where God was. (20:15-18) In other words, the original plan was for the people to hear more than just these 'Aseret haDibrot; whether they should have heard the entire Torah or just the rest of Sefer haB'rit (through 23:19) is unclear. What is implicit in these verses is that it was the people's fear that interrupted the revelation and "changed the rules" such that Mosheh would receive the rest of the revelation alone and transmit it to the people.
This would also explain an interesting switch in terminology in the Torah relating to the Tablets. Whereas they are called Luchot haB'rit – "the Tablets of the Covenant" in one section of Sefer D'varim (9:9-15), they have a different name in reference to their placement in the Mishkan:

You shall put into the ark the Edut (testimony) that I shall give you. (25:16). These tablets are called Edut because they testify to the Revelation. In other words, these 'Aseret haDibrot were not committed to graphic representation on the tablets because of their inherent importance, but rather as a testimony to the Revelation which every member of the B'nei Yisra'el had experienced (see the S'forno on 24:12). Had the B'nei Yisra'el "withstood" the fear and heard more of the Torah directly from God, perhaps the whole Torah would have been given in stone by the Hand of God – or perhaps none would have been carved (there would be no need for a physical representation of the Revelation – whose purpose may be to validate the rest of the Mosheh-only Revelation – if all of the Torah had been given directly to the B'nei Yisra'el). This – we will never know.

One conclusion we can draw from this is that instead of viewing the 'Aseret haDibrot as categories or an "outline of Torah", we may view them as the FIRST ten statements to be given to the B'nei Yisra'el. In other words, instead of seeing the 'Aseret haDibrot as (the) ten chapter headings of the covenant, let's see them as the "first ten pages" of that covenant.

VI. PREMISE C: TWO VERSIONS MUST BE INTEGRATED

As we all know, there are two versions of the 'Aseret haDibrot in the Torah. Besides those appearing in our Parashah (20:2-14), they are "repeated" by Mosheh to the new generation in D'varim (5:6-18). Although the two versions are structurally alike, there are some significant differences between them – especially in the Dibber about Shabbat. Rabbinic tradition – and a simple reading of the text – mandates that both versions were given at Sinai. For example, the notion that Shamor (D'varim) and Zakhor (Sh'mot) were said in one voice is not only p'shat – it is also Halakhically meaningful

(see BT Berakhot 20b). In order to fully understand the impact of the ‘Aseret haDibrot, we have to integrate both versions. [A modern-day analogy to this would be taking a stereo recording and isolating each channel – first listening to the left channel with the strings and horns, then listening to the right channel with the percussion and vocals; God gave us “stereo” at Sinai (at least), and each “channel” was written separately. The harmonic “reality” can only be understood when integrated.]

In summary: We must understand these ‘Aseret haDibrot through the eyes and ears of the B’nei Yisra’el at that time; we must understand them as the “opening” of the covenant as opposed to its “outline” and we must integrate both versions in order to comprehend the impact and import of this Revelation.

VII. THE FIRST DIBROT: INTRODUCTION TO GOD

Although there are some (relatively minor) differences between the two presentations of the first few Dibrot (I am…you shall have no other gods…you shall not take the Name…in vain), we are on fairly safe ground examining them as one consistent unit (see Ramban s.v. Zakhor). As the “first page” in the covenant, it is clear that the two parties to the contract need to be introduced. The B’nei Yisra’el have seen God as a warrior (see 15:3) and have been witness to His power in Egypt and on the sea – but could have been misled (based on their experience with Egyptian culture and religion) to believe that there is one God who fights for them, another who meets them in this cloud of glory etc. Therefore – the first statement for them to hear is “I am Hashem who took you out of Egypt” – the same God who fought your wars and fed you in the desert. (See Ibn Ezra on this verse and his explanation of why the introduction isn’t “Who created heaven and earth”).

As part of this introduction, a sharp divide must be made between the way the gods were worshipped in Egypt and the way Hashem is to be served. Images, physical representations of any sort – even those resembling His noblest creations – are absolutely forbidden. God’s glory is represented not through an image or representation – but through His Name. You must not only avoid any syncretism (worship of other gods along with Hashem), you must also avoid trying to represent or depict God – He is beyond imagery. The only way to understand Him is through His Name (however that is to be understood – perhaps it means that just as a Name is purely for external interaction, so the only way to understand God is through His actions with us. We refer to Him as “merciful” not because that’s who He is, but because that is how He manifests Himself to us).

This pattern – the obliteration and impossibility of idolatry and fetishes followed by a deep reverence for God’s Name – is found in the opening verses of D’varim 12.

VIII. TWO ASPECTS OF SHABBAT

As mentioned above, the two versions of the “Shabbat Statement” vary greatly:

(Sh’mot):Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to Hashem your God; you shall not do any work; you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days Hashem made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore Hashem blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

(D’varim): Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as Hashem your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work.But the seventh day is a sabbath to Hashem your God; you shall not do any work; you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore Hashem your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

* Difference #1: Zakhor – “remember” (Sh’mot) / Shamor – “observe” (D’varim);

* Difference #2: “…as Hashem your God commanded you.” (D’varim only)

* Difference #3: "…so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you." (D'varim only)

* Difference #4: Commemoration of Creation (Sh'mot)/Commemoration of Exodus (D'varim)
In order to understand these differences – and the propriety of Shabbat following the "introductory" dibrot – let's begin by focusing on the second difference. In D'varim, we are told that Shabbat was already commanded by God. To what is this referring? It certainly can't be referring to the earlier version of the 'Aseret haDibrot, since that statement would be true for all Ten Statements. If this is the case – then "…as Hashem your God commanded you" should have either appeared in all ten statements or at the very beginning or end of the series.

Some of the Rishonim cite the well-known Gemara (BT Sanhedrin 56b) that we were commanded regarding Shabbat at Marah (Sh'mot 15:22-26); however, if this is the case, why doesn't the Torah make the same statement in the Sh'mot version of the 'Aseret haDibrot? I believe that what these Rishonim – and the Gemara itself (in the name of R. Yehudah) intend is as follows:

There are two aspects to Shabbat. On the one hand, Shabbat is a day of cessation of labor – set up in a special way to reflect a humane approach to those who work with and for us. The Torah commands us not only to avoid working, but to make sure that our servants "rest as well as you". This is commemorative of an overt experience of the Exodus – that even though we were enslaved to the Egyptians, we must not fall prey to the human tendency to "pass on the pain" and inflict the same bad treatment upon our (future) servants. This particular aspect was already commanded – in the desert, regarding the Mahn (Mannah). We were commanded to only take enough Mahn for one day for each member of our household – reflecting a sensitivity to others (if we took more than our share, someone else would suffer) and a faith in God that He would provide. On Friday of that week, we found a double portion and were commanded to prepare today everything we would need for these two days and not to go out and collect it on the morrow. In other words, Shabbat is a day of cessation of social and financial competition and accumulation – and this had already been commanded. (See R. Hirsch's comments in D'varim and at the end of Sh'mot 16:20).

There is another side to Shabbat, which also relates to the Exodus – although more covertly than the first aspect. Shabbat is not only a commemoration of the Exodus and a behavioral reminder and guide to proper and dignified treatment of others – it is also a commemoration of creation. The entire debate/polemic between Mosheh and Pharaoh that led to our Exodus was about God's ultimate power and control over His world. The commemoration and remembrance of Shabbat (Zakhor) is a weekly testimony to God as creator, as evidenced by the plagues in Egypt. (Note that this version open up with virtually the same wording as the Mitzvah to commemorate the Exodus (13:3); from here our Rabbis learn that the Exodus must be mentioned in the Kiddush of Shabbat – BT Pesahim 117b)
In other words, as we move to the next stage of the B'rit, we are not receiving a "new" command; on the one hand, an older Mitzvah (dating back two to three weeks to the first week of the Mahn) is being reinforced while another aspect, one which is also part of our most recent experience of the Exodus, is being integrated into that same day of cessation/commemoration.

IX. TWO ASPECTS OF KIBBUD AV VA'EM

Regarding the next Statement (honoring parents), we have two problems: Why is this statement here at all, and why is it given the same "…as Hashem your God commanded you" as Shabbat – again, only in D'varim?

I'd like to suggest that not only are there two underlying motivations for Kibbud Av va'Em – as we defined regarding Shabbat – but that both of them have direct associations with the Exodus. As such, this Mitzvah quite properly belongs at the beginning of the B'rit.
When we were first commanded to celebrate the Pesach and thereby save the B'khorot (firstborn), God commanded us to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. This celebration was commanded to be done by families. This may not seem very noteworthy to us, but keep in mind the Halakhah that Eved ein lo hayyis (a slave has no Halakhically meaningful family relationships – BT Kiddushin 69a), and that slave life does not admit to family as a priority. The notion that we were commanded to celebrate with our families indicates an obligation to recognize the fact of family as a unique and special circle around us – which was not necessarily the norm in Egypt. In this sense, we were very much commanded to honor parents – for the most basic level of honor is the recognition that our relationship with them goes

beyond the biological and genetic. (See the Gemara in Sanhedrin ibid. where the same Marah-association is made with Kibbud Av va'Em – I believe that our explanation fits nicely with that and is not a challenge to it. Perhaps at Marah, but most certainly at the Mahn, we gathered water and food by families and households!)

There is another underlying motivation for parental honor which is most certainly part of the Exodus – but which is more covert in the experience. Almost anyone standing at Sinai was the product of several generations of slaves – generations which could easily have given up in despair and ceased reproducing. Much as the brave stories from the ghettos of WWII, the faith and tenacity with which the B'nei Yisra'el continued to raise families was heroic – and was the direct cause for the Exodus. God could never have taken a non-existent people out of Egypt! For them to be "redeemable", they had to exist and that debt of gratitude had to be paid to parents.
So far, we have seen two areas of Mitzvah (Shabbat includes at least three Mitzvot between the two versions) which directly build upon commandments or experiences of the recent past. We will now see that the rest of the Statements came to deflect the B'nei Yisra'el from behavior which was most likely for them to be drawn to – again, as a result of their most recent experiences.

X. MURDER-ADULTERY – KIDNAPPING/STEALING

The B'nei Yisra'el had not only been the victims of genocide, seeing their own babies thrown into the Nile, but they had also been witness to the destruction and murder of much of Egyptian society. The Torah is sensitive to the notion that our environment affects us and that our (even necessary) involvement in war can lead to a significant lowering of our moral compass. Witness the specific commands regarding the sanctity of the Mahaneh – war camp (See Ramban's commentary on D'varim 23:10). We had just arrived at Sinai fresh from our first war (against Amalek) – and had to be warned that in spite of what was done to us and in spite of what we had just been commanded to do (defend ourselves), human life is still sacred and we must never lose that awareness: Lo Tirtzach – Do Not Murder.

It is often the fate of slaves (or any "lower class") that they dream of overturning the oppressive class and allowing themselves the freedoms enjoyed by their overlords (Orwell's Animal Farm is a good example). As we are told in Vayyikra (Leviticus) 18, Egyptian society was promiscuous in the extreme and practiced every kind of sexual abomination. Coming from this type of society, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of the B'nei Yisra'el would have thought about "enjoying" such activities. After commanding us regarding proper respect for parents, the Torah commands us about the sanctity of the marital bond. Therefore, the next step in the B'rit is: Lo Tin'af – Do Not Commit Adultery.

[Parenthetic note: The "Halakhic p'shat" of the next Statement is "Do Not Kidnap". This is learned from context (see Rashi ad loc.); since the other statements all carry the possibility of capital punishment, this one must also include a capital crime. The only type of "stealing" which involves the potential for capital punishment is kidnapping.]
People who have been treated badly usually have one of two reactions (and often both at the same time) – they either wish to continue to be subjugated (note the difficulty that many long-term prisoners have with managing their own lives) or they wish to subjugate others. This would be especially true of slaves, who have been used for material gain with no regard for their humanity. We might have reacted in one of these ways, subjugating others or looking for others to subjugate us. Whereas God prohibits the latter – after a fashion – in its earlier prohibition of idolatry, He prohibits the former here. Therefore, the Torah commands us to restrain ourselves from using others for our own material gain: Lo Tignov – Do Not Kidnap.

XI. THE NEW SOCIAL CIRCLE: RE'AKHA'

In the final Dibrot, we are introduced to a new term: Re'akha – your fellow. This word obviously plays a significant role here as it shows up four times within these last couple of lines. I believe that both the significance of this word and of the mention of these Mitzvot at the beginning of the B'rit may be understood in light of an event that took place several months earlier in Egypt:
[God tells Mosheh:] …"Tell the people that every man is to ask Re'ehu (his neighbor) and every woman is to ask R'utah (her neighbor) for objects of silver and gold." (Sh'mot 11:2)

We were commanded to "borrow" the gold and silver of the Egyptians, who are called, ironically, our Re'im. This act consituted both deception and coveting. [A note about coveting: To covet something does not mean that you see your

neighbor with a new car and you want one just like it – that may just be good taste. Coveting is when you want THAT car – his car. It relates more to your appreciation – or lack thereof – of his ownership and property than about what you want.] We weren't told to get gold – but to get it from the Egyptians. It wasn't as much an issue of having great possessions (see B'resheet 15:14) as much as "emptying Egypt out" (Sh'mot 3:22, 12:36).
Now we are commanded that our new Re'im – every other member of the Covenant – must be treated differently. Besides being a Kingdom of Kohanim, we are also slated to be a "Holy Nation" (see 19:6). In order for this to take place, we have to reshape our attitudes towards neighbors and fellows and create a just society based on law: Lo Ta'aneh v'Re'akha Ed Shaker – Do Not Bear False Witness Against Your Fellow.

We must also respect the rights and property of our fellows: Lo Tahmod…v'Khol Asher l'Re'ekha: "Do Not Covet…nor Anything Which Belongs To Your Fellow."

It is most poignant that these 'Aseret haDibrot conclude with that key word – Re'akha, reminding us of how differently we need to behave towards our covenantal fellows than we did to our neighbors in Egypt.

Parshat Yitro: Moshe's Management Consultant

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Our parasha splits neatly into two parts. It's easy to guess which part has all the action, and therefore usually gets all the attention:

1) The visit of Yitro, Moshe Rabbeinu's father-in-law, to the camp of the Bnei Yisrael.
2) The revelation of the Decalogue (the so-called "Ten Commandments").

There's no question that the Decalogue has all the action: it's not every day that Hashem descends on a mountain amid lightning and thunder to deliver life-instructions to three million people! Besides the drama of the scene, this part of the parasha is the "fireworks" in other senses: theologically, religiously, and nationally, Matan Torah (the giving of the Torah) changes our nation and the course of world history.

You've got to feel some 'sympathy' for the other half of the parasha, the half for which the parasha is named, which tells a story with no "fireworks": no juicy story of conflict, no dramatic divine revelation, no eloquent speech. The story of Yitro's visit doesn't excite us much. It doesn't even seem very important. Distracted by the fanfare of the revelation, we tend to neglect Yitro's visit. Perhaps the parasha is named after Yitro just to remind us that this part of the parasha exists!

As parasha-contrarians, always looking for neglected areas of the Torah, we will be looking away from the dramatic scene of the giving of the Torah to see what we can learn from the story of Yitro's visit.

YITRO'S VISIT:

The Torah focuses on three separate themes in recounting Yitro's visit:

1) Yitro returns Moshe's family (wife and two sons) to him, after an unspecified period of apartness.
2) Yitro reacts joyfully to the news of the miracles Hashem has performed for Bnei Yisrael.
3) Yitro suggests setting up a judicial system / government to share the burden of leadership with Moshe.

We will focus on the last of these themes: Yitro's suggestion to set up a system resembling a government. At this point, it is crucial to read through the text of the section:

SHEMOT 18:13-27 --

The next day [i.e., the day after Yitro's arrival at Bnei Yisrael's camp], Moshe sat to judge the people. The people stood before Moshe from morning till night.

Moshe's father-in-law saw what he was doing to the people and said, "What are you doing to the people? Why do you sit alone, and all of the people stand before you from morning till night?"

Moshe said to his father-in-law, "The people come to me to seek Hashem ["Elokim"]. If they have a matter, they come to me; I judge between man and his fellow, and I teach the laws of Hashem and His instructions."

Moshe's father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will tire yourself out -- you and the people with you, because it is too much for you. You cannot do it alone! Now, hear me, let me advise you, and may Hashem be with you: you should represent the people before Hashem and bring matters to Hashem [when necessary]. Warn them of the laws and instructions, teach them the path they should follow and what they should do.

"Choose from among the entire nation men of valor who fear Hashem, men of truth, haters of ill-gotten profit, and appoint them as officers of a thousand [men], a hundred, fifty, and ten. They should judge the people at all times; they should bring all important matters to you, but they should judge all minor matters.

"Lighten your load -- they will bear it with you! If you do this, and Hashem commands you so, then you will be able to stand, and all of these people will get to where they are going in peace!"
Moshe listened to his father-in-law and did all that he said. Moshe chose men of valor from among the whole nation and placed them as heads of the people -- ministers of a thousand, a hundred, fifty, and ten. They judged the people at all times; they brought the difficult matters to Moshe and judged the small matters themselves. Moshe sent off his father-in-law, and he went to his land.

THE CORPORATE METAPHOR:

If you're familiar with the business world, you may recognize Yitro as a "management consultant" and Moshe as the CEO (of a not-for-profit organization, of course). The consultant is supposed to be an outsider to the company, just as Yitro is not a member of Bnei Yisrael. The Torah notes Yitro's outsider status at the beginning of the parasha by referring to him not just as Moshe's father-in-law, but as the "Kohen Midyan," the Priest of Midyan; his own loyalties are elsewhere. This is important: sometimes it takes an outsider to notice things insiders don't notice. Once you're part of an environment, you begin to see its problems as part of "the way things are around here." It can take an outsider's fresh perspective to awaken insiders to problems which can be solved and motivate them to act. Also, insiders are often part of the problem! And an outsider can be more effective as a consultant because he or she may feel more comfortable offering criticism (and will not suffer consequences later from vengeful coworkers or superiors).

Just to string the "corporate metaphor" along a bit further, Sefer BeMidbar (10:29-33) tells us that Moshe invites Yitro to join Bnei Yisrael in the march to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe promises that if he joins them, he will share in all the benefits Bnei Yisrael receive from Hashem. In corporate terms, this is what happens when the CEO is so pleased with the management consultant's work and so impressed with his insight that he offers him a permanent job at the company. The CEO promises that the consultant will enjoy all the benefits that the most privileged company employees receive. Yitro's decision not to join Bnei Yisrael is the management consultant's demurral to change loyalties and tie himself to the company for which he has consulted. He does his job and goes home; he is impressed by Bnei Yisrael's support system -- Hashem and His miracles -- but he doesn't want to join the team. (Note, however, that some commentators assume that Yitro does accept the offer in the end and does join Bnei Yisrael.)

INTERVIEWING THE CEO:

Yitro, the "management consultant," opens the conversation reported above. He 'interviews' the 'CEO' and asks him how he would describe his job:

"Moshe's father-in-law saw what he was doing to the people and said, 'What are you doing to the people? Why do you sit alone, and all of the people stand before you from morning till night?'

One way for the consultant to understand the organization and its problems is to hear conflicting understandings of the roles individuals are supposed to play. What does the executive, the leader, think his job is? What are the needs of the employees, and are they being met?

Yitro observes Moshe judging the people and asks what he is doing. Well, obviously, Moshe is judging the people -- so what does Yitro really want to know? There seem to be two components to his question:

1) Focus on Moshe: "Why do you sit alone? Why don't you share the burden? Why do it all yourself?"

2) Focus on the people: "Why do the people have to wait all day? Why set up your system in such an inefficient way that people are forced to wait from morning till night to get a hearing?"

THE CENTRAL PROBLEM:

Here we come to the central problem in this story: Is Moshe somehow unaware that things are running very inefficiently?

Can't he see the mob of people clamoring for his attention from dawn to dusk? Can't he figure out himself that appointing more judges would alleviate the problem? Abravanel articulates this question sharply:

ABRAVANEL, EXODUS 18:
"Concerning the advice of Yitro to Moshe about appointing judges: certainly, Yitro's words were good and correct. But even the simplest [intellect] should have understood that it was foolish to have one person judge from morning to night, for the judge and the judged would surely grow faint and fatigued! How could Moshe Rabbeinu and all the Elders of Israel not have realized that appointing [more] judges over the people would have lightened the load?"

This question makes Yitro's question particularly problematic: what is his assumption? If it's so obvious that the present way of organizing the judicial system is not good for either Moshe or the people, what does he think Moshe has in mind? Does he think Moshe so egotistical that he believes no one else can do an adequate job? Does he think Moshe so power-hungry that he refuses to share authority?

The Torah tells us in Sefer BeMidbar (12:3) that Moshe is the humblest person walking the face of the Earth. Could Yitro have missed this quality in his son-in-law? Many stories throughout the Torah demonstrate Moshe's willingness to share power, as well as his general humility. Yitro may not know all of these stories, and some of them haven't even happened yet, but they say something important about Moshe's character, something Yitro could not have missed.

For instance: Yitro could not have missed the humility which made his son-in-law attempt to reject Hashem's command to serve as His messenger in taking Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayyim. He could not have missed that Moshe was the kind of person who felt able to approach Paro only if he could share that role with someone else, with Aharon, because of his belief in his inability to express himself properly. He could not have missed the quality that enabled Moshe and Aharon to cooperate perfectly as a team in performing the plagues in Mitzrayyim without even a hint that Moshe resented Aharon's taking part of the spotlight or that the brothers were competing for supremacy. He could not have missed the quality which made Moshe wish (BeMidbar 11:29) that all of Bnei Yisrael could share with him in the gift of prophecy, the quality that made him dismiss a threat to his virtual monopoly on communicating with Hashem.

Well, how does Moshe *himself* understand Yitro's question? We can tell from his answer. It seems that Moshe understands that Yitro has asked him, "What is it about the way you think about your role as a leader, your responsibility to the people, which makes you believe that things can *only* be this way, and that you can't share the burden with others?" This question prompts Moshe to describe what he believes is his role.

MOSHE'S "JOB":

The first thing Moshe says is that the people come to him to seek "E-lohim." In some contexts in the Torah, "Elohim" does not mean "God," it means "judges." For example:

1) SHEMOT 21:6 -- (the beginning of Parashat Mishpatim) if a male Jewish slave does not want to leave servitude at the end of his term of slavery, his ear is pierced and he serves a longer term. The ear-piercing ceremony takes place before a court; the Torah uses the term "Elohim" to refer to the court.

2) SHEMOT 22:7-8 -- in a dispute between the owner of an object and someone who was supposed to watch it for him, the parties are to bring the matter "before Elohim" -- before a court.

Is this what Moshe means by "Elohim" in this context? On the one hand, it is tempting to think that he is using "Elohim" to mean "judges," since this whole discussion centers on his function as a judge. Moshe would be saying, "People come to me to seek judgment ['Elohim']." But there is evidence that Moshe probably does not mean "judges," and that "Elohim" means "Hashem":

1) First of all, in almost every instance during Yitro's visit in which Hashem is mentioned, the word "E-lohim," the more universal term for Hashem, is used instead of the more Bnei-Yisrael-specific name for Hashem, "Y-HVH." "Y-HVH" appears a few times at the beginning, but "E-lohim" quickly becomes predominant. So there is reason to think that "E-

lohim" in Moshe's sentence means "Hashem" as well.

2) A stronger indication: Moshe finishes this very sentence by using the word "E-lohim" in a way that can only mean "Hashem" -- "I teach the laws of 'E-lohim' and His instructions." It is possible that Moshe is playing a little word game, using "Elohim" in different ways in the same sentence, but I think the stronger possibility is that both mentions of "E-lohim" refer to Hashem.

After telling Yitro that the people come to him to seek Hashem, Moshe goes on to explain that when people have a dispute, they come to him and he does two things: he judges them and he teaches them Hashem's laws (the Torah).

MOSHE: DIVINE CONDUIT:

Yitro had asked Moshe why he felt compelled to sit alone to judge the people. Moshe's response tells Yitro that Moshe does not see himself as just a functionary of a judicial system; he does not see himself as just a judge. Moshe sees himself as the intermediary between the people and Hashem. The way he sees it, the people come to him seeking not just justice, not just a judge -- they come seeking "E-lohim" -- seeking Hashem! The reason no one else can do this job is because Moshe does not want to turn the people's encounter with Hashem into an encounter with a judicial system. The current system is a religious one: people bring their problems and questions to Hashem's closest representative. Yitro is suggesting that Moshe turn the system into a judicial one. Instead of walking into the presence of God -- into shul, so to speak -- the people will now walk into a courtroom. Instead of meeting an intermediary to Hashem, people will bring their troubles to legal scholars who have studied law codes. This is what Moshe wants to avoid, why he feels he is the only one who can do the job, for Moshe is Hashem's right-hand man.

Yitro does not try to argue with Moshe. He agrees that the legal system should be a bridge to Hashem rather than a set of static statutes. And he does not tell Moshe to stop his work -- "You should represent the people before Hashem and bring matters to Hashem." All he says is that Moshe is being too religiously ambitious. It is simply impossible to try to turn every legal question and dispute into an encounter with Hashem's chief representative: "You will tire yourself out . . . it is too much for you!" Moshe must relinquish this goal of continuous Matan Torah, this continuous Mosaic revelation. He must appoint others to judge along with him.

It would be great if the CEO himself (or herself) would answer the customer relations phones at IBM or Microsoft or GM or Merck to help you figure out why your modem or your word processor or your mini-van or your hypertension pills weren't doing what you needed. You'd be very impressed! In seconds, the CEO would cut through all the red tape and solve your problems with no delay. But the reason no CEO answers the public relations phones is that "navol ti-bol, gam ata, gam ha-am ha-zeh": he would sit from morning till night answering customer calls, ignoring larger and more important responsibilities, like deciding where the company is headed in the future and what its role is in the global market . . . and how to make money from the Internet. Also, customers would have to wait for weeks on "hold." No one would be happy.

The same is true here: Moshe wants to give everyone his attention and provide a direct line to Hashem. But he can't handle the sheer volume himself, and even if he could, he would have to ignore the more important duties of leading the nation. Meanwhile, the people would wait in lines winding around the block ten times.

HASHEM SHOWS UP IN COURT:

Ultimately, Moshe remains the source of revelation: Yitro encourages him to continue to be the one to teach the people the laws of the Torah; he remains "Moshe Rabbeinu," "Moshe, our Teacher," but he gives up most of the day-to-day functions of "Moshe, our Judge." This does not mean that from this point on, the Jewish legal system has nothing to do with approaching Hashem. Since Torah law is divinely given, one who submits to Torah law and the Torah's courts submits to Hashem. But more immediately, Hashem Himself maintain a presence in court. One manifestation of Hashem's presence in a Jewish court is that the Supreme Court -- the Sanhedrin He-Gedola -- meets in the Beit HaMikdash (Temple) itself. We all know that Hashem is present in the Mikdash as a focus for worship, but the fact that the Supreme Court meets there means that Hashem is also there in order to meet the people who come to seek His instructions.

In addition, the Midrash understands the pasuk, "E-lohim nitzav ba-adat e-l," "E-lohim stands among the congregation of God," to mean that Hashem is present in Beit Din (Jewish court). Rashi and Ramban also develop this idea in several places (see Rashi Bereshit 18:1 and Tehillim 82:1, Ramban Shemot 21:6 and BeMidbar 11:16).

Nowadays, many of us think of court as the domain of slick lawyers, biased juries, and crooked or inobjective judges. Maybe we think of it as Judge Wapner's territory, or material for a nighttime soap opera, or the forum for a celebrity murder trial, or the stage for a tawdry Presidential scandal. But ideally, Jewish court is something like shul -- it is a place to meet Hashem and bring our problems to Him. (When I say "shul," I mean what shul *should* be, not the place some people go to yak with their friends and see what everyone is wearing.)

SAME OLD SAME OLD:

Often, the Torah reports several different versions of an event. The most common location for repeated stories is Sefer Devarim, "Deuteronomy," the "Repeated Torah," called "Mishneh Torah" by Hazal (the rabbis of the Talmud). Our story -- the story of Moshe's appointment of judges to serve under him -- appears just nine pesukim (verses) from the beginning of Sefer Devarim. Moshe narrates the story to Bnei Yisrael, who are assembled to hear their leader's final speech before his death and their entry, without him, to Eretz Cana'an:

DEVARIM 1:9-18 --

At that time I said to you, "I cannot carry you alone -- Hashem, your Lord, has increased you, and you are today numerous as the stars of the sky. May Hashem, Lord of your fathers, add to you a thousand times your number, and bless you, as He said [He would]. But how can I alone carry your troubles, burdens, and disputes? Select for yourselves wise and understanding men, known to your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads." You answered me and said, "What you have said to do is a good idea." I took the heads of your tribes, wise and well-known men, and made them heads over you: officers of a thousand, a hundred, fifty, and ten, and police for your tribes. I commanded your judges at that time, "Hear [disputes] between your brothers and judge justly between each man and his brother, and between the stranger. Do not 'recognize faces' in judging: listen to the small as to the great. Do not fear any man, for justice is Hashem's. Whatever is too hard for you, bring to me and I will hear it." I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.

How is this story different than the story in Parashat Yitro?

1) In Parashat Yitro, the idea for the new judicial system comes from Yitro; in Parashat Devarim, it seems to be Moshe's idea. Yitro does not even merit an honorable mention in Devarim. Whose idea was it really?

2) In Parashat Yitro, it is Moshe who approves the idea for the new system; in Parashat Devarim, Bnei Yisrael approve the idea. Who really approved the idea?

3) In Parashat Yitro, Moshe selects leaders and appoints them; in Parashat Devarim, the people select leaders and Moshe appoints them. Who really made the selection?

4) In Parashat Yitro, the judges to be selected must be "men of valor" who "fear of Hashem," "men of truth," "haters of ill-gotten gains"; in Parashat Devarim, the judges to be selected must meet a decidedly different set of criteria: men who are "wise" and "understanding," "well-known to the tribes." The actual selection as described in Yitro and Devarim follows the specific criteria for each account: in Yitro, those selected are indeed "men of valor from all of Yisrael," while in Devarim, those selected are "heads of tribes" who are "wise" and "well-known." Put slightly differently, Parashat Yitro projects a judicial meritocracy, in which even non-leaders may be selected if they bear the qualities of impartiality and incorruptibility specified by the Torah; Parashat Devarim projects a judicial "old boy network," in which those who are already leaders -- wise leaders, to be sure -- will be appointed as judges.

[By the way, "anshei hayyil," literally, "men of valor, does not mean "brave warriors" or "fearless heroes," it means "judges who will be strong and brave enough to remain honest [=valor] even when it is difficult to do so" -- like when they are

threatened or bribed by the litigants, or when they feel emotionally inclined to sympathize with one side. Perhaps some judges currently on the bench might be described as "cowboys," but it seems to me that the Torah is not advocating swashbuckling jurisprudence.]

The above discrepancies between the two versions leave us with two questions:

A) WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

1) Who initiates the new judicial system? Does Yitro tell Moshe that his task is too much for him (Parashat Yitro), or does Moshe realize on his own that his burden is too great (Parashat Devarim)? Both can be true without contradiction: Yitro notices the problem and takes the initiative in alerting Moshe. But when reviewing the event in Parashat Devarim for the benefit of the assembled, Moshe leaves out Yitro's role. In a moment we will speculate about Moshe's rationale.

2) Who approves the system? Does Moshe approve it (Parashat Yitro), or do Bnei Yisrael agree to the plan (Parashat Devarim)? Both can be true without contradiction: Moshe approves Yitro's suggestion, and when Moshe presents the plan to the people, they approve as well.

3) Who selects the leaders, Moshe (Parashat Yitro) or Bnei Yisrael (Parashat Devarim)? Both can be true without contradiction: Moshe does indeed do the choosing, in a sense, since he approves or rejects the candidates nominated by the people. On the other hand, the people do the choosing, since they nominate leaders for appointment by Moshe.

4) What are the criteria for the judges, honesty/impartiality/incorruptibility (Parashat Yitro) or wisdom/wide reputation/current leaders (Parashat Devarim)? Both can be true without contradiction (or without much!): Parashat Yitro tells us that those chosen are honest, while Parashat Devarim tells us that they were also wise, well-known, and already occupied leadership positions. Each story emphasizes a different aspect of the judges for a particular reason. [Alternatively, perhaps, by "from all of Yisrael," Yitro means to advocate a complete meritocracy, which would select judges just on the basis of their qualifications -- men of valor, truth, honesty -- but Moshe realizes that the nation and its leaders would be completely destabilized by replacing the current leadership with new people. He takes Yitro's suggestion, but perhaps he understands the words "from all of Yisrael" to mean that the leaders should come from all of the tribes, not just those currently ascendant in leading the nation. In choosing local political and judicial leaders, Moshe realizes that only leaders chosen from each tribe will be accepted as leaders by that tribe. So in Devarim, he accepts the leaders of the tribes as judges; they are the leaders chosen "from all of Israel."]

B) WHY DOES THE TORAH REPORT DIFFERENT VERSIONS IN DIFFERENT PLACES?

Now we come to our second question: granted that we can reconstruct what actually happened [either my version above, or one you might propose] -- but why does the Torah give us two different versions? Perhaps another way to ask this question is, what is the focus of Sefer Shemot and what is the focus of Sefer Devarim?

Sefer Shemot traces the development of Bnei Yisrael into a nation and Moshe Rabbeinu into a leader. Sefer Devarim's narrative section reviews the trip through the desert and makes explicit the lessons to be learned from the journey. Since Moshe knows he is to die soon, he must prepare the people to 1) keep the Torah without his guidance and 2) function as a nation without his guidance.

Since Shemot is partly about Moshe's development, the focus of the visit with Yitro is how *Moshe* reacts, not how the people react. The Torah tells us nothing about the people's role in selecting the judges and nothing about their approval of the whole process because the focus is on Moshe and his developing role as leader of the nation. But since Devarim is about Moshe's attempt to strengthen the people's commitment to the Torah and the authority structure so they can "make it" religiously and politically without him, the Torah focuses in Devarim on Moshe's interaction with the people in putting the new system into play:

1) Yitro is left out of the story because he is external to the relationship between Moshe and the people, and certainly external to perpetuating the authority structure beyond Moshe's demise. Moreover, the reminder that an outsider invented

this system might make the people feel it had been imposed on them from the outside, while Moshe aims in Sefer Devarim to emphasize to the people the role they themselves played in creating the system and appointing its authorities.

2) Moshe mentions only that the people approve the plan, leaving out his own approval, for the same reason: if he wants to give the authority structure the best chance of surviving his death, it is best to minimize his own role in imposing the system on the people. The more they perceive it as their own creation, the more they will be inclined to accept its authority.

3) Moshe stresses that the people suggested candidates: again, Moshe emphasizes that the authority structure is not something imposed by him, but something in which the people participated.

4) The judges chosen are "wise" and "known to your tribes": as mentioned above, Moshe knows that the traditional tribal leadership cannot simply be rejected and replaced by a complete meritocracy. This would destabilize the nation and encourage it to reject the whole system (besides creating a disgruntled class of former leaders who would eagerly aid efforts at a rebellion which would return them to their former positions of authority). Instead, the people nominate those leaders they feel fit the bill, and Moshe approves them and appoints them officially. Once these leaders are nominated, Moshe makes sure -- as Parashat Devarim reports -- to deliver to them detailed instructions about maintaining impartiality and honesty in the face of obstacles (echoing the description in Parashat Yitro of "haters of ill-gotten gains," "men of truth," etc.).

The comparison between the two versions, then, reveals the purpose and character of Sefer Shemot and Sefer Devarim, as well as teaching sophisticated strategies for leadership and diplomacy.