

Potomac Torah Study Center

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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.

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander, President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, is guest scholar at the 21th Annual Herbert Lieberman & Ruben D. Silverman Memorial Shabbaton at Beth Sholom Congregation in Potomac, MD. The Lieberman and Silverman families dedicate the Devrei Torah for Shabbat Yitro in honor of Rabbi Dr. Brander's visit.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Seven weeks after B'Nai Yisrael leave Egypt, and after three weeks of intensive preparation, the people stand at the base of Har Sinai and wait for a direct message from Hashem. The Torah moves chapter 19 (when B'Nai Yisrael reach the base of Har Sinai) after chapter 18 (when Yitro arrives, after the people are already by Har Sinai) to contrast Yitro's praise for Hashem with Amalek's ruthless attack on the weakest Jews in the camp (end of chapter 17). By moving directly from Amalek to Yitro, the Torah contrasts the most evil society of the time with Moshe's righteous father-in-law, another non-Jew but one who recognizes that Hashem is both powerful and loving. Yitro has never before heard of a god who loves and cares for each individual person, and this quality impresses him far more than does Hashem's power.

Rabbi Label Lam relates the story of another non-Jew's reaction to learning about Jewish history. Asher Wade, a Methodist pastor, and his wife, opened the Sunday newspaper on November 5, 1978, the 40th anniversary of Kristallnacht, and viewed horrible photos of the destruction in Hamburg. They recognized that this city, home of 180,000 Jews in 1938, was empty of Jews and that the setting of the destruction was a parking lot by 1978. The Wades asked local officials and learned that a majority of the Germans in the city, including university officials, joined the Nazi party right after Kristallnacht. Wade resigned as pastor, left the church, and he and his wife converted to become Orthodox Jews. He moved to the United States and later to Israel, and he is now a Rabbi. His story is readily available on the Internet.

Rabbi David Fohrman, in discussing the logic behind Hillel's summary of the Torah as "What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow," shows that each of the Ten Statements (Commandments) has a parallel. For example, "Do not murder" parallels "Anochi Hashem," (I am Hashem). God created humans Tzelem Elokim, in the image of Hashem. Murder

therefore involves destroying a creature created in God's image. (Obviously one cannot murder Hashem, so the parallel to God is ignoring Him.)

How does the concept of murder as a parallel concept to Anochi Hashem relate to the war between Hamas and Israel? Hamas devoted hundreds of millions of dollars (probably billions of dollars) over more than a decade to building concrete reinforced underground tunnels throughout Gaza, hundreds of miles long, many paved and wide enough for military vehicles to transport weapons and ammunition. The tunnels also have countless hiding places for hostages, and the tunnels have entry and exit points in numerous places, including hospitals, schools, senior centers, and homes of Hamas leaders. Hamas designed the underground cities and tunnels to support attacks to kill, maim, and rape Israelis. The vicious treatment of Israelis shows that Hamas worked hard to violate Commandments 1 and 6 as much as possible.

The only way to prevent a repeat of the October 7 attack is for the IDF to destroy underground tunnels, weapons, and ammunition – and to kill as many Hamas leaders as possible. Hamas hides its leaders, weapons, and ammunition in civilian areas, especially places near children, hospitalized patients, and elderly – because Hamas wants to make it impossible to destroy its cache without killing and wounding as many civilians as possible. The alternative to destroying Hamas now is having Hamas return soon with more weapons and evil troops to kill even more Jews. Hamas created a conflict for the IDF in finding a way to destroy evil with as few innocent victims as possible. The ones who violate commandments 1 and 6 are Hamas and its backers, not Israel and fellow Jews.

While anti-Semitism remains at record levels throughout the world, honest people are beginning to speak up and protest that the real evil in the world today comes from Hamas and its proponents, not from Israel and fellow Jews. Hopefully the correction in world opinion will continue so that we can feel safe again – at least for a time.

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, 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; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Yisro: A Final Solution

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5768

And Yisro the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people- that HASHEM had taken out of Egypt. (Shemos 18:1)

And Yisro heard: What report did Yisro hear that caused him to come (join the People)? The splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek! (Rashi). What did Yisro hear that caused him to take action and join the Jewish People? Rashi quotes the Mechilta that what he heard about was the splitting of the sea and the about the war with Amalek. The assumption is that he needed to hear about both events. If he needed absolute convincing about G-d then the splitting of the sea should have been sufficient. In what way was the war with Amalek a motivational force that pushed him into action?

As Rabbi Asher Wade tells it, *“Something happened on the way to church one morning.”* The spark that set off an explosive chain of events that would completely alter the life of this ordained pastor in the Methodist Church was the Commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of Kristallnacht. It was November 5, 1978 and Asher Wade, a native of Virginia, was attending the University in Hamburg in Germany working towards his doctorate in the field of Metaphysics and Relativity Theory. He had already earned a B.A. in Philosophy in America and a post-graduate degree in Philosophical Theory at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. In addition, he had previously worked as an adolescent and marriage counselor at the U.S. Army Chaplaincy in Berlin while he was attending the Goethe Institute for Language Studies.

When Asher Wade and his German-born wife turned the page of the local newspaper that fateful morning in November, they were shaken out of their languid Sunday routine by the graphic pictures of the destruction of Jewish homes and stores of Hamburg during Kristallnacht. But the photograph they found most unsettling was the Great Synagogue of Hamburg during Kristallnacht. To their horror, they immediately recognized that the site where Hamburg's once thriving 180,000 member Jewish community had worshipped was now their university's parking lot.

How could this be? How could the country that had nurtured Beethoven and Goethe also be the incubator for such heinous acts of destruction? And so, their long journey began with a series of questions. *“What was it like to be a student on Kristallnacht? What was it like being a scholar on Kristallnacht?”* And finally, *“What was it like being a Christian Kristallnacht?”*

When they innocently posed these three questions to the respective authorities in their community, according to Asher Wade, he and his wife were shaken out of their nest, *“that comfortable position of the Cambridge elite.”* As the representatives of their church, they were dismayed when they discovered that the first to join Hitler's ranks was the Medical faculty, followed by the Law faculty. Five out of eight students, they found out, had openly joined the Nazi party. As a result of their probing, he and his wife began to feel like *“charter members of the Hamburg leper colony.”* They were further shocked and disillusioned with Western Civilization, he said, as they *“stumbled across what apparently looked like the unbroken gunpowder trail from the Holocaust — to the six Crusades — to the 305 years of the church-sanctioned Inquisition.”*

But now that they were out of the nest, two more positive and upbeat questions focused their attention in a new direction. *“Who was this strange troop of people known as the Jews?”* they asked themselves, *“who didn't have a country but yet somehow survived with their own jurisdiction, their own laws and order, civil as well as religious, no matter where they went and no matter what language they spoke.”* And although he had it made in two worlds, academia and the world of religion, Reverend Wade withdrew from the church, left the ministry, converted to Judaism and he and his wife moved to the United States and eventually Israel.

What was it that sparked this minister to come join the Jewish People? Maybe it was a similar observation to that which alerted Yisro. The miracle of Jewish existence or a philosophical agreement about the notion of a Creator was not quite enough. The persistence of a dedicated evil that can coolly smile with civility cries out for an equal resolve and a final solution.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5772-yisro/> Note: Rabbi Asher Wade's story is readily available on the Internet.

Yitro --The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Pour-over Coffee on Shabbat

by Rabbi Dov Linzer

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy... You shall not do any melakha (labor)." (Shemot 20:8)

QUESTION - Jerusalem

Is there a permissible way to make fresh pour-over coffee on Shabbat?

ANSWER

There are two possible concerns in this case, both of a serious d'oraita nature. One is bishul, cooking. Does the pouring of hot, yad soledet bo water over the ground coffee beans constitute an act of cooking them? The second is borer, selecting. Once the water is poured over the coffee beans and creates sludge (the technical term), the flavored water is then selected out of the mixture through the filter, which would seem to be a classic case of borer with a utensil that is made for selecting, a d'oraita melakha. Let us examine both of those.

As to bishul – There is some question as to whether bishul would apply to roasted coffee beans: Some would posit that it should be exempted because of the principle that ayn bishul achar bishul, that once something is cooked, it is not a Shabbat violation to cook it again. Others argue against this for multiple reasons, chief among that the that principle only applies when the item was previously cooked, and here the coffee beans were not cooked, but roasted.

The solution to the problem of bishul, however, is obvious. Just use a kli shelishi and you are fine. This means, pouring water from the urn into a cup, from that cup into another cup, and pour from the second cup onto the coffee beans. This is no different from the use of tea bags in a kli shelishi on Shabbat (some even permit their use in a kli sheni, although this is not my practice). For those who don't use tea bags, out of concern that the tea leaves will always cook in boiling water, regardless of the kli, then they would similarly not be able to pour the hot water over the coffee beans. (One could argue that it would even be permissible to pour from a kli sheni onto the coffee beans, but I would prefer to be strict regarding that).

As to the problem of borer – surprisingly, in this case, this is not a halakhic concern because of the way the process takes place. What happens here is that you pour water onto the grounds, the water mixes with the grounds and gets flavored by them, and then the water comes out through the filter into the cup. You never took something that was a mixture and removed from it the part that you wanted. You didn't shake or manipulate the filter with the sludge in it or do anything to the sludge itself. It was water in, (flavored) water out.

While this is a little shocking, it is actually a case in Shulkhan Arukh regarding pouring water onto lees in a filter, and having grape-flavored water come out, which is permitted. See SA OH 319:3, MB 33, and Shmirat Shabbat 3:58. In the end, this is not much different than what we do with a tea bag, which is really nothing more than ground tea leaves inside a filter which is containing them. Just make sure to not shake the coffee filter and, in the case of tea, to not shake the water out of the tea bag.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

Love and Awe at Har Sinai

By Rabbi Amir Zinkow *

The narrative surrounding the Ten Commandments can often be confusing, and is easy to lose sight of given the importance of the commandments themselves. However, through a close read of the פסוקים, we can achieve understanding of the entirety of the experience for Moshe and B'Nai Yisrael. In order to do this, we will examine Har Sinai experience through the lens of the tension between the Torah's two main modes of experiencing the divine: love and awe, found in the Torah.

Let's take a look at the structure of chapter 19 while noting the פסוקים that require explanation. Questions and challenges will be interspersed with the text, and answered after the text is summarized and quoted.

Verses 1-8: HaShem tells Moshe the terms of the covenant, which Moshe then conveys to the people. They accept, and Moshe returns to HaShem with the message of acceptance.

9 And ה' said to Moses, *"I will come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after."* Then Moses reported the people's words to ה'

What words is משה reporting to ה' here? He has not gone back to communicate with them!

10 And ה' said to Moses, *"Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow."*

Verses 9-15 continue with the instructions for preparation: A three-days-long sanctification along with warnings about the perils of coming too close to the mountain when the divine presence dwells upon it. Why weren't these instructions part of the first message? Why did משה have to make an extra trip for this?

16 On the third day, as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn; and all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 Moses led the people out of the camp toward God, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for ה' had come down upon it in fire; the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently. 19 The blare of the horn grew louder and louder. As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder.

The scene here is very different from what ה' describes in verse 10, most notably the addition of fire and smoke instead of a cloud. It is also important to note that it is unclear exactly where משה is positioned here. Is he at the foot of the mountain with the people? Has he gone up the mountain?

While the rest of the narrative through chapter 20 deserves equal treatment, for this short format we will examine only until Exodus 19:19.

In order to unlock the narrative events, we will attempt to solve all of the problems presented here with one, coherent narrative. Our first question, what message did משה convey, is answered in the מכילתא quoted by רש"י:

The Words of the People etc. — He said to God: "I have heard from them a reply — that their desire is to hear the commandments from You. One who hears from the mouth of a messenger is not the same as one who hears directly from the King. It is our wish to see our King (cf. Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 19:9:2).

Up until this point, the Israelites' experience of God has been through acts of power, experiencing יראה (awe) almost exclusively. After having accepted upon themselves the responsibilities of the covenant, they express a desire to experience ה' in a different way, from a place of love, אהבה. Let not ה' remain a distant, awesome power, they say. Let us feel close to ה', to feel an intimacy in the receiving of the Law.

ה' acquiesces to the request, though it comes with the three days long preparation added in verses 10-15, thus explaining why these instructions were not part of the initial message. Only after the people express their desire to be close to ה' through love is the sanctification necessary.

At the same time, there is a pull back from the pure אהבה (love) that the people desire. While it may be possible to have some intimacy with the divine, this is also a dangerous prospect and requires preparation, seriousness, and purity of mind and body. (Awe) יראה, responds ה', must be a part of the experience as well.

The pull towards יראה continues on the third day, when God appears not in a cloud, but in a fire, surrounded by smoke, thunder, lightning, and a shaking mountain. The intent lands: the people need משה to coax them out of the camp in order to bring them towards this awesome mountain. I would like to posit that משה remains with the people at this moment for two reasons. First, the text continues with ה' calling משה up the mountain in verse 20. In a straightforward read, it makes sense to say he is at the foot of the mountain through verse 19. Second, משה remaining with the people makes the experience of that moment a unified, national experience, one in which all the people are able to witness the totality of this divine experience, in all of its love and all of its awe.

The people of Israel understandably wanted to experience ה' with אהבה; they might have needed to see it in order to know it was there. God understood this need, and yet needed to keep יראה in place, as our relationship with the divine can not be either one or the other. Reading the narrative, it seems that the יראה was too much for the people of Israel: In chapter 20, they revoke their request, asking משה to be God's messenger. Though God wanted to show the people they could experience אהבה, it is also true that this aspect of relating to the divine might come easier for many people than יראה. Without visceral, awe-inspiring reminders, our יראת שמיים may easily wane. We are reminded through our ancestors' experience of the divine to be mindful of our relationship with God, and to work towards living in the tension of יראה and אהבה.

* Judaic Studies Faculty, Barack Hebrew Academy, Philadelphia, PA. Semikha, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah 2017. Omitted Hebrew text available at website below.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/01/yitro5784/>

Listening to the Revelation: Thoughts for Parashat Yitro

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Albert Einstein commented on the nature of Jewish ideals: *"The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, an almost fanatical love of justice, and the desire for personal independence – these are the features of the Jewish tradition which make me thank my stars that I belong to it."* (*The World as I See It*, p. 103).

Einstein believed that Jewish civilization was magnificent and unique in cultivating education, justice and personal autonomy. It provides the moral and intellectual framework for individuals to achieve personal fulfillment and to be constructive members of society.

We Jews, like Einstein, should "thank our stars" that we belong to the Jewish tradition.

Many of the foundational values of Judaism are found in this week's Torah portion. We read of God's revelation of the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, commandments that serve as the basis of a moral society. We read the description of

the people of Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation – a people that must be devoted to righteousness and holiness. We also learn the importance of taking personal responsibility.

The Torah portion begins with the words "*Vayishma Yitro*" – and Yitro heard. News had reached him about the miraculous salvation of the Israelites at the Red Sea and about their battle with Amalek. A Hassidic master asked: why did the Torah specify that Yitro heard about these things? Everyone, not just Yitro, had heard about the exploits of the Israelites. The Rebbe answered: others heard, but Yitro listened. Yitro was special because he drew conclusions from the news he received. He realized that he should meet with Moses and the Israelites, that he should stand in solidarity with them, that he should find ways of helping them.

We are barraged by news, by demands, by problems, by requests: many people hear these things, but then tune them out. Special people listen. They try to understand what is at stake and what role they can play. And they act accordingly. Those who hear are those who stand back, who are "*the silent majority*." Those who listen are the ones who enter the fray and change the world for the better.

The parasha includes the Ten Commandments. Significantly, the Ten Commandments are in the singular -- not plural -- form. God speaks to each individual. The Midrash comments that God's voice reached each person according to his/her ability to comprehend. God wanted every person to listen to His words and take them personally; he did not want them simply to hear Him.

Listening is a quality that demands that we pay close attention to what is being said, that we be attuned to the feelings and needs of others, that we come to feel a genuine empathy with them. By listening, we then can decide on appropriate words and actions that may be helpful.

Yitro's ability to listen, not just to hear, distinguished him from so many others of his generation. So, too, each of us can learn to be better listeners, more sympathetic helpers, and more constructive participants in building better families, communities and society as a whole.

* 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 during its winter fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/listening-revelation-thoughts-parashat-yitro>

Ruminations on Rambam

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

A past question (The Jewish Press, February 12, 2021) struck me as particularly strange: "*Should a frum Jew believe the sun goes around earth if the Rambam says it does?*" My immediate reaction: how could anyone today, including a frum Jew, think that the sun goes around the earth? Science has advanced prodigiously since the 12th century, and Rambam himself taught that "*a person should never cast reason behind, for the eyes are set in front, not in back.*" Rambam relied on the best science of his time. And there can be no doubt at all that he would call on us to rely on the best science available in our time. He would be highly embarrassed by those who, basing themselves on Rambam's own writings, posit that the sun revolves around the earth, rejecting the advanced science of today.

I concluded my response with these words: *“One of the great dangers for religion — and for human progress in general — is for people to cling to discredited theories and outdated knowledge. Those who cast reason behind thereby cast truth behind. And truth is the seal of the Almighty.”*

What I took to be so obvious was apparently not so obvious to the other rabbinic respondents. One of them wrote *that “it makes more sense to side with Rambam than it does with Copernicus.”* Another respondent asserted that Rambam was not giving a lesson in physics but *“was explaining the world according to the Torah.”* And the final respondent thought it was “likely” that Rambam would agree with the findings of modern astronomy — likely, but apparently not certain.

How disappointing to realize that there are “frum” people today who feel comfortable denying modern astronomy based on words of a medieval sage. How sad for Rambam’s reputation!

Rambam was one of the greatest luminaries in Jewish history. A pre-eminent halakhist, philosopher and medical doctor, he was also a brilliant and clear writer. Yet, in spite of his voluminous writings, he still remains misunderstood and misrepresented.

So while I was lamenting the column in the Jewish Press, I was simultaneously pleased to be reading a new book by Menachem Kellner and David Gillis, *Maimonides the Universalist: The Ethical Horizons of the Mishneh Torah*, (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, London, 2020). Both of these authors have written important works exploring the genuine teachings of Rambam based on a careful reading of Rambam’s own words in his various writings.

This new book offers an important approach to understanding Rambam’s Mishneh Torah — and the Rambam’s general religious worldview as well. By studying the concluding sections of each of the 14 books of the Mishneh Torah, the authors have demonstrated an ethical framework for this halakhic work. Rambam was not only concerned with presenting the laws; he was concerned with inculcating the ethical/spiritual foundations of the laws.

In his *Guide of the Perplexed* (3:51), Rambam pointed out that all of the Torah’s commandments exist *“with a view to communicating a correct opinion, or to putting an end to an unhealthy opinion, or to communicating a rule of justice, or to warding off an injustice, or to endowing men with a noble moral quality, or to warning them against an evil moral quality. Thus all are bound up with three things: opinions, moral qualities, and political civic actions.”* In the Mishneh Torah, Rambam applied this insight when presenting the halakhot.

In offering his ethical insights, Rambam does so in what Kellner and Gillis describe as a universalistic manner. Rambam often points to Abraham as a model human being...and Abraham discovered and served God long before the Torah was given. Abraham was not “Jewish”; he was a human being who longed to transmit proper beliefs and behaviors to society. At the precise midpoint of the *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam teaches *“that each and every single human being can be as sanctified as the Holy of Holies”* (p. 143). Jews and non-Jews can achieve true piety and spiritual perfection. Being “sanctified” does not depend on genetics but on one’s personal strivings.

In closing his chapter on the “Laws of Slaves,” Rambam notes that the halakha permits working a non-Jewish slave *“with rigor.”* But he goes on to offer an impassioned call for sensitive and considerate treatment of such slaves:

“Out of halakhah and aggadah, Maimonides constructs a halakhah that moves smoothly but pointedly from seeing the non-Jewish slave as an alien who can be treated as an inferior to seeing him as an equal fellow human being. The upshot is a statement of thoroughgoing universalism, as Maimonides builds towards the establishment of a truly Abrahamic society at the very end of the Mishneh Torah” (p.266).

The Torah offers Jews a distinctive way to understand and serve the Almighty. But Jews do not have a monopoly on God. All human beings, created in God’s image, have access to the Almighty...just as Abraham himself had access long before the time of Moses. Kellner and Gillis note:

"The point of the Mishneh Torah as a whole is the creation of a society which gives its members the greatest chance of achieving their perfection as human beings. In this way, the end of the Mishneh Torah comes round to its beginning: just as the beginning of the work deals with matters that relate to all human beings, so do the last chapters" (p. 308).

The authors have produced a remarkable book that allows us to see Rambam not merely as a codifier of laws, but as a promoter of an ethical, universalistic humanitarianism. They have shown the ethical component in Rambam's ending sections of each of the books of the Mishneh Torah. These ending sections *"adjust the tendency of each individual book, generally in a universalist direction, and compose a balanced and integrated picture of halakhah, oriented towards universal conceptions of individual and social perfection. They guide the reader towards an understanding of all the ceremonial commandments as intellectually and morally purposive, and of the social commandments as infused with the divine, creating a sense of reciprocity between intellectual virtue and moral virtue"* (p. 319).

Kellner and Gillis have written an impressive book that enables readers to enter more deeply into Rambam's religious worldview. At a time when Rambam is subject to so much misrepresentation and misunderstanding, it is heartening to read a book that seeks to present Rambam's teachings in a clear, genuine and convincing manner. Bravo and thank you to the authors.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. The Jewish Press newspaper has a feature in which questions are posed to a group of rabbis. Rabbi Angel is one of the respondents.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/ruminations-rambam>

Yisro: Do You Believe in You?

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

As the Jews stood at the foot of Har Sinai, Hashem introduced Himself to them. He said, *"I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Mitzrayim, the place of slavery."* The commentaries wonder why Hashem didn't introduce Himself as the creator of heaven and earth. Many explain that although creation was great, it is the personal redemption which they experienced that would resonate with them. It is from personal redemption that they would be able to forge a personal relationship with Hashem.

I would like to suggest that there is more to this Mitzva than we typically realize. The statement, *"Who took you out of Mitzrayim, the place of slavery,"* is describing a Mitzva that is much more far reaching than saying, *"Who created heaven and earth."* True, both statements reference Hashem's total mastery over creation. Hashem created the world and continues to run it. But **by saying that He took us out of Mitzrayim, the place of slavery, Hashem is charging us with the responsibility to really leave Mitzrayim.** More than abstract belief that Hashem created the world, Hashem requires us to step out of abused mentality. Many great untruths were attributed to us during our experiences in Mitzrayim. The Mitzva is more than just to believe in Hashem. The Mitzva is to leave the slavery behind and have a healthy perspective of ourselves so that we can properly relate to Hashem. [emphasis added]

On the verse)Devorim 26:6(which states, *"The Mitzrim made us bad,"* Rav Zalman Sorotzkin)Oznayim LaTorah(asks, shouldn't the wording be, *"The Mitzrim did bad to us"*? Why is the wording that they made us bad?

Rav Sorotzkin explains that what we are describing is the propaganda which the Mitzrim used to justify their abuses and keep us enslaved. They claimed all kinds of things about us, just as antisemites throughout the ages have conjured up flaws to try to make their abusive behaviors seem moral. We recognize that those past experiences may have left us with some residual feelings that we are inferior, that we are unworthy of a royal relationship with Hashem. We may have internalized some of the abusive messaging that we would never amount to anything; we would never go free. The Mitzva of *"I am Hashem your G-d,"* is not just about Hashem's greatness and mastery over creation. The Mitzva is also about making sure that we leave the slavery of the past and its negative impressions of ourselves, behind us.

Over the generations, antisemites tried to justify themselves by using expressions like, “Lazy Jew,” “Dirty Jew,” or “Cheap Jew.” Reality is so different than these propaganda statements. In times when sewage ran through the streets of their general population, the Jewish quarter was governed by Halacha which places great emphasis on cleanliness, bathing, and appropriate handwashing. Statements like “lazy” or “cheap” might have served antisemites well over the ages, but knowing Jews a bit makes those statements comical. Industriousness and vision seem to be part of our DNA. Generosity is a way of life.

Stepping out of other people’s opinions is a national obligation. When Hashem instructed the people to prepare for the Revelation at Sinai, he informed them)Shimos 19(, *“You shall be My treasure... You shall be a kingdom of respected ministers and a holy nation.”* The Mitzrim had shared their view about Jews for decades. They said whatever they wanted to morally justify the enslavement and keep it going. That abuse could easily make the nation feel unworthy and undeserving of Hashem’s love. Hashem’s command is not so much about His kingdom. We recognize His creation; we are grateful for the redemption. Hashem’s command is that we must step out of any residual slavery effects. We need to realize that we are treasures, that we are a respected kingdom of ministers and a holy people. We need to leave the slavery behind – so that we can believe in ourselves and enter the very close relationship with Him to which he invites us.

This concept is not just about national redemption. It is about personal redemption as well. I once counseled a man whose first employer expected a 70-hour work week from his employees. Although this man)fortunately(had moved on to different employment, he continued to live with the impression that was imposed upon him by that first employer. It was hard for him to find satisfaction in a normal workweek even as his performance was recognized by peers, clients, and his boss, as exemplary. He had trouble feeling satisfaction from the time he spent with family because in the original life-model that he experienced such things were not recognized as valuable.

The first Mitzva that Hashem instructed us with at Sinai is much more than believing in Him. We recognize that past experiences might sometimes be things we need to step away from, as one steps away from the effects of slavery. We each have a Nishama. We are part of a sacred and noble people.

We must believe in Hashem. We also must believe in ourselves.

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 * © 5783

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.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Yitro

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Beshalach. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.]

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Yitro: To Covet or Not to Covet

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2024

Have you ever noticed that the Ten Commandments reveal almost no new detail to the Israelites? They already knew that murder, adultery, theft, distortion of justice and idolatry are forbidden because according to tradition they were part of the laws given to Noah and his descendants following the flood. They also knew that HaShem is their God, the God who delivered them from the Egyptians, because this message was included with the announcement of each plague, as well in all of Moshe's presentations to the Israelites. They were also told, a short while before the Giving of the Law, that they have to keep Shabbat, so the only new concepts introduced in the Decalogue are honoring one's parents, which was most probably natural for them, and the last commandment: Thou Shall Not Covet.

This last one is the most difficult to understand and to follow, for why would the Torah command us about emotions and what are the methods of enforcement and punishment for transgressors? Some commentators do suggest that not coveting means not acting upon one's craving. For example, not forcing a neighbor to sell a house you are interested in, but then again, how is that measured or punishable? And how would it apply to not coveting another's wife? Is it so common to force someone to divorce in order to marry his wife that the Torah had to include it in the Ten Commandments? After all, the Ten Commandments are the introduction of the Israelites to their God and the covenant they are about to enter into. By standing at Mount Sinai, the Divine promise to Moshe at the burning bush was fulfilled. The process leading to the revelation was breathtaking, with lightning, visible sounds and smoke coming from the top of the mountain. Taking all that into account we would have expected some revolutionary ideas delivered to the people. Something they have never heard before. Maybe an explanation of their purpose in life, the secrets of creation or a glimpse into the inner workings of the Divine Throne and the Ten Spheres, but no, all they got were these ten concepts with which were familiar, natural or impractical.

The answer to all these questions is that if, as people say, the devil is in the details, then God must be in the larger picture, in the broad strokes and the bird's eye view. We should not view the Ten Commandments as a list of Thou Shalls and Thou Shall Nots but rather as a road map for a spiritual journey, the journey of a lifetime. In this brief passage the Torah has outlined the principals of faith not as a legal codex but as a path for a better world, happier life and spiritual greatness.

First we have to translate the title not as the Ten Commandments but rather as the Ten Concepts, because not all of them are commandments. The ten are divided into two groups of five, where the first group urges us to appreciate our blessings, given to us simply for being human, while the second five, in ascending order, bring us to the highest moral level possible.

The first three concepts are inextricably connected as they speak of God's gift to mankind, the gift of spirituality, creativity, intelligence and compassion. We are created in the image of God and therefore strive to emulate God and connect to Him. This Divine spark also motivates us to achieve freedom, the freedom from taskmasters and the freedom to realize our potential and ideals, but not the freedom to harm others because we are all equal and no human being is intrinsically better than the other. That freedom means that we and none other are responsible for our actions, for our fellow human beings and for Tikkun Olam. The Torah's admonition against idolatry is not meant to protect God because He is immutable. It is supposed to protect us from the deceit of creating our own gods and telling them what to tell us to do. Idolatry is a way for humans to reconcile the need for spirituality with that of hedonism and indulgence, and although it might seem harmless at first, it leads eventually to wars, anarchy and religious oppression. In that spirit, the Torah goes on to warn us against carrying God's name in vain, in the context of the judicial system, but also regarding the general behavior of clergymen, religious leaders, educators or self-appointed spokesmen of the Divine. The Torah does not want them to take God's gift of spirituality and closeness to God and distort it by viewing God through their human lenses or by using their knowledge and position to accumulate power, wealth or control.

After discussing the interrelated gifts of spirituality, the Torah discusses the beautiful gift of Shabbat, a day of relaxation,

bonding with family and friends and recharging emotionally and physically. One can always enjoy the Shabbat and life better when he is in good company and ideally, one's family should be the best company. That is where the last of the first five concepts comes in, because it is true that parents don't always know how to shower their child with love and support, but the Torah tells us that even if we did not get it from our parents, we should still respect them and thus give our children an example to follow and emulate. The respect we show our parents, coupled with genuine and unconditional love to our children, will garner true respect and love from them and will create an ideal family, a true gift for life.

Now that our intrinsic, natural gifts as humans have been brought into focus, we understand that we should be happy and joyous for our share, and we are ready to appreciate the gifts and belongings of others without craving or taking them. The second five start with the most obvious, taking one's life)murder(, and continues to discuss taking one's wife and love)adultery(, possessions)theft(and the right for justice and due process)bearing false testimony(.

The tenth and final concept is therefore not a commandment but a statement: if you followed this thought process and implemented it, if you have internalized the understanding of every human's right to basic freedoms and the awareness of the great gifts God has granted you, then you will naturally shy away from harming another person in any way. Once you have achieved this clarity of mind and the willingness to use the gifts that God has given you for the advancement of the world and others, you will never covet that which does not belong to you, because you will truly and wholeheartedly know you do not need it.

The concepts seem simple and obvious but they are tremendously difficult to incorporate because they go, in many ways, against our natural selfishness. If we are wise enough, as God wishes for the Israelites, to revere God and fully implement these concepts, then we can claim and feel that we indeed stood at mount Sinai with our forefathers, our bare feet caressed by the hot desert sand of that holy site, and that since then we keep walking towards Tikkun Olam.

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.** The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

This Dvar Torah is from an unpublished draft of a forthcoming book on Tanach by Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared his manuscript draft with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Remember Shabbat and Keep it Holy

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

We have a "bursting at the seams" Torah portion this week. So much happens that I don't know where to start. First, Moshe's father-in-law Jethro comes back with his wife and kids. Moshe welcomes them with open arms and then takes Jethro's advice on doing a complete reform of the Jewish Sinai Desert Judicial System. Finally, the Jews receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. God gives the Ten Commandments, each of which would deserve its own write up.

But for now, let's look at the fourth commandment, "*Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.*"

How do we remember the Sabbath?

Let's say we are visiting our brand new Kosher Deli and we see something that looks especially delicious. Our Sages remark that if we say to ourselves, "Gee that looks delectable, I think that would look great on my Shabbos table" and we buy it, we have fulfilled the commandment to remember the Sabbath.

By that definition, this Shabbat will be one of the most “remembered” in AHC. We celebrate Alex Maasland's Bar Mitzvah, something we have been preparing for for a long time, even before Alex was born. Alex's grandparents Robert and Lesley Max and their daughter Shoshana Maasland have been pillars of AHC for a long time, strengthening the Jewish community with their attendance, leadership and presence. They have passed on Jewish traditions to you, Alex, and have done everything they can to give you a top notch Jewish education and upbringing here in Auckland, culminating)but not ending(with this Shabbat. We are so happy to celebrate and “remember” this Shabbat with you and your family.

May you continue to grow from strength to strength in all areas of your life and may you strive to also become a pillar of Jewish life in your own way and pass it on to others.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Kneseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Yitro: A Pure Revelation

“Moses awoke early in the morning and climbed Mount Sinai.”)Ex. 34:4(

The text emphasizes that Moses ascended the mountain at daybreak to receive the Torah. The Sages taught that Moses' subsequent descent from Sinai to transmit the Torah to the people also took place at first light. *“Just as his ascent was at daybreak, so, too, his descent was at daybreak”*)Shabbat 86a(. Why is the hour of these events so significant?

Crystal Clear

The quality of Moses' prophecy was without equal. The Sages compared the unique clarity of his prophetic vision to an *aspaklariah me'irah*, a clear, transparent lens. This metaphor expresses the unique authenticity of the Divine revelation to Moses, to whom God spoke *“face to face, in a vision and not in allegories”*)Num. 12:8(.

What made Moses' vision so uniquely accurate? His prophesy was true to its original Divine source; it was not influenced by societal needs or political considerations. On the contrary, it is this pristine Divine revelation that dictates the proper path for society, the nation, and the entire world.

For this reason, the Torah stresses the hour of this historic event. Moses began his ascent to Sinai at first light — before the day's social interactions — thus indicating that the revelation at Sinai was independent of all social, political, and practical accommodations. It is precisely due to the Torah's absolute integrity that it has the power to vitiate life and renew creation, to refine humanity and uplift the world to the heights of purity and holiness.

Precise Transmission

The Sages added an important corollary to this insight. It was not just Moses' original revelation that was free of worldly influences. The Torah's transmission to the people also retained its original authenticity. *“Just as his ascent was at daybreak, so, too, his descent was at daybreak.”* The Torah's laws do not reflect the influence of social and political necessities. The Torah is the light of the Creator, the Divine Will giving life to the world, propelling the universe to advance in all aspects, material and spiritual.

The Torah that Moses brought down to the people of Israel was the exact same Torah that he received on Sinai — a complete Torah of absolute truth, transcending the limitations of our flawed world. *“His descent was at daybreak,”* unaffected by the day's social interactions. The Torah remained pure, brought down to the world through the spiritual genius of the master prophet.

)*Silver from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. IV on Shabbat 86a)9:16(.

https://ravkooktorah.org/YITRO_68.htm

Yitro: Particular Paths to a Universal God (5780)

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

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, they are 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 Tishrei, 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. Noah, 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 Noah, 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.

FOOTNOTES:

]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.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

]1[What is Judaism's approach to non-Jews?

]2[If Judaism is Divine Truth, why isn't it the religion of all humankind?

]3[How does Judaism teach us to recognise the dignity and integrity in the 'other'?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/yitro/particular-paths-to-a-universal-god/> 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.

"Be Prepared!"

By Yossy Goldman * © Chabad 2024

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!"

* Life Rabbi Emeritus of the Sydenham Shul and president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

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

Yitro: The Basis of Ethical Behavior by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

On 6 Sivan, G-d gave the Jewish people the 613 commandments contained in the Torah. Of these, He gave 10 explicitly:)1(to believe in G-d,)2(not to serve idols,)3(to respect G-d's Name,)4(to observe the Sabbath,)5(to honor parents,)6(not to murder,)7(not to commit adultery,)8(not to kidnap,)9(not to lie when testifying, and)10(not to desire other people's homes, spouses, or possessions.

G-d inscribed these ten commandments on two tablets and the remaining commandments were implicit within these ten.

The Basis of Ethical Behavior

*You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not kidnap. You must not bear false witness against your fellowman. You shall not desire...)*Ex. 20:13-14(

The five commandments inscribed on the first of the two tablets deal with our relationship with G-d, whereas the five inscribed on the second tablet deal with our relationship with our fellows.

This juxtaposition teaches us two things:

On the one hand, we must learn to treat G-d with the same consideration that we show human beings. We instinctively sense that we must repay the kindnesses shown us by other people, but we often neglect our responsibilities toward G-d; He is easy to forget.

On the other hand, our relationships toward our fellows must be based upon our belief in G-d. If our commitment to social decency is based on anything else, there is no guarantee that our actions will not be swayed by self-love or worse.

When G-d is removed from the picture, even the most "cultured" society can commit mass murder. But when the first half of the Ten Commandments, our duties toward G-d, governs our lives, we are sure to overcome any obstacle that stands in the way of goodness and truth.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant a decisive victory over our enemies.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Likutei Divrei Torah

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via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

To Thank Before We Think

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

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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).

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Prototypes of Very Different Gentiles

“And Jethro the Priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard all that God had done for Moses and his people; that He had taken Israel out of Egypt.” [Exodus 18:1]

This Torah portion records how Jethro, Moses’ Midianite father-in-law, heard of God’s great wonders in redeeming the Israelites from Egypt and came to Moses amidst great praise to the Lord. Upon witnessing Moses’ difficult workload in rendering judgments from dawn to night, Jethro gave sage advice in organizing and delegating a graduated judicial system, with only the most complex cases to come before Moses. One of the issues dealt with by the biblical commentaries is the exact time when Jethro arrived on the scene: Was it before or after the Sinaitic revelation?

In terms of the chronological sequence of the biblical account, it would appear that Jethro came to Moses immediately after the splitting of the Reed Sea and before the commandments were given at Sinai.

However, both Nahmanides and Ibn Ezra point out that since Moses could not have been occupied to the point of exhaustion with rendering biblical rulings before the Bible had

been given, logic dictates that Jethro arrived and made his wise suggestion after the revelation at Sinai. But if so, why does the Torah record the advent and advice of Jethro before the account of the revelation, and why name the portion which includes the content of the divine words after a Midianite priest, especially since he came on the scene after that revelation took place?!

Ibn Ezra explains:

“Since the Bible has just mentioned the evil which Amalek did to the Israelites [at the end of Exodus Chapter 17 as the conclusion of the previous portion of Beshalach], the Bible must [immediately thereafter] mention in contrast the good advice which Jethro gave to the Israelites [at the beginning of Chapter 18 in the opening of the portion of Yitro].”

I would add that the Bible is contrasting two very opposite reactions to the miracle of the Exodus. In general, the nations of the world heard of the stunning rebellion of the Hebrews and became terrified:

“Nations heard and shuddered; terror gripped the inhabitants of Philistia... Fear and dread fell upon them; at the greatness of Your Arm they fell silent as stone.” [Exodus 15:14–16]

Two peoples, however, do not merely respond by panicking. Amalek, “first among the gentiles” (Num. 24:20), set out to make war against this emerging new star with the intent of heading them off at the pass. And Amalek played “dirty”:

“Remember what Amalek did to you... when they encountered you... when you were tired and exhausted, and they cut off those who were lagging to your rear [the old, the young and the infirm].” [Deut. 25:17, 18]

Jethro, on the other hand, is filled with admiration and praise: “And Jethro was overjoyed at all of the good which the Lord accomplished for the Israelites in saving them from the hand of Egypt. And Jethro said, ‘Praised be the Lord who has saved you from the hand of Egypt and the hand of Pharaoh... Now I know that the Lord is the greatest of all of the gods...’” (Ex. 18:9–11).

In effect, the biblical juxtaposition is teaching us that all gentiles should not be seen in the same light: there is the gentile who is jealous and aggressive (Amalek), but there is also the gentile who is admiring and willing to be of help (Jethro).

We are still left with the question as to why the biblical portion of the divine revelation should be referred to by the name of a Midianite priest – and I believe that herein lies one of the most profound truths of the Jewish faith. Undoubtedly the Torah was given to the Jewish people, as Maimonides teaches, “Moses our Teacher bequeathed the Torah and

Likutei Divrei Torah

the commandments only to Israel, as it is written, ‘a heritage to the congregation of Jacob,’ as well as to anyone who may wish to convert [to Judaism]...”

But in the very same breath Maimonides continues to legislate:

“And similarly Moses was commanded by the Almighty to enforce upon the gentile world for everyone to accept the seven Noahide laws of morality.” [Laws of Governments 8:10]

Maimonides concludes his religio-legal magnum opus *Mishneh Torah* with the “Laws of Governments,” (Lit., *hilkhot melakhim*, Laws of Kings) which climax in an optimistic description of the messianic age, a period of unusual peace and harmony when “nation will not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn war anymore” (Laws of Governments, Chapters 11, 12). Jewish redemption is seen within the context of world redemption; the God of justice, compassion and peace must rule the world, with Israel accepting the 613 commandments and every nation accepting His seven commandments of morality, especially “Thou shalt not murder.”

The paradigm for redemption, indeed the first example of Israel’s liberation, was our exodus from Egypt. There are a number of lessons which must be extracted from this prototype. First of all, the Israelites must win the war against oppression; the God of Israel will only be respected if His people succeed. Second, the message of Israel must be a moral one: “I am the Lord thy God who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage.” Israel is entitled to live in freedom – and must be willing to wage battle against autocratic, Amalek-like governments which themselves utilize terrorism against innocent citizens and which harbor, aid and abet terrorists. And Israel must establish Jethro-like partnerships with those who – although they may still follow their individual religions – recognize the over-arching rule of the God of justice, compassion and peace.

The portion of the revelation at Sinai is called Yitro (Jethro); only if the Jethros of the nations of the world accept fealty to the God of peace will the ultimate vision of Torah become a reality for Israel and will the world as we know it be able to survive and prosper.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Torah is Acquired Through Effort, Not Brain Power

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 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 Kabbalas 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 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

Likutei Divrei Torah

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 Droschas 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 Droschas 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.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Two very different reasons are given for keeping shabbat. In Parshat Yitro, in the Ten Commandments, the fourth commandment is to keep shabbat. And a reason is given (Shemot 20:11):

“Ki sheshet yamim asah Hashem et hashamayim v'et ha'aretz.” – “For Hashem created the world in six days and then He rested on the seventh day.”

Through keeping shabbat we therefore have a ‘zecher le'maaseh Bereishit,’ – an ongoing reminder of Hashem's act of Creation.

But then in Parshat Va'etchanan, there is a second version of the Ten Commandments, and here a different reason is given for keeping shabbat (Devarim 5:15):

“Vezacharta ki eved hayita b'Eretz Mitzraim,” – You should keep shabbat to “remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt,” and Hashem saved you therefrom. Here we have a second reason for keeping shabbat: ‘zecher l'yetisat Mitzraim,’ – to remember the Exodus from Egypt.

Both reasons are crucial.

When it comes to our appreciation of the presence of Hashem in the universe, there are two ways in which we can approach this. First of all, “Ki sheshet yamim asah Hashem et hashamayim v'et ha'aretz,” – Hashem created the heavens and the earth in six days. All we need to do is to look to the heavens and throughout the world. The vastness of this universe! It had to have had a Creator!

In addition, from the second version of the Ten Commandments, we learn that we discover Hashem through our experiences. Just as the

Israelites could recall the way in which they felt the presence of Hashem during the Exodus, so too, throughout our lives we feel that He is there.

We therefore have a cerebral connection to Hashem but we also emotionally know that he is with us all the time.

The Torah therefore teaches us that by keeping shabbat properly every single week, we are blessed to experience Hashem in two separate and equally crucial ways. First of all, to actually know logically that He is present in our lives and secondly, having remarkable, wonderful experiences through which we feel His presence in the world.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Yitro: the first organizational consultant?

Rabbanit Gavriela and Rabbi Aviel Dahan
Was Yitro's advice purely organizational, or did it also contribute to the inception of the Jewish People as a vibrant and growing community?

The portion of Yitro begins with a visit from Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, who arrives in the Israelite camp in the desert. Having heard of the miracles God had performed for the People of Israel, he decides to set out and meet them in person.

The Priest of Midian, as Yitro is called, had worshipped every possible form of idolatry in his lifetime. However, he now leaves everything and goes out to meet Moshe and the Israelites in order to hear firsthand about the great miracles that had transpired. After hearing from Moshe how God had saved the People, Yitro declares – “Now I know that God is greater than all gods” – and immediately sacrifices offerings to God.

The verses go on to tell us how Moshe returns to his daily chores during the course of Yitro's visit, and how the former judges the people from dawn to dusk. When Yitro sees the state of things, he turns to Moshe and gives him a piece of organizational advice: Delegating responsibility by authorizing others to assist him in giving counsel to the people, and finding solutions for their myriad of questions and challenges. This would also fill the People's need for some form of an encounter with God. Yitro emphasizes the fact that “the thing that you do is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee; for the thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.”

In other words, Yitro's claim is that as long as the people acknowledge Moshe as the sole authority, and look up to him as being the only spiritual figure, they will ultimately develop a dependency that will lead to collapse the minute Moshe is no longer there. Moshe explains that the fact that the judiciary comprises none but himself is not only a matter of principle, but is also practical.

Likutei Divrei Torah

In terms of principle, the People view judgement as an encounter with God. In other words, when they turn to Moshe to render judgement, they do not only come to get a truthful ruling, but also to dwell in the Divine Presence. In keeping with this notion, the Mechilta DeRabi Yishmael says that accepting the judge's verdict goes way beyond the simple understanding of what is wrong and what is right; rather, it is equated with an unmitigated closeness to God: “One who exercises a ruling of justice is like one who has become a partner to God in the Creation.” The fact that Moshe sat from dawn to dusk, rendering judgement to the People and delivering justice, was what enabled a partnership between the People and God.

The more practical reason, according to the Ibn Ezra, was that by means of the judiciary, all parties were exposed to the laws of the Torah. In fact, this was Moshe's method of teaching the laws and the statutes to the People who had just left Egypt, and who would, in turn, give these over to their children after them.

Both of these reasons made it possible for Moshe to disseminate the Torah of God, and teach His laws to the People.

Moshe, who had grown up as a prince in the house of Pharaoh, was born into greatness and raised to be a leader. We can only assume that he knew how to delegate the responsibilities of leadership. However, from Moshe's words, one gets the sense that he believed that he alone bore the responsibility of teaching the Torah of God to the People, and that only he could forge the desired closeness between the nation and the Lord. In other words, it appears that he believed there was nobody but himself who could really achieve this. Perhaps this feeling stemmed from the unique bond Moshe shared with God, or perhaps the reason was that the elders of Israelites and other prominent figures were not yet ready to take on such grave responsibility. (Shmuel David Luzzatoo on Shemot 18:24)

Notwithstanding the above, Moshe implements Yitro's advice in full, having understood that Yitro's words were uttered with Ru'ach HaKodesh, Divine Spirit. (Tzror HaMor on the Torah, ibid.)

In fact, the minute Moshe relegates authority to others, thus alleviating the grave burden of disseminating the word of the Lord and His Laws to the People, which thus far was his alone, another opportunity presents itself – those appointed to be “rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” become exemplary spiritual leaders and play an important role in the leadership of the people alongside Moshe. This unique setup was able to provide the necessary instruction for anyone who wished to learn God's Torah.

The system proved to be all the more necessary following the giving of the Torah at Sinai, when an unmediated encounter between God and the People took place, thus making it possible for all those who wished to “inquire the Lord” to actually do so. And yet the People take fright in the presence of this Divine revelation and retreat from the encounter, perhaps attesting to the fact that they were unable to meet God directly without the proper mediation.

We would like to suggest that Yitro’s advice was not only “organizational” but was also a critical solution to a unique situation. Firstly, it allowed for the Anshei Chayil, the “men of valor” who were chosen by Moshe, to take an active part in establishing the new entity called the People of Israel, by transforming a collective of slaves, born into slavery, and led through the desert by a type of monarch, into a real nation with a new identity. These men of valor, who were chosen from among the people, receive a portion of Moshe’s wisdom, and help facilitate not only the new relationship forged with God, but also the new bonds created among the people themselves.

As such, these men also serve as exemplary figures, whose qualities should be emulated. The appointment of these men as leaders, created a whole new set of dynamics, one which reinforced the People by means of a leadership formed from within the congregation, rather than external to it. Some of these men of valor were responsible for thousands of Israelites, while others – “rulers of tens” – attended to a smaller group of people, serving as role models and engaging with diverse individuals, whom would otherwise not have been exposed to any figure of authority or exemplary persona.

In many respects, this new judicial setup, solved the utter dependence on Moshe, who was hitherto perceived as the sole leader figure, and the only person capable of transforming a nation of slaves into a kingdom of priests who will be a light unto the nations.

It follows then, that the counsel given by Yitro was not aimed at simply alleviating Moshe’s daily burden during the years of wandering in the desert. Rather, it was intended to achieve something far bigger: “compelling” Moshe to make room for the People to grow; creating the conditions for new leaders to emerge.

Responsibility which is decentralized enables all those who wish to seek God and inquire His will to do so. It also creates a forward movement and allows the community to grow as an entity. On the other hand, when wisdom is centralized and leadership is given to one individual, members of the community have no access to knowledge and become completely dependent on that one individual. This, in turn, leads to indifference.

Decentralizing wisdom and authority means placing trust in others. It also means creating a space where people are allowed to err, a condition which ultimately cultivates growth. This is also how perpetual forward movement is formed.

A community’s strength is measured by the room it gives each individual to grow and actively seek God’s wisdom. Oftentimes, we, as community leaders who bear responsibility, be it formal or otherwise, tend to focus our actions inwards, towards ourselves.

However, if we are wise enough to decentralize and delegate responsibility, we will end up with a whole that is much greater than the sum of all its parts. Responsibility given to one individual is very limited and, as such, generates less value.

This holds true for the People of Israel in the desert, for communities, for synagogues and even for individual households.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin
Yearn It To Earn It

The singular most important event in world history was the revelation at Sinai when Hashem pronounced the Decalogue to at least two million Jews. We are taught (Bereishis 1:31) that, "G-d saw all that He had made and behold it was very good; and there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day". Rashi notes that this is the only day that has the definite article "hay - the", before it, and this alludes to the sixth day of Sivan when the Torah would be given. Rashi goes on to cite the Tanchuma which states that G-d built a condition into the world which He created, that if the Jewish people would not accept the Torah, the world would revert to nothingness. The acceptance of the Torah by the fledgling Jewish nation gave reason and purpose to the world, and constituted the maintenance and survival of the world. How significant is this day!

It's fascinating to note that a most interesting development took place prior to the Revelation. We are taught (Shemos 19:9) that the original plan was for Hashem to come to Moshe in the thickness of the cloud, and the people of Israel would hear Hashem directly as well, be completely convinced that it was G-d communicating with Moshe, and, as a result, "they will also believe in you [i.e. Moshe] forever". In other words, the people would be spectators, would be convinced that they heard G-d communicate to Moshe, and would be able to follow His Torah since they would be convinced that it came from Hashem. The verse continues that, "Moshe related the words of the people to Hashem". While we are not told in the text what the response of the people was to Hashem's initial plan, Rashi explains (citing the Mechilta) that the people the people wanted to hear the Revelation directly from Hashem, "since one cannot compare hearing

Likutei Divrei Torah

from a messenger to actually hearing directly from the King". What emerges is something fantastic: you ask for it, you get it! As a result of asking for more, the people were then instructed how to prepare themselves to receive prophecy (19:10-11).

It is fascinating to note (as the Torah teaches in Bamidbar 12:6-8) the basic difference between the prophecy of Moshe and that of all the other prophets. The other prophets received their prophecy in a vision, in a dream. Moshe was the only prophet to speak or communicate with G-d, "peh el peh - mouth to mouth", i.e. as one individual would speak to another. There is a prevalent custom to stay awake the entire night of Shavuot, which some explain to be an atonement for the Jewish nation oversleeping the night before kabalas haTorah - receiving the Torah. How are we to understand this - is it possible that they really oversleep on the morning that they could be experiencing prophecy!? The answer is that they thought they would be receiving the prophecy of His revelation in a dream, a vision. Instead, however, they were upgraded to obtaining prophecy on the highest level, like Moshe, because they asked for it. They wanted greater closeness and intimacy with Hashem, and He responded in kind.

We see elsewhere, as well, that if one doesn't yearn and pine for greater knowledge of G-d and Torah one does not receive it. We are taught (Shemos 3:6) that when G-d first appears to Moshe at the burning bush, Moshe "hid his face" for he was afraid to gaze toward G-d. Later (Shemos 33:18) Moshe asks Hashem "show me now Your glory", which is understood by our Rabbis to mean that Moshe was asking to understand G-d. The Talmud (Berachos 8a) interprets this to mean, that Moshe was questioning why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. The Medrash (Medrash Rabbah, Shemos 3:1) teaches that G-d responds to Moshe, "When I wanted to teach you, you declined by turning your face from Me. Now that you are requesting of Me, I will turn My face from you and deny you your request." Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l comments that Moshe undoubtedly turned away from G-d out of a sense of complete and total humility, feeling unworthy of such a magnificent revelation by G-d. Even so, Hashem's response was teaching Moshe that one's quest for knowledge should often override the derech ertz of humility. Moshe, according to this opinion in the Medrash, was taken to task for not being more proactive in seizing the moment for greater spirituality. Not asking for it was an opportunity lost.

We are taught (Shemos 19:1,3) that the children of Israel arrived at the wilderness of Sinai, Moshe ascended to G-d, and then G-d called to him from the mountain. The Ohr HaChaim asks: is it not strange that Moshe ascended prior to being summoned by Hashem? He answers, most excitingly, that Moshe was told at the burning bush that fifty

days after the exodus from Egypt the nation would worship G-d on this mountain. It appears that Moshe learned from his prior mistake at the bush, and as soon as they arrived at the mountain, Moshe, in his excitement and enthusiasm, could not be restrained, and, as we are taught, "ahava mikalkes es hashura - love conquers all", Moshe's love for Hashem propelled him to ascend the mountain, defying the usual protocol of not entering such a domain prior to being summoned and invited. We find this theme repeated later (Shemos 33:7), "So it would be, that kol mivakesh Hashem - whoever would seek Hashem - would go out to the tent of meeting". The Targum translates the words "kol mivakesh Hashem" as "kol detavah ulpan", meaning whoever would seek instruction from before Hashem would go out to the house of study which was outside the camp. One has to be mivakesh, seek Torah, and then one is rewarded with spiritual success.

The above sources demonstrate that to achieve success in Torah and spiritual growth, one has to work at it and demonstrate one's readiness to put time and effort into it. This was demonstrated on a communal level when the incredible revelation at Sinai was attained via their burning desire for prophecy, and on the individual level when Moshe could not be restrained from running up the mountain. What lesson might there be for each and every individual who may say to himself, "of what significance am I in this vast universe?"

I would like to refer each and every person them to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 37a) where we are taught that each individual is to say and believe, "bishvili nivrah haolam - the world was created for me". Rather than believe that they are insignificant, each person must realize that he is truly a world unto himself. Just as each individual's face is unique, so too, is each individual's mind unique (Berachos 58a). Each person must realize that they were born at a particular time and in a particular place in order to make their unique contribution to their society and, indeed, to the world. Just as Moshe could not be restrained from running up the mountain, each Jew is charged to love Hashem (as we are taught in the first paragraph of the Shema), and we demonstrate this love by our desire to be close to Him, closeness which is achieved by greater fulfillment of studying His Torah and performance of mitzvos.

Each Shabbos, as part of the Kiddush we recite on Friday night, we proclaim that Shabbos is "zaycher liyitziyas Mitzrayim - a remembrance of our exodus from Egypt". At first glance, this declaration seems puzzling. It is understandable that Shabbos is zaycher limaasay biraishis - a remembrance of His creation of the world", since the essence for our keeping and observing Shabbos is to remind ourselves that G-d created this world in six days. But what does Shabbos have to do

with the exodus from Egypt? The Ramban (in his commentary to the Ten Commandments in sefer Devarim) explains that His total mastery over nature which was demonstrated through the exodus from Egypt proves that He is the creator Who can do with nature as He sees fit. I'd like to suggest another explanation. The word "maytzar" can mean "a boundary". "Zaycher liyitziyas Mitzrayim" can be understood homiletically to refer to the ability of man to break out of, and not be limited by, the boundaries which either he or society have surrounded him with. Shabbos, with its neshamah yesayrah, is a weekly charge for greater intimacy with Hashem, urging us to follow the pristine example of our forefathers at Sinai and to constantly actively seek further growth and development, rather than be a passive spectator who watches many golden opportunities slip by.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

When the Student is Ready

They journeyed from Rephidim, and they arrived in the desert of Sinai, and they encamped in the desert, and Israel (Vayichan – Singular) encamped there opposite the mountain. (Shemos 19:2)

and Israel encamped there: וַיַּחֲנֹךְ, [the singular form, denoting that they encamped there] as one man with one heart, but all the other encampments were [divided] with complaints and with strife. — Rashi

And Moshe spoke before HASHEM saying, "They, the Children of Israel will not listen to me and how will Pharaoh listen to me, and I am of uncircumcised lips. (Shemos 6:12)

Why does Moshe go backwards to the old excuse of the speech impediment? That was clarified by the burning bush. Also, his argument seems strong enough that he feels that the Children of Israel won't listen and how much more so Pharaoh. Why does it matter after that that he has a speech impediment?

There is no question that Moshe was our greatest teacher. He goes down in history with the title "Rabbeinu". He is our teacher. All the Torah for all generations traces back to him. Yet, there is a greater teacher we can learn from. The word "Torah" means teaching. That's what the Torah does. It teaches. It is "Toras HASHEM" - the Torah of HASHEM! HASHEM is our greatest teacher, in fact and we can learn from the way He teaches.

A lesson plan is always the key to great teaching. One of the key ingredients of that plan is something called an anticipatory set. It is meant to whet the appetite of the student and awaken an interest in learning. Without that, the student is not a vessel to receive. All the great lecturing in the world will not accomplish a thing until the student is a willing participant. Since a person has free will, this can present a great challenge.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Often, if not always, a good teacher must create a teachable moment. To catch the interest of a class, I launched a few shocking statements that needed, of course, to be qualified. "Today we will learn how to speak Loshon Hora! The Torah permits killing, breaking Shabbos, and eating non-Kosher food!"

One student said, "Now, tell us! Tell us please!" We went on to explain that in certain circumstances only and under certain conditions one might or must either kill, violate Shabbos, eat non-Kosher food to save a life, and under certain conditions to speak Loshon Hora. We went on to learn those conditions and the lesson filled that void the anticipatory set created. The students were thirsty and receptive for an answer – so the lesson was gladly received.

The Sefas Emes offers the following amazing insight on the verse. He explains that it is "Because the Children of Israel will not listen" and therefore he was of uncircumcised lips... Speech is in exile as long as the recipients are not ready to hear the word of HASHEM..." He goes on to explain that to the extent that the listener is unavailable, the words are hidden. The more ready the recipients are, the more open and revealed is the message.

Sometimes even when you desperately want to tell somebody something, if they are not ready to hear, then the message will feel like it is being blocked by the listener, and even the most articulate speaker can become a stammerer, a stutterer.

The greatest proof of this we find by Mount Sinai when the entire Nation of Israel camped, in a singular fashion, as Rashi describes "like one person, with one heart". It was then that HASHEM Himself broke a 2448- year, 26 generation silence. When "the student" was really ready that's when "The Teacher appeared" and declared, "I am HASHEM..."

After the incredible exhibition of the exodus, including ten plagues and the splitting of the sea, and after the 49-day journey to Mount Sinai, munching on miraculous Mann along the way, the Jewish People were ready. All of what had preceded that moment in history was a grandiose anticipatory set.

There is an eastern notion that always rang true with me, and I believe that this is the Torah source for that notion, "When the student is ready the teacher appears." I always wondered where the teacher goes until the students are ready. Now we understand that it's the teacher's job to create a teachable moment, to patiently prepare and wait for that magic moment when the student is ready.

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's
Derashot Ledorot**

How Many are the Ten Commandments*

If an election were held among the peoples of the world to determine which was the most popular document in the universe, there is no doubt that some of the votes would be cast in favor of the Ten Commandments. It is the recognized cornerstone of the world's great religions. It is a code which is accepted even by many atheists. It is the model for many great literary works. It is preached, and preached about, more than any other comparable document. Yet, curiously, the Decalogue or Aseret HaDibrot crops up in a Jew's talk only in those weeks when the sidrot of Yitro and Va'ethanan are read, for then the Decalogue too is read. Otherwise, the Ten Commandments are a relatively insignificant part of the Jewish religious vocabulary. At a brit mila we mention Torah and good deeds – not the Ten Commandments. To the parents of a young boy starting on his school career, we express our wishes for a future of Torah – nothing is said of the Decalogue. And to the Bar Mitzva, unless his birthday be in the week of Parashat Yitro, we speak of tradition, and education, and home, and Torah – not of the Aseret HaDibrot. Now, why is that? Why does the traditional Jew, despite his observation of them, not have such an attraction to the Ten Commandments which his fellow Jews have? Why does the Orthodox rabbi preach about the Ten Commandments so much less frequently than does the Conservative or Reform rabbi?

The answer is, that the Decalogue as such and as it is commonly understood, is too simple a formula. There is something mighty suspicious about ten easy rules to this complex business of life. The traditional Jew, perhaps because of his tradition, or because of his background in scholarship, or because of his grasp of reality, is keenly aware of the fallacies of oversimplification, of its tragically disappointing results and consequences. Life is a harsh, intricate, complicated affair, and ten rules alone and by themselves are hardly sufficient to solve all of its formidable problems.

Our Rabbis already recorded a protest against this misunderstanding of the Ten Commandments as the wherewithal of religion, as the ten solitary steps with which to solve all problems and cure all ailments. The Talmud tells us (Berakhot 12a) that in the Temple, during the Shaḥarit service, it was customary to recite the Decalogue before Shema. But then the Rabbis decided to abrogate this traditional recitation because of the heretics, who pointed to this recitation of the Decalogue as proof that it was the only important part of Torah. This decision against the saying of the Decalogue was accepted by the generations, and even until this very day the Ten Commandments are not part of our liturgy. And all because of the minim, the heretics who over-emphasized these ten mitzvot to the detriment of all others, those people who sought too easy a cure to too great

a problem, those who believed to the point of heresy. The Ten Commandments, by themselves, the Rabbis meant to tell us, are by far insufficient.

And our age is distinguished by precisely this malady of oversimplification. Ours is an age where attempts are made to solve all knotty moral problems and ethical questions by a few easy steps, by a "rule of thumb." For in what age, other than one which looks for simple and childish rules, could a book like *How to Win Friends and Influence People* – a book that presents several disgustingly easy rules on how to become a social success and develop a magnetic personality – gain its phenomenal popularity? In what other age could such a tizmes be made about a book like *Peace of Mind* which reduces all of Judaism to a few neat psychological principles? And all of our Western culture is colored by Christianity, a religion which won its millions of converts by boiling down Judaism to its easiest regulations, by accepting the Ten Commandments – and even those not completely – and rejecting most of the rest of the Torah. The sage advice our contemporaries seek is that currently available in most of our popular digest magazines – "Ten Ways to a Happy Married Life," "Three Ways to Beat Cancer," "Five Ways to Win the Love of Your Children," and other such nonsense.

No, my friends, despite our unbounded reverence for the Ten Commandments, we must not over-emphasize them out of all proportion. It is not consistent with the intricacy of life and the complexity of moral and religious experience. And it can lead to outright heresy. But lest you leave today with the impression that the Rabbi this morning preached a sermon against the Ten Commandments, let me assure you that I am in good company. The Rambam, Maimonides, has preceded me on this matter. Only he was even more emphatic about it. He incorporated his opinion in a strongly-worded legal response to someone who asked him whether it is proper to rise when the reader reads the Decalogue in the Torah. You know, of course, that in this synagogue and in most synagogues, the congregation rises when the Decalogue is read. However, Maimonides believed that this was against the spirit of Jewish law. Allow me to quote to you part of his response (Teshuva 46) in English translation:

It is proper to abolish this tradition [of rising for the Decalogue] wherever it has taken hold, and to teach the people to sit, as they usually do...in order that there should not result a degeneration of the pure faith...the heretical belief that one part of the Torah is superior to another, a belief which is wrong and evil and deplorable in the extreme.

Maimonides, then, was also perturbed by this reliance on succinct formulas which result in naturally ignoring the rest of the Torah. And if such a reliance on preference is expressed by

Likutei Divrei Torah

rising during the reading of a specific portion of the Torah, then it should be stopped.

The consensus of Jewish thought, then, is that there is no sufficient concise formula or rule which can serve as a key to all life or religion. We may say, with George Bernard Shaw, that the only Golden Rule is – that there are no Golden Rules.

Yet I am certain that there are certain questions of which you are aware which remain unanswered. You may wonder: why, then, were the Ten Commandments given separately? You may rightfully ask me: why was the giving of the Decalogue accompanied by all that flourish, by the elaborate preparation, by the strange celestial phenomena, by the aura of holiness, and the fearful display of the elements, which reached its climax in "Anokhi?" Obviously, there is something to the Ten Commandments we have thus far failed to mention.

The answer to that question was already given by the great Jewish philosophers. Philo, followed by Saadia Gaon, Abarbanel, and other beacons of Jewish thinking, insists that the Ten Commandments were more than ten. They believe, very reasonably, that in this case, ten equals 613. And this, according to the laws of religious arithmetic, is a great truth. You see, what they wanted to tell us was that the Ten Commandments mean more than what they say; they are more than a list of ten mitzvot – rather, they contain, in essence, all 613. They include remazim, hints, of all the other commandments. The entire Torah, all its mitzvot, are latent, in capsule form, in the Decalogue. Thus, for instance, the prohibition of idolatry includes the kernels of all laws related to idol worship and ritual, and all laws which, according to these thinkers, were promulgated as safe-guards against idolatry, and it prohibits the worship of gold and pleasure and beauty. "Thou shalt not steal" includes the prohibition of robbing, usury, interest, graft, and influence-peddling. "Lo tinaf" implies all injunctions against adultery, incest, immodesty, un-chastity, and all forms of moral corruption. With this in mind, we can equate the Decalogue with the whole Torah, and therefore understand its biblical eminence and the great holy events attending to its giving. Without this realization that the Ten Commandments contain the seeds of all 613 commandments, they are simply ten of the mitzvot of the Torah – not an easy formula to a get-pious-quick type of religion.

The Talmud (Shabbat 31a) tells an interesting story of a pagan who approached the great scholar Shammai and said to him: "Convert me to Judaism on the one condition that you teach me the entire Torah during the time that I can balance myself on one foot." The pagan wanted an easy formula, a simple rule which will ease his way into heaven – something like the abracadabra he had pronounced before his idol in his idolatrous days. And Shammai

reacted to this request by pushing him away with a measuring-rod, or a construction-worker's yardstick, which was in his hand. With this, Shammai indicated that any simple rules, like the Ten Commandments as they read literally, are far insufficient. They are like the architect's measuring instrument – they can indicate the limits of faith, but not the body; they can indicate size, but not depth. They can tell you where to build, but not what kind of material to build with; they can give you a very general idea of Judaism, but you cannot be a Jew with them alone, just as you cannot build with a yard-stick alone.

The pagan then approached the other great religious thinker of that age, Hillel. Hillel, too, did not believe in choosing one mitzva above another, in facile prescriptions, in golden rules. But he knew the mind of this pagan, he understood his background, his pagan theology of simplicity. And so Hillel showed his great pedagogic genius. He told him: I'll give you a rule even easier than the Ten Commandments, even easier than "Love thy neighbor as thyself" – and that is, don't hate your neighbor, do not do to him what you would not have done to yourself. The pagan was happy beyond description – here it was, an easy cook-book recipe for Judaism. But then Hillel added something – "ve'idakh peirusa, zil gemor," "all the rest of Torah is commentary, go and learn it." Without Torah, this principle cannot be understood. It is meaningless. "Zil gemor." Go ahead, my friend, and study that Torah, if you wish to understand the rule. For the rule I told you includes all of the commandments, and all the commandments include it. Without all the commandments, you remain a pagan, a heathen.

In the same way, the Ten Commandments can become the guiding light of our lives only if "idakh peirusa," if they are taken not as ten easy rules, but as ten classes of laws which include all of Torah, which is their essential and vital commentary. To the question "how many are the Ten Commandments?" we must answer "613."

There are no easy roads to the good life. There are only many hard, tough, unpaved paths – but these paths are steady, sure, and certain, and they lead to greater, holier, and loftier glory. [Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's *Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Exodus*, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern] *February 16, 1952

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Netflix's Greatest Competition

The CEO of Netflix once said that their greatest competition is not their competitors, but sleep. Once one video finishes, Netflix give you a few seconds before the next one automatically begins. They want to keep us engaged and mindful of what's going on

specifically in Netflix, not in the important things in our lives.

Thank G-d for Shabbat. We know that every Friday, we switch off our phones and other devices, and the world comes to a standstill. Neither the CEO of Netflix nor any other digital geniuses can penetrate the kedushah of Shabbat, when we can truly switch off and connect with the relationships on those most important to us – Hashem, our spouse, our children, our community.

In the Ten Commandments, it says that for six days you must work, and complete all of our work. The Midrash asks: is it possible for a person to complete all of their work? Have we ever gone in to Shabbat having accomplished all that we wanted to? The Midrash answers that you should go in to Shabbat with a mindset as if everything that needed to be done has been done. True serenity, true presence of mind and sense of self comes when we are able to act as if everything we need to have done has been done. To create a reality in our minds.

That is what Shabbat is: an oasis in time, where everything stops, not only Netflix, but everything that we wanted to do that week, we put on hold, and create space for the most important relationships in our lives. If we are able to create that mindset that we have done all we can during the week, we will be able to truly connect with ourselves, Hashem and all those who really matter in our lives.

Weekly Parsha YITRO

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

There are two different viewpoints as to the timing and to the nature of the visit of Yitro to the Jewish encampment in the desert of Sinai. One opinion is that he came before the revelation of God to the Jews and the granting of the Torah to them. The other opinion is that he came after Sinai and the Torah revelation. I think that these two different opinions really delve into the character and nature of Yitro himself, as much as they deal with chronological events recorded for us in the Torah.

Rashi indicates that Yitro came because of his awareness of the miracle of the splitting of Yam Suf and of the subsequent battle between Amalek and Israel. If so, as Rashi seems to indicate by not mentioning the Torah revelation as one of the causes for his leaving his country, his position and his faith to come to join Israel in its journey, then it seems that Yitro's "conversion" to Judaism was motivated by seemingly outside influences rather than by personal soul-searching.

If however Yitro arrives at the camp of Israel after the revelation at Sinai, then one can justifiably argue that it was an inner recognition of the veracity of the newly revealed Torah. Recognition of the truths of its monotheistic moral code that Sinai represents would have motivated his abandonment of past idols and ideals and drove him to his new attachment to the God and people of Israel.

In this seemingly pedantic discussion on the timeline of events that befell the Jewish people in their forty year sojourn in the desert of Sinai, lies a very deep and relevant understanding of the Jewish world and its obstacle laden path to faith and belief.

Throughout Jewish history there have been many who were influenced by outside, historical events that made them wonder in amazement at the survival and influential presence of the Jewish people. The Jew was always outnumbered and discriminated against by world society. It has always been felt by many that it was only a matter of time that Judaism and Jews would finally ceased to exist. Yet from the ancient pharaohs to the modern age the survival of the Jewish people has remained a troublesome mystery to world society.

The world is aware of the miracles that have accompanied us while crossing the sea of history and of the constant battle that we have been forced to fight against Amalek. This awareness has provided us with a few allies from the outside world to aid us in our quest for equality and fair treatment. These people are valuable friends and allies but are rarely if ever true converts to Judaism. However, we have been blessed in every generation by the attachment of people to Judaism and Israel because of the appreciation and recognition of the God-given moral code that the Torah represents.

It is the inner spiritual drive of their souls that drove and drives these people to become converts to Judaism. Since it is difficult, if not well nigh impossible, for any Jewish rabbinic court to explore the inner soul of any other human being, the problems of formal conversion to Judaism, especially in our time, are many and difficult. Yet, Yitro stands as an example as to the benefits to the individual and the nation as a whole of those who are not born Jewish and who stubbornly wish to attach themselves to the people and destiny of Israel.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

Parshat Yitro: The Prototypes of Very Different Gentiles

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

"And Jethro the Priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard all that God had done for Moses and his people; that He had taken Israel out of Egypt." [Exodus 18:1]

This Torah portion records how Jethro, Moses' Midianite father-in-law, heard of God's great wonders in redeeming the Israelites from Egypt and came to Moses amidst great praise to the Lord. Upon witnessing Moses' difficult workload in rendering judgments from dawn to night, Jethro gave sage advice in organizing and delegating a graduated judicial system, with only the most complex cases to come before

Moses. One of the issues dealt with by the biblical commentaries is the exact time when Jethro arrived on the scene: Was it before or after the Sinaitic revelation?

In terms of the chronological sequence of the biblical account, it would appear that Jethro came to Moses immediately after the splitting of the Reed Sea and before the commandments were given at Sinai.

However, both Nahmanides and Ibn Ezra point out that since Moses could not have been occupied to the point of exhaustion with rendering biblical rulings before the Bible had been given, logic dictates that Jethro arrived and made his wise suggestion after the revelation at Sinai. But if so, why does the Torah record the advent and advice of Jethro before the account of the revelation, and why name the portion which includes the content of the divine words after a Midianite priest, especially since he came on the scene after that revelation took place?!

Ibn Ezra explains:

"Since the Bible has just mentioned the evil which Amalek did to the Israelites [at the end of Exodus Chapter 17 as the conclusion of the previous portion of Beshalach], the Bible must [immediately thereafter] mention in contrast the good advice which Jethro gave to the Israelites [at the beginning of Chapter 18 in the opening of the portion of Yitro]."

I would add that the Bible is contrasting two very opposite reactions to the miracle of the Exodus. In general, the nations of the world heard of the stunning rebellion of the Hebrews and became terrified:

"Nations heard and shuddered; terror gripped the inhabitants of Philistia... Fear and dread fell upon them; at the greatness of Your Arm they fell silent as stone." [Exodus 15:14-16]

Two peoples, however, do not merely respond by panicking. Amalek, "first among the gentiles" (Num. 24:20), set out to make war against this emerging new star with the intent of heading them off at the pass. And Amalek played "dirty":

"Remember what Amalek did to you... when they encountered you... when you were tired and exhausted, and they cut off those who were lagging to your rear [the old, the young and the infirm]." [Deut. 25:17, 18]

Jethro, on the other hand, is filled with admiration and praise: "And Jethro was overjoyed at all of the good which the Lord accomplished for the Israelites in saving them from the hand of Egypt. And Jethro said, 'Praised be the Lord who has saved you from the hand of Egypt and the hand of Pharaoh... Now I know that the Lord is the greatest of all of the gods...'" (Ex. 18:9-11).

In effect, the biblical juxtaposition is teaching us that all gentiles should not be seen in the same light: there is the gentile who is jealous and aggressive (Amalek), but there is also the gentile who is admiring and willing to be of help (Jethro).

We are still left with the question as to why the biblical portion of the divine revelation should be referred to by the name of a Midianite priest – and I believe that herein lies one of the most profound truths of the Jewish faith. Undoubtedly the Torah was given to the Jewish people, as Maimonides teaches, "Moses our Teacher bequeathed the Torah and the commandments only to Israel, as it is written, 'a heritage to the congregation of Jacob,' as well as to anyone who may wish to convert [to Judaism]."

But in the very same breath Maimonides continues to legislate:

"And similarly Moses was commanded by the Almighty to enforce upon the gentile world for everyone to accept the seven Noahide laws of morality." [Laws of Governments 8:10]

Maimonides concludes his religio-legal magnum opus Mishneh Torah with the "Laws of Governments," (Lit., hilkhot melakhim, Laws of Kings) which climax in an optimistic description of the messianic age, a period of unusual peace and harmony when "nation will not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn war anymore" (Laws of Governments, Chapters 11, 12). Jewish redemption is seen within the context of world redemption; the God of justice, compassion and peace must rule the world, with Israel accepting the 613 commandments and

every nation accepting His seven commandments of morality, especially “Thou shalt not murder.”

The paradigm for redemption, indeed the first example of Israel’s liberation, was our exodus from Egypt. There are a number of lessons which must be extracted from this prototype. First of all, the Israelites must win the war against oppression; the God of Israel will only be respected if His people succeed. Second, the message of Israel must be a moral one: “I am the Lord thy God who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage.” Israel is entitled to live in freedom – and must be willing to wage battle against autocratic, Amalek-like governments which themselves utilize terrorism against innocent citizens and which harbor, aid and abet terrorists. And Israel must establish Jethro- like partnerships with those who – although they may still follow their individual religions – recognize the over-arching rule of the God of justice, compassion and peace.

The portion of the revelation at Sinai is called Yitro (Jethro); only if the Jethros of the nations of the world accept fealty to the God of peace will the ultimate vision of Torah become a reality for Israel and will the world as we know it be able to survive and prosper.

Shabbat Shalom

from **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabiyy@theyeshiva.net>

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Behind the War On Hamas

The Two Great Evils of History: The Islamists and Hitler

Give Us Two

One of the intriguing things about the Ten Commandments[1], given to the Jewish people is that they were engraved on two separate tablets. Was G-d short of granite that He needed to use two tablets? Why could He not carve the commandments onto a single stone?

There is the stereotypical Jew-bashing joke about this. Before coming to the Jews, G-d approached all the nations and asked if they would like to accept the Torah. Each of them refused because of some commandment in the Bible to which they could not possibly adhere. When G-d presented the offer to the Jews, their sole question was: How much do you want for it?

To which G-d responded: “It’s for free.”

So the Jews replied: “Give us two.”

Yet the issue demands sincere reflection. Why indeed was there a need for two tablets?

Two Versions

The rabbis in the midrash proposed a novel answer. The Ten Commandments, they suggested, were engraved on two tablets, five on each stone, so that they would be read in two directions -- from top to bottom, and from side to side[2].

The simplest way of reading the Ten Commandments is, of course, from top to bottom:

On the first stone:

1) I am the Lord your G-d who has taken you out of Egypt...

2) You shall have no other gods...

3) You shall not swear in G-d's name in vain...

4) Remember the Sabbath...

5) Honor your father and your mother...

And the five commandments engraved on the second tablet:

6) You shall not murder.

7) You shall not commit adultery.

8) You shall not steal.

9) You shall not bear false witness against your fellow.

10) You shall not covet your fellow’s house; you shall not covet your fellow’s wife ... nor anything that belongs to your fellow.

This was the way of reading the Ten Commandments vertically. Yet due to the fact that the first five commandments were engraved on one stone and the second five on a separate stone, there was another way of reading the commandments -- horizontally instead of vertically, from commandment No. 1 directly to No. 6; from No. 2 to No. 7; 3 -- 8; 4 -- 9; 5 -- 10.

This version of the Ten Commandments would then read like this:

1) I am the Lord your G-d/You shall not murder. 2) You shall have no other gods/You shall not commit adultery; and so forth with the rest of the commandments.

But why is it necessary to read the Ten Commandments horizontally? What insight can we gain from this alternative reading of the commandments?

In this essay we will discuss the juxtaposition of the first and sixth commandments: “I am the Lord your G-d/You shall not murder.” The significance of this “horizontal” reading from a historical, political and religious standpoint cannot be overstated. It embodies one of the most stunning aspects of Judaism. What is at stake in this juxtaposition is nothing less than the future of human civilization.

Two Historical Attempts

Two groups have made an attempt to divorce commandment no. 1 from commandment no. 6 -- to sever the idea of a Creator, who conceived the world for a moral purpose, from the imperative to honor the life of another human being. The first group was comprised of the philosophers of the Enlightenment during the 18th and 19th centuries, the second of religious leaders in many and diverse ages. The result for both was moral defeat.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment ushered in the Age of Reason and the modern secular era, founded on the belief that the great ideal of “You shall not murder” did not require the prerequisite of “I am the Lord Your G-d” in order to be sustained. Religion was not necessary to ensure moral behavior; reason alone, without G-d, would guide humanity into an age of liberty and to the achievement of moral greatness. The sixth commandment could operate successfully independent of the first.

While religion embodied the vision of man standing in a continuous relationship with G-d, the essence of the Enlightenment represented the vision of man without G-d. It was a vision already introduced during the first days of creation near the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, by the most sophisticated animal of the time, the serpent. “You shall be like G-d,” it promised Eve[3]. Man could, and ought to, replace G-d. Left to his own (de)vicies, the thinking went, the human being will achieve greatness. But the Holocaust spelled the end of this grand faith in the promise of human progress based on human reason. In Auschwitz, the belief that modern man felt a natural empathy for others was ruined forever.

The gas chambers were not invented by a primitive, barbaric and illiterate people. To the contrary, this people excelled in sciences and the arts, but nevertheless sent 1.5 million children, and 4.5 million adults, to their deaths solely because they had Jewish blood flowing in their veins. SS guards would spend a day in Auschwitz, gassing as many as 12,000 human beings, and then return home in the evening to pet their dogs and laugh with their wives. As the smoke of children ascended from the crematoriums, these charming romantics would enjoy good wine, beautiful women and the moving music of Bach, Mozart and Wagner. They murdered millions of innocents in the name of a developed ethic, and they justified genocide on purely rational grounds.

In “Schindler’s List,” there is a scene during the liquidation of the Krakow Ghetto where a little girl hiding in a piano is shot dead by an SS guard. As her little angelic body lay in a river of blood, another guard sits down to play the piano.

First SS guard: Was ist das? Ist das Bach?

Second SS guard: Nein. Mozart.

First SS guard: Mozart?

Second SS guard: Ja. And they both marvel at the exquisite music.

This was Nazi Germany at its best.

Elie Wiesel, who gripped the world’s imagination with his book “Night,” a personal testimony of life and death in Auschwitz, once asked the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who himself lost many members of his family in the Holocaust, how he could believe in G-d after Auschwitz. If G-d existed, Wiesel asked, posing the single greatest challenge to faith, how could He ignore 6 million of His children de-humanized and murdered in the cruelest of fashions?

The Rebbe shed a tear and then replied, “In whom do you expect me to believe after Auschwitz? In man?”

This must remain one of the lasting legacies of Auschwitz. If there is any faith at all left after the extermination of 6 million people, it must glean its vitality from something transcending the human rationale and its properties. If morality is left to be determined exclusively by the human mind, it can become a morality that justifies the guillotine, the gulag and the gas chamber. As Dostoevsky famously put it in "The Brothers Karamazov," "Where there is no G-d, all is permitted."

The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote: "I cannot see how to refute the arguments for the subjectivity of ethical values [resulting from atheism], but I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don't like it." Russell's point is critical. Without G-d, we cannot objectively define any behavior as good or evil. As difficult as it is to entertain, no one can objectively claim that gassing a mother and her children is any more evil than killing a mouse. It is all a matter of taste and opinion. The validity and effectiveness of "You shall not murder" can be sustained only if it is predicated on the foundation of faith in a universal moral creator who gave humanity an absolute and unwavering definition of what constitutes good vs. evil.

Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel, who escaped Warsaw a few weeks before it was invaded and lost most of his family in the Nazi Holocaust, captured this sentiment succinctly: "If man is not more than human, then he is less than human." Either we climb to a place beyond ourselves, or we are likely to fall to a place below ourselves. When the vision of the sacred dies in the soul of a person, he or she is capable of becoming a servant of the devil.

Religious Evil

But this is far from the whole picture.

While the Enlightenment abandoned commandment no. 1 in favor of no. 6, various religions over the ages abandoned no. 6 in favor of no. 1. Theirs has been the atrocious belief that as long as you believe in the Lord, or in Allah, you can kill and maim whomever you brand an "infidel." Whether it is a business executive in New York, or a teenager eating a slice of pizza in Jerusalem, or a child on the first day of school in Beslan, or a commuter in Madrid, or a tourist in Bali, or a Chabad couple in Mumbai, if the person is not a member of your faith, G-d wants him or her to die. For the religious fundamentalist, "I am the Lord your G-d" has nothing to do with "You shall not murder."

This is the greatest perversion of faith. When thousands can rejoice gleefully in the torture of Jewish babies, in the rape and beheading of Jewish women, as the Hamas monsters did on October 7th, 2023, while millions of others celebrated, is the most vile desecration of Allah. Faith that does not inculcate its followers with the sanctity of every single human life desecrates and erodes the very purpose of faith, which is to elevate the human person to a state beyond personal instinct and prejudice. If you delete "You shall not murder" from religion, you have detached yourself from "I am the Lord your G-d." To believe in G-d means to honor the life of every person created in the image of G-d. What the juxtaposition of the two commandments is telling us is that you can't believe in G-d and murder (3*).

Conversely, if you truly believe that taking the life of another human is wrong -- not just because you lack the means or motive to do so or are afraid of ending up in jail, but because you recognize the transcendent, inviolable value of life -- that's just another way of saying you believe in G-d. For what confers upon human life its radical grace, its transcendent sanctity and its absolute value if not the living presence of G-d imprinted on the face of the human person?

3,336 years ago, Judaism, in the most ennobling attempt to create a society based on justice and peace, established its principle code in the sequence of the two commandments -- "I am the Lord your G-d/You shall not murder." A society without G-d can become monstrous; a society that abandons the eternal and absolute commandment "You shall not murder" is equally evil. Both are capable of burning children alive during the day and then retiring to sleep with a clear conscience.

The Mountain

The Talmud captures this notion in an intriguing fashion[4].

The Talmud cites a tradition that when Israel approached Sinai, G-d lifted up the mountain, held it over the people's heads and declared:

"Either you accept the Torah, or be crushed beneath the mountain." (The Talmud bases this tradition on the verse in Exodus, "And they stood beneath the mountain[5].")

This seems ludicrous. What worth is there to a relationship and a covenant accepted through coercion[6]?

The answer is profoundly simple. What G-d was telling the Jewish people is that the creation of societies that honor life and shun cruelty is dependent on education and on the value system inculcated within children of the society. The system of Torah, G-d was suggesting, was the guarantor for life and liberty. If you reject the morality of Torah, if you will lack the courage and conviction to teach the world that "I am the Lord your G-d" and that I have stated unequivocally "You shall not murder," the result will be humanity crushed under a mountain of tyrants.

Seventy-five years since Auschwitz and after two decades of incessant Islamic terrorism, the mountain is hanging over our heads once again. Shall we embrace the path of divine-based morality? Shall we never forget that religion must always be defined by "You shall not murder[7]?"

[1]Exodus chapter 20. [2] Mechilta to Exodus ibid. [3] Genesis 3:5. 3*) The Midrash (Mechiltah ibid.) in discussing the connection between the first and sixth commandments presents the following parable to explain the evil behind murder: "There was a king who entered a country and put up portraits of himself, and made statues of himself, and minted coins with his image. After a while, the people of the country overturned his portraits, broke his statues and invalidated his coins, thereby reducing the image of the king. "So, too, one who sheds blood reduces the image of the King, as it is written (Genesis 9:6): "One who spills a man's blood... for in the image of G-d He made man." [4] Talmud, Shabbas 88a. [5] Exodus 19:17. [6] This question is raised among many of the Talmudic commentators. Many answers have been offered. See Tosfos, Eitz Yosef, Pnei Yehoshua, Shabbos Shel Mi and BenYehoyada to Talmud Shabbos ibid. Midrash Tanchumah Noah section 3. Daas Zekeinim Mibbalei Hatsofot on Exodus 19:17. Maharal Tiferes Yisroel ch. 32, Gur Aryeh on Exodus ibid. and Or Chodosh p. 45. Sources noted in Pardas Yosef to Exodus ibid. Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Pulnah in Ben Poras Yosef Parshas Vayeishev. Torah Or Megilas Esther p. 96c; 118c. 7) This essay is based on a Yiddish letter by the Lubavitcher Rebbe written to Dr. Elie Wiesel in 1965 (published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 33 pp.255-260) and on a 1962 public address by the Rebbe (published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 3 pp. 887-895), and on other sources. [7] This essay is based on a Yiddish letter by the Lubavitcher Rebbe written to Dr. Elie Wiesel in April, 1965 (published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 33 pp.255-260) and on a 1962 public address by the Rebbe (published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 3 pp. 887-895), and on a lecture presented by Rabbi Dr. Benjamin Bleich, and other sources.

Perceptions

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Yisro THE Big Reveal

Friday Night

THIS WEEK'S PARSHA is climactic for an obvious reason, and a less obvious reason. The giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai is one of the most important events of all of history, greatly altering the direction of mankind.

The world doesn't know or appreciate it, but all the civility that we live with and depend upon is only because of the Torah. Nothing else comes close to the moral standard it teaches man to live up to, and those who haven't have lived far more barbaric lives...even today. The deterioration of society in any generation is because of a lack of Torah influence.

The less obvious reason has to do with the main purpose of Creation, which so few people know or think about. It's why God started with all of this, "this" including so much more than we see or know about, most of which cannot be picked up by the "James Webb Telescope." To see that part, or what we are allowed to see of it, requires the proper tradition, and a good mind's eye.

That purpose? The revelation of God to man. That's all life is about, and that is all life has ever been about. God created all of it, the Ohr Ain Sof (Revelation Level 1), the Kav v'Tzimtzum (Revelation Level 2), Adam Kadmon (Revelation Level 3), Atzilus (Revelation Level 4), Beriyah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah (Revelation Level 5), just for this purpose. Oh, and our physical universe too, which is on the lowest level of Asiyah.

Now, if you were to ask the seven billion plus people living on this planet what they thought the purpose of life is, if they have an answer, it is unlikely to be this one. I've asked this question to people with many years of Torah learning under their belt and, not once did I receive such an answer. Some have come close, but no one has said it clearly and decisively. How could something be so central to everything and yet be so unknown to so many people?

Because it is not only about God's big reveal to all of mankind, but mankind's big reveal of God. When Yeshayahu HaNavi called the Jewish people to be a "light to the nations" (which happens to also be imprinted on the wall of the organization that likes us the least), he was telling us this: Go reveal God to the world.

And by reveal, we don't mean on a theoretical level only. We mean, find a way to make the reality of God so real to people that they can relate to Him and feel His Presence as they might another person in the same room. We mean, act in a way that makes the existence of God palpable to you, which will make it more palpable to others...as it was in this week's parsha at Mt. Sinai.

Shabbos Day

TECHNOLOGY MAKES LIFE easier physically and spiritually. I don't mean that it doesn't challenge us spiritually because clearly it does. Technology has created more stumbling blocks for the Torah Jew than anything else in the last couple of decades, if not longer.

What I mean is this. I have great friends and chavrusos I have never met in person, or hadn't for the longest time. In the past that would not have been nearly as true if we had only been able to be pen pals, because there is only so much you can learn about someone from the way they write. But thanks to programs like Skype and Zoom, people can meet with one another from thousands of miles away time after time, and develop relationships and bonds that once were only possible from actually spending time in person.

It makes a profound point that may get lost on most of us and that is, how we can develop close relationships with people we can't really see or hear, just imagine. But you'll ask me, "What do you mean, just imagine? We can actually see and hear who we're talking to when using any of these programs!"

Yes and no. You're not seeing the actual person as you would in real life. Rather, their computer is translating their picture and words into electrical impulses. Those impulses then travel over communication lines and are later reassembled according to their original order by our computers. This results in a pixelated version of your counterpart that you associate with the real thing. In short, it's just information that is allowing your brain to relate to the other party as a real person, and develop emotional responses to them based upon what you are relating to.

The success of a such a digital relationship depends upon the conveyer of the data. When the Internet is slow, the picture freezes and the words become garbled. If it remains frozen, the relationship becomes frozen, and it becomes like talking to a "dead" person, God forbid. Even if an individual stops talking in person, you can still sense they are alive and relatable.

Now we can take that information and apply it to our relationship with God. You don't have to actually see God to see Him, or actually hear Him to hear Him. As great as that would be, and will be in the future when prophecy returns, it is not necessary for developing a close and personal relationship with God. When someone says, "I would believe in God if I could see Him!" they have to realize that the only reason why they don't, is because they haven't taken the time to gather the right information about God to have that relationship. That's on them, not God.

Seudas Shlishis

TO KNOW GOD is to love Him. And not just love Him, but to "see" Him, to sense His Presence, as if it is palpable. If you ask, "How is that possible?" the answer is, "Is anything impossible for God?" We may not have the ability to create that sense, but if we try, He'll take care of the rest.

So many times in Tanach we find the Shechinah "resting" on a particular person and changing their reality. Yiftach was a virtual nobody who became the leader of his people when God imbued him with His spirit. In Parashas BeHa'alosecha, 70 elders became members of the prestigious Sanhedrin when God gifted them the knowledge to function on such a high level of Torah. It's what God does when His plan for Creation requires it, and people become worthy of it.

This was essentially the Har Sinai Experience. It was God giving the Jewish people a taste of just how real an experience of God can be if you go after it. This is what Yeshayahu was telling the Jewish people when he said, "Seek God when He is found, call Him when He is near" (Yeshayahu 55:6). In other words, God can be "found" and God can be "near," if you make it so.

It is not just a gift. It is the very purpose of Creation. When someone creates a situation of revelation of God, they bring meaning to all of existence. They rectify themselves and the world, mitigating the need for God to have to "force" His revelation onto mankind. Because that is all the War of Gog and Magog is intended to do, to get the world's attention and make them realize Who God really is.

As God will later say in the Torah, "You have been shown, in order to know that God is God; there is none else besides Him" (Devarim 4:35). Once we learn this

and project it through our lives, the world will catch on as well. Then we will have been the light unto nations we were taken out of Egypt and to Mt. Sinai to be.

That's where all of this is leading, what's going in the world today. All the bad and all the confusion may hide the Presence of God for now, but that is just to amplify the eventual revelation of God. But this amplification can either be because of us, or through us. Judging by the rate that things are changing for the worse, we don't have much time left to make that decision.

Latest book now available on Amazon: Vayechulu: Getting More From Friday Night Kiddush.

Acharis K'Reishis, Part 5

CONTINUING ON WITH the translation, it says:

It has been explained that also in the Egyptian exile, the Jewish people left oppression prior to their redemption. They elucidate the verse, "the rain is over and gone" (Shir HaShirim 2:11) as referring to the main oppression. They also make a parallel to the days of Koresh, as well as the future pekidah, as will be explained. They explain how the order of redemption applies equally to all of them (i.e., to all redemptions).

See the Ma'amar Geulah of the Ramchal [where he says]:

"It is necessary to know that the redemption from Egypt and the future redemption are equal in many ways. It is just that the future one will be even greater, because Creation will then find a rest that it has not known from the day of its existence until now (i.e., the end of history)."

In the commentary of the Ramchal on Shir HaShirim (Otzros Ramchal, p. 45) [it says]: "This is the matter of redemption that is found many times in history. It is all from the same source, that is, the redemption from Egypt and the future redemption come from the same source, as it says [with respect to the final redemption], 'like the days of your leaving Egypt I will show you wonders' (Michah 7:15)."

The GR"A explicitly says on Shir HaShirim [on] 2:8, and there [on] 6:10, that the leaving of Egypt was the beginning of all the redemptions, and it will be likewise in the future as well. Therefore, all the specifics of the future redemption are actually similar to the details of the redemption from Egypt. We find that the redemption from Egypt occurred in many levels, as it was mentioned previously (Ch. 2 from Aderes Eliyahu, Parashas VaAira 6:6). "[The verse says,] 'I will take you out [from under the burdens of Egypt]' and this refers to the oppression of the Children [of Israel] and all their difficult labor. 'I will save you [from their labor]' means you will no longer be slaves to the Egyptians. 'I will redeem you [with an outstretched arm and great judgements]' refers to the leaving of Egypt. 'And I will take [you as a people] and I will be [God to you]' is the giving of Torah, as it says 'You will be to Me a people [and I will be God to you]' (Vayikra 26:12)."

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Deed and Creed YITRO

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The parsha of Yitro records the revolutionary moment when God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, entered into a mutually binding agreement with a nation, the Children of Israel, an agreement we call a brit, a covenant.

Now, this is not the first Divine covenant in the Torah. God had already made one with Noah, and through him all of humanity, and He made another with Abraham, whose sign was circumcision. But those covenants were not fully reciprocal. God did not ask for Noah's agreement, nor did He wait for Abraham's assent.

Sinai was a different matter. For the first time, He wanted the covenant to be fully mutual, to be freely accepted. So we find that – both before and after the Revelation at Sinai – God commands Moses to make sure the people do actually agree.

The point is fundamental. God wants to rule by right, not might. The God who brought an enslaved people to liberty seeks the free worship of free human beings.

God does not act toward His creatures like a tyrant.

Avodah Zarah 3a

So at Sinai was born the principle that was, millennia later, described by Thomas Jefferson in the American Declaration of Independence, the idea that governors and governments derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed." God wanted the consent of the governed. That is why the Sinai Covenant was conditional on the people's agreement.

Admittedly, the Talmud questions how free the Israelites actually were, and it uses an astonishing image. It says that God suspended the mountain above their heads and said, "If you agree, well and good. If you don't, here will be your burial." That is another topic for another time. Suffice to say that there is no indication of this in the plain sense of the text itself.

What is interesting is the exact wording in which the Israelites signal their consent. To repeat: they do so three times, first before the Revelation, and then twice afterwards, in the parsha of Mishpatim.

Listen to the three verses. Before the Revelation:

All the people answered as one and said, 'All that God has spoken, we will do [na'aseh].'

Ex. 19:8

Then afterward:

Moses came and told the people all of God's words and all the laws. The people all responded with a single voice, 'We will do [na'aseh] every word that God has spoken.'

Ex. 24:3

He took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people. They replied, 'We will do [na'aseh] and we will hear [ve-nishma] all that God has declared.'

Ex. 24:7

Note the subtle difference. In two cases the people say: all that God says, we will do. In the third, the double verb is used: na'aseh ve-nishma. "We will do and we will hear, (or obey, or hearken, or understand)." The word shema means 'to understand', as we see in the story of the Tower of Babel:

"Come, let us descend and confuse their speech, so that one person will not understand another's speech."

Gen. 11:7

Now note that there is another difference between the three verses. In the first two cases there is a clear emphasis on the unity of the people. Both phrases are very striking. The first says: all the people answered as one. The second says, The people all responded with a single voice. In a book that emphasises how fractious and fissiparous the people were, such declarations of unanimity are significant and rare. But the third verse, which mentions both doing and listening or understanding, contains no such statement. It simply says: They replied. There is no emphasis on unanimity or consensus.

What we have here is a biblical comment on one of the most striking features of all in Judaism: the difference between deed and creed, between asiyah and shemiyah, between doing and understanding.

Christians have theology. Jews have law. These are two very different approaches to the religious life. Judaism is about a community of action. It is about the way people interact in their dealings with one another. It is about bringing God into the shared spaces of our collective life. Just as we know God through what He does, so God asks us to bring Him into what we do. In the beginning, as Goethe put it, was the deed. That is why Judaism is a religion of law, because law is the architecture of behaviour.

When it comes, however, to belief, creed, doctrine, all the things that depend on shemiyah rather than asiyah, understanding rather than action: on this Judaism does not call for unanimity. Not because Judaism lacks beliefs. To the contrary, Judaism is what it is precisely because of our beliefs, most importantly the belief in monotheism, that there is, at least and at most, one God. The Torah tells us in Bereishit about creation, in Shemot about redemption, and in this week's parsha about revelation.

Judaism is a set of beliefs, but it is not a community based on unanimity about the way we understand and interpret those beliefs. It recognises that intellectually and temperamentally we are different. Judaism has had its rationalists and its mystics, its philosophers and its poets, its naturalists and its supernaturalists: Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva, Judah Halevi and Maimonides, the Vilna Gaon and the Baal Shem Tov. We seek unanimity in halachah, not in aggadah. Na'aseh, we act in the same way, but nishma, we understand each in our own way. That is the difference between the way we serve God, collectively, and the way we understand God, individually.

What is fascinating is that this well-known feature of Judaism is already signalled in the Torah: in the difference between the way it speaks about na'aseh, "as one," "with a single voice," and nishma, with no special collective consensus.

Our acts, our na'aseh, are public. Our thoughts, our nishma, are private. That is how we come to serve God together, yet relate to Him individually, in the uniqueness of our being.

Parshas Yisro

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Malka bas Rav Kalman z'l.

Struggling to Accept

Yisro, the minister of Midian and father in law of Moshe, heard all that God did for Moshe and Yisroel [...] (18:1).

This week's parsha opens with Yisro reacting to the news of what Hashem had done for Moshe and Bnei Yisroel. The first words in the parsha are, 'וישמע יתרו' and both Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonasan translate the words as 'and Yisro heard.' Later on in the parsha, when Yisro offers a management solution to the overburdened justice system, the Torah says 'וישמע משה' which both Targumim translate as 'ויקבל' –and Moshe accepted.'

This difference in the translation of the word 'וישמע' is only natural. When it occurs by Yisro, it is referring to the accounting of the incidents that Yisro had heard. By Moshe the word is referring to his reaction to the solution that Yisro had proffered to resolve an overworked justice system; therefore the Targumim translate it as 'accepted' because the Torah means to inform us that Moshe valued Yisro's solution and agreed to implement his innovative design for the court system.

Yet in Aramaic the word 'קבל' has another meaning, 'to complain.' Meaning, the word for accepting and complaining is the same. This is difficult to understand. A complaint is a personal rejection of an idea or situation; it is the opposite of acceptance. So what is the relationship between these concepts that allows one word to have two seemingly opposite meanings?

As discussed in prior editions of INSIGHTS, Aramaic is the language of understanding another perspective. Perhaps we can discern from here the process of accepting a new idea. In other words, if one just 'hears' an idea, it likely will simply pass through his or her mind with little long-term effect. In order to really internalize an idea, especially one that is personally challenging, we must first begin by resisting it.

If we don't start the process of consideration of a new concept by intensely questioning and struggling to see if it's right for us, then we aren't really opening ourselves to fully incorporating the concept into our lives in a meaningful way. Once we overcome our resistance, we are then open to acceptance. This is the process known as free will. Meaning, this struggle to decide what we want to do is the process of exercising of our free will, which is a key element in the purpose of creation. This is why the story of Hashem giving Bnei Yisroel the Torah is called Kabolas HaTorah.

Highly Pleasurable

Yisro, the father-in-law of Moshe, took a burnt offering and a peace offering for God; and Aharon and all the elders of Yisroel came to eat bread with the father-in-law of Moshe before God (18:12).

Rashi (ad loc) comments on the last words of this possuk (i.e. 'before God'): From here we see that one who partakes of a meal at which Torah scholars participate is as if he has taken pleasure from the splendor of the Divine presence.

Rashi here is consistent with his commentary on the Talmud (Berachos 63b). The Gemara there states that King Shaul, on the eve of attacking the nation of Amalek, warns the nation of Keinites to withdraw from the midst of the Amalekites or risk being eradicated along with the Amalekites. The Gemara quotes Shaul who explains the reason he allowed them to escape the fate of the Amalekites: 'For you have done a kindness with the entire nation of Yisroel.' The Gemara goes on to explain that their forefather Yisro had hosted Moshe and that was their merit. In fact, the Gemara concludes with, 'Yisro, who only connected himself to Moshe for his own personal honor, receives such a great merit (that his descendants are spared), how much more so an individual who hosts a Torah scholar in his home and provides him with food and drink and benefits him from his possessions, how much more so!'

Rashi (ad loc) explains the kindness that Yisro did refers to the story in our parsha whereby Yisro invites Aharon and the elders to partake in his meal. Maharsha (ad loc) questions Rashi's interpretation by noting that, in this week's parsha, Yisro had actually come to visit Moshe. In other words, Yisro was a guest himself, not a host! Maharsha therefore gives an alternate explanation: Yisro's merit was actually from hosting Moshe when he was an escaped convict from Egypt. The kindness that Yisro showed him at that time was later repaid by King Shaul to his descendants. In truth, Maharsha's explanation also seems to fit the simple reading of the Gemara, for it makes no mention of Aharon and the elders of Yisroel. Why does Rashi feel compelled to explain Yisro's merit from the story in our parsha?

Rambam in the Yad (Hilchos Dayos 6:2) rules: 'There is a mitzvah to cleave to Torah scholars and their students so that one may learn from their actions, as the verse states, 'and to Him you shall cleave.' By cleaving to Torah scholars, one cleaves to Hashem.' In other words, socializing with Torah scholars is a specific commandment that is related to cleaving to Hashem.

Maharsha seems to understand that the Gemara is referring to the mitzvah of hachnosas orchim – hosting guests. But this is difficult to understand. The mitzvah of hachnosas orchim is derived from Avraham Avinu hosting the ‘three Arabs’ that he found on the road outside his tent. We don’t find that there is a bigger mitzvah for welcoming guests who are Torah scholars.

In fact, a careful reading of the Gemara reveals why Rashi doesn’t agree with Maharsha’s interpretation. The Gemara makes a very clear statement about the value of hosting a Torah scholar and benefitting him from one’s possessions. This doesn’t fall under the category of hosting guests, this falls under the mitzvah of cleaving to Hashem. That is why the verse in our parsha ends with the words ‘before God.’ When Yisro invited Aharon and the elder of Yisroel to partake in his meal he was displaying his desire to be connected with Hashem.

On the other hand, when Yisro offered Moshe refuge by inviting him into his home when he was a stranger in Midian, it was a mitzvah of hachnosas orchim. At that time, Yisro wasn’t inviting Moshe as a means of connecting to Hashem. In our parsha, Yisro becomes a convert. Thus the significance of this message is conveyed specifically through Yisro, for a convert is uniquely positioned to attest to the Torah’s ability to transform a person into a Godly being. He himself has become a new person through his commitment to Torah. Therefore, he is the most sensitive to the changes in others through Torah study. He understands that Torah scholars become Godly through their commitment to Torah, and cleaving to them is the way to cleave to Hashem.

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For the week ending 3 February 2024 / 24 Shvat 5784

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Yitro

The Green-Eyed Monster

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife...” (chapter 20)

Have you had the following experience? You’ve got your eye on the newest iPhone or the newest Toyota Sienna, or, if you’re really well-heeled, the latest Rolex. You start to pray the Shemoneh Esrei, the silent standing prayer, you bend forward, say Baruch Atah... and into your mind floats a picture of this beautiful gold Rolex Seamaster Oyster Limited Edition. Baruch Atah HaRolex! You’re obsessed. An embarrassing portion of your waking life might be spent fantasizing about that new car or that new watch that you really want to buy.

Rabbi Elyahu Dessler identifies the two root motivations of our personalities: the desire to give and the desire to take. The desire to take is unique in that it’s not really about the object of desire, it’s about fulfilling the desire itself. It’s about the desire to possess. Therefore, once you get whatever it is, it loses that pristine gleam very quickly. The desire to take is a “green-eyed monster that mocks the meat it feeds on.” It can never be satisfied, because as soon as you have your new Rolex, well, you’ve got it now, right, and so it loses that delectable allure, and then sometime later, the next obsession takes hold, and so on and on. Does this sound familiar?

It says in the Book of Proverbs: “All the days of a poor man are wretched, but contentment is a feast without end.” When you’re happy with what you’ve got, your life is a never-ending feast, but when you look over your garden fence at your neighbor’s Sienna, or his family successes, and you compare all that with your own, your entire life will likely be miserable.

There are many modern challenges that a person needs to overcome in order to feel truly satisfied. In particular, it is important to be careful about what we feast our eyes on. To be truly satisfied with our lives, if we are careful where we look and what we desire, then we have a much greater chance for life to become a never-ending feast.

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Office of the Chief Rabbi

Parshat Yitro: Is it possible to see sounds?

25 January 2024

Is it possible to see sounds?

From Parshat Yitro we learn that the answer is, yes.

Immediately after the Torah tells us about the extraordinary encounter that the nation had with Hashem at Mount Sinai, when the Ten Commandments were given:

‘Vechol-ha’am ro’im et-hakkolot’ – ‘the entire nation saw the sounds’.

What can this mean?

I believe we can gain some insight into this, from a Bracha which we recite every single morning.

Upon waking up, we thank Hashem, ‘Poke’ach Ivrim’, for opening the eyes of the blind.

That is because while we are asleep, we cannot physically see as we usually would and therefore, we appreciate the opportunity to see what is in front of us, from the moment that we open our eyes.

But there is a sad question that is asked in Halacha:

If a person unfortunately is blind, should they recite this Bracha – ‘thank you God for opening the eyes of the blind’?

The Mishnah Berurah tells us that the answer is yes and there are two possible reasons.

The first is that the blind person is thanking Hashem, for the sight that other people have, because they can assist the blind person.

Or there is a second reason – that it is because the term ‘Poke’ach Ivrim’ does not literally mean, ‘who opens the eyes of the blind’, but rather, ‘who enlightens the blind’.

The word ‘Poke’ach’ comes from the term ‘Pe-keach’, which means to be bright, to be perceptive, to understand what is happening – and that is what this Bracha is for.

‘Poke’ach Ivrim’ means, we thank Hashem for enabling us to appreciate the depth of what is in front of us, in the way that we say in English, ‘I see what you mean.’ And this doesn’t necessarily mean that you physically have vision.

That is the reason why a blind person should say this Bracha and that explains what happened at Mount Sinai.

The nation saw the sound, such was the depth of their spiritual experience, that they could perceive everything that was in front of them. The truth of Hashem. The truth of the Torah He was giving to us.

Our prayer therefore is, that throughout the future, may Hashem bless us and our future generations, so that we likewise, will always be able to see the sounds – to perceive, to understand and to internalise the greatness of the truth of Hashem and the commandments that He gives us.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Yisro - Most Favored Nation

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The portion of Yisro contains perhaps the most popular of all Biblical treatises The Ten Commandments. But the portion contains much more than commandments. It also contains Hashem’s elocution defining his people as the most treasured in the world. What makes Jew chosen? Before giving the Torah to them, Hashem enunciates the prerequisites.

“And now, if you hearken well to Me and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples, for Mine is the entire world” (Exodus 19:5). Note: Judaism’s exclusivity is not dependant on birthright alone. It is dependant on commitment to Torah and Mitzvos. It is not a restricted club, limited only to those who are born as Jews, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; it is also exclusive to those who commit to observe, whether, of Asian, African, or European descent. Thus, the Torah clearly states that those who hearken and observe the covenant are worthy to be a beloved treasure.

What needs clarification is the final statement, “for Mine is the entire world.” What difference does that make in the context of commitment, and Hashem cherishing those who choose His path?

An old Jewish Bubba Ma’aseh serves as a wonderful parable.

Sadie Finkelstein lived in an apartment on New York’s Lower East Side for about 50 years. Her son, David, had made it big in the corporate world as cosmopolitan businessman, wheeling and dealing, traveling to

places as far-flung as the Himalayas and Russia's Ural Mountains. Of course, he shopped the finest Paris boutiques and European stores on his excursions to the more civilized portions of the world.

For his mother's 75th birthday, David decided to send her a gift of the finest Russian caviar and France's most exquisite Champagne. From his hotel suite in Paris he had the items shipped with one-day delivery, the Champagne and caviar on ice!

A few days later, David called his mother up. "Ma," he asked, "did you receive package?"

"Sure, I received package," his mother said. She did not seem impressed "Well how was it?" David asked in anticipation.

All he heard was a sigh. Then a pause. "To tell you truth," said Sadie "The ginger ale was a very sour and the blackberry jelly tasted to salty." What makes a treasured item? What defines glory? If one is locked in his apartment and sees not the world, his treasures may be relegated to crackers and shmaltz herring. One may say, the Jews think that their culture is Divine, but they live in a myopic world. Hashem says, "No!" "You shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples, for Mine is the entire world"

In proclaiming the Jewish people as the most beloved treasure, Hashem adds, "I know every culture, I saw every diamond, I own all the gold and all the precious jewels, and yet there will be no greater treasure to me than they who observe my laws and commandments!"

In choosing His people, the Almighty explicates, that he has proverbially tasted all the world's delicacies. He has seen all the world's glory. He has seen every fascinating custom and gazed at every civilization. His celestial palate has taste for the most Heavenly and Divine delicacies. Then He defines the Jews as the greatest treasure in a world that belongs solely to Him! That means we are a treasure among whatever archeologists, historians, sociologists, feel is priceless. We are a treasure amongst treasures!

The Almighty who lacks for nothing enjoys nothing more than the joy of His dearest people those who are chosen because they have chosen.

*Dedicated in memory of Esther Hammerman by Shayne and Marty Kessler
Good Shabbos!*

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Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Yisro

Spilling Wine Like Water Is a Positive Omen for the Home

In Hilchos Havdalah (Orach Chaim 296), the Ramo cites a custom of spilling out some of the Havdalah wine on the floor before concluding the Borei pri hagafen bracha to avoid the problem of "kos pagum". (This is not a widely practiced custom.) ("Kos pagum" means the kos (cup) of wine on which a ritual blessing is recited cannot be a kos from which someone previously drank.) The Ramo explains the reason for this custom: "For we say that any house in which wine is not spilled like water does not possess a 'siman bracha,' so we do this as a sign of blessing at the beginning of a new week."

The Taz comments on this Ramo "Ayn l'zeh peirush!" (This is inexplicable.) First of all, the whole concept of "kos pagum" only applies to a kos (or bottle) from which someone previously directly drank some wine. Furthermore, it is not an appropriate practice to start reciting a blessing and then pour the wine on the ground. There is no greater shame to a bracha than this! As written, this comment of the Ramo makes no sense whatsoever.

The Taz therefore prefers the practice he found recorded in the sefer Yesh Nochalin, to fill up the cup prior to Havdalah such that it flows over the side of the wine goblet. In other words, you fill the kos so full that it spills over onto the ground. This is the intended siman bracha symbolism of wine spilling like water.

The Taz clarifies the concept of "a house in which wine is not poured out like water": The chachomim (rabbis) are not advocating pouring out wine as if it was water. That would be baal tashchis (the prohibition against wastefully destroying). There is no baal tashchis on water, but

there is baal tashchis on wine! It is incomprehensible that we should be taught to spill out good wine as if it were water.

Rather, the Taz notes that the statement "any house in which wine was not poured like water will not see signs of blessing" is written as a "b'dieved" (after-the-fact) expression. If they were advocating a positive practice then it should have said "any house where they do not pour wine like water..." Rather, the intended lesson is "when something gets broken in your house, don't lose your temper!" In other words, if you have an expensive bottle of wine in your cabinet and your child spills the bottle of wine out, don't make a federal case out of it. Such an incident should not cause you to lose your temper.

The chachomim were not only talking about a bottle of wine. Children break things, your wife breaks things, you yourself break things. Don't get so upset about these kinds of things. Even if you suffer a loss from the incident, accidents happen. The wine spilled, the glass broke, the china chipped, the crystal shattered. Don't cry about it. People's natural instinct is to get angry about such matters, therefore the chachomim, hoping to counteract this gut reaction stated: Any house in which wine is not (unintentionally) spilled out like water will not see siman bracha. That is the proper attitude to have when something spills, breaks or gets damaged. It is a bad omen if wine spilling causes more trauma in a house than water spilling.

This is what the Gemara (Sotah 3b) means: "Rav Chisda said 'Anger in a house is like a karyia worm to sesame seeds.' (Just as the worm consumes the sesame, anger destroys the house – it will cost you money!) Chazal are saying: If a person loses his temper over things that happen in his house, he will be impacted by financial loss. The loss is not merely the value of what broke or was damaged. If you lose your temper at home, the Ribono shel Olam will punish you in other ways as well."

What is the "midah k'neged midah" (measure for measure) here? I saw the following suggestion in the sefer, B'Zos Yavo Aharon: When someone breaks something in a household and the owner sustains damage, if the owner is a true believer, he will recognize that HaKadosh Baruch Hu wanted this to happen. The Almighty wanted him to suffer a loss. Therefore, why is he getting angry? At whom is he getting angry?

A person may get angry at his child or at his wife, but it is not really the child or the wife who was the ultimate cause of this loss. They are merely a tool in the hand of the Almighty. If a person was a true ma'amin, he would say, as did Dovid HaMelech (King David): "He (Shimi ben Gerah) is cursing (me) because Hashem said to him 'Curse Dovid'. Who can then say 'Why did you do this?'" (Shmuel II 16:10). Our attitude must be that Hashem wants me to need to replace the glass pitcher or the crystal or the china or whatever it is. This loss came about from the yad Hashem, so why are you getting angry?

It must be that you are getting angry because you think you are in charge. You think that you call the shots. You think that you determine your profit and loss for the year. The Ribono shel Olam says "I will show you, and I will bring poverty to your house, because you are not really a believer in the source of your financial stability. "Therefore, if a person does not lose his temper over such things but rather calmly accepts them as 'bashert' (it was meant to be), such emunah will be a siman bracha because as a reward for such faith, the Ribono shel Olam will replace the loss suffered.

This is really what the Aseres HaDibros (Ten Utterances or Commandments) are all about. The Aseres HaDibros begin with the mitzvah of emunah (belief in G-d): "Anochi Hashem Elokecha" (I am the L-rd your G-d) who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery." (Shemos 20:2) They end with the mitzvah "You shall not covet your neighbor's house..." (Shemos 20:14).

Anochi Hashem Elokecha is emunah in theory. We all subscribe to that. But emunah in practice is "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." What does it mean to covet your neighbor's house?

It is his house. "I would like such a house. I would like such a car. I would like such a wife. I would like such money. I would like such children. I want that..." This mitzvah is emunah in practice: It is the belief that I already have exactly what the Ribono shel Olam wants me

to possess. Hashem does not want me to have that house. He does not want me to have that car. He does not want me to have that wife. He does not want me to have THAT. I already possess what I need. I don't possess what I don't need.

This is why the language of the Orchos Chaim l'ha'Rosh is that the entire body of Torah law is included in the Aseres HaDibros. The Aseres HaDibros are the "avos" (primary categories) as in "Avos Melachos" (by the laws of Shabbos) and "Avos Nezikin" (categories of damage, as spelled out in Tractate Bava Kamma). The Aseres HaDibros are the "avos" of the entire Torah. The Orchos Chaim further says that if the entire Torah is included in the Aseres HaDibros then the final mitzvah of the Aseres HaDibros is "You shall not covet" to teach us that someone who transgresses "Lo sachmod," transgresses the entire Torah. The entire Torah comes down to four words: Lo sachmod beis ray'echa (You shall not covet your neighbor's house).

This cannot just be lip service. We need to truly believe that everything emanates from the Ribono shel Olam – including all our material wealth and possessions, our good times and our bad times, our profits and our losses. They are all from Him. A person with such deeply-held emunah will never be angry.

In reverse, the lesson of the Taz is that any house in which wine is spilled like water (in other words, that has the attitude that it is as if the wine that spilled is only water, so it is nothing to get upset about) will see a siman bracha as a result of its true emunah.

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Hearing and Derher-ing

Rabbi Yakov Haber

"And Yisro, the priest of Midyan, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G'd had done for Moshe and for Israel, His nation, that he took them out of Egypt" (Shemos 18:1). Rashi (combining two views mentioned in Mechilta) comments on the first words of the verse, "Vayishma Yisro - and Yisro heard" - "מה שמעו שמע ובה? קריעת ים סוף ומלחמת עמלק" - What hearing (news, events) did he hear (about)? The splitting of the sea and the war of Amaleik." The commentaries ask several questions. If the verse explicitly states that Yisro heard "all that G'd had done," why does Rashi focus only on two of those events. Furthermore, on the phrase "all that G-d had done," Rashi presents a different list: the falling of the man, the well (water from the rock), and the splitting of the sea. Why does this list differ from the first list?

Many note that the verb S-M-A, roughly translated as "hear," has several meanings in its usage throughout Tanach: 1) to biologically hear, 2) to accept or obey (listen to) and 3) to understand.[1] [Yiddish captures two of these meanings with similar words: *herr* = hear and *derher* = insight or idea.] Based on these multiple meanings, the commentaries (see Mizrahi, Gur Aryeh) explain that the first Rashi is not explaining what Yisro heard about; this is explicitly stated in the verse that he heard all that Hashem did for the Jews and that he took them out of Egypt. [This last point, referencing biological hearing, is perhaps Rashi's point in his second comment.[2]] Rather, the first Rashi is asking what motivated Yisro to come join the Jewish people, namely, based on the third meaning of "shema," what caused him to understand that something particularly unique occurred motivating him to journey to his son-in-law and ultimately convert to the Jewish religion.[3] Similarly, Zohar (quoted by Sheim Mishmuel) asks: "Did (only) Yisro hear and not the whole world? Is it not written (in the Song of the Sea), 'Nations heard and were troubled!' (Shemos 15:14) Rather, the [people of the] whole world heard and were not broken. [By contrast, Yisro] heard and was broken and submitted to the Holy One blessed be He and drew near to His fear." All others only heard; Yisro heard and understood the implications of these earth-shattering events obligating him to make drastic changes to his life.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 27:9) comments on Yisro's "hearing":

"Listen to the word of G'd..." (Yirmiyahu 2:4). This is what is written (Yeshayahu 55:3), "Listen and your soul will live!" How dear Israel is

that He [Hashem] encourages them! He said to them, "If a person falls from the roof, his whole body gets bruised. The doctor visits him and gives him a bandage for his head, his hands, his legs and all of his limbs. He is all bandages! I (G'd) am not like that. Rather, a man has 248 limbs and the ear is one of them. If the whole body is sullied with sins, but (only) the ear listens, the whole body receives life." "Listen and your soul will live!" (Yeshayahu ibid.) That is the meaning of "Listen to the word of G'd, O House of Jacob!" (Yirmiyahu ibid.) So you find with Yisro that through listening he merited life since he listened and converted as it is written, "And Yisro ... heard all that G'd did to Moshe and to Israel His nation, etc."

My great Rebbe, the founding Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, Rav C. Y. Goldwicht zt"l (Asufas Ma'arachos, Mishpatim, "Nishma v'Na'ase"[4]) explains the reason that specifically Yisro taught us the power of listening. Rav Goldwicht raises a contradiction between the famed dual commitment of Klal Yisrael at the giving of the Torah of "na'ase v'nishma - we will do and (then) hear" - implying great initial commitment and fear of G-d even before receiving the specific commandments - on the one hand and the phrase "v'shamanu v'asinu - we will hear and do" (Devarim 5:20), in the opposite order: first listening then doing, presented by the Torah in Moshe's review of the events of Mount Sinai, on the other. Rav Goldwicht answers that the commitment present initially at Har Sinai was not something that all would be able to accomplish. Indeed, even the commitment of the generation which received the Torah did not last and was shortly followed by the cheit ha'egel, the sin of the Golden Calf. However, Hashem forgave the Jewish people and gave them a second set of luchos. This represented the kabbalas haTorah of the ba'al teshuva, one who needs inspiration before he can make intense commitment. He needs to "hear" before he can do. Yisro, the first convert to the Jewish people l'sheim shamayim (unlike the eirev rav), serves as the paradigm of the proper use of shmi'a, not just hearing but listening and understanding the implications of world events and/or study leading to transformation and commitment. By parallel, the journey of the ba'al teshuva begins by not only studying and experiencing but being receptive to understanding and internalizing their implications.

Rav Goldwicht further quotes the Gemara (Pesachim 50b) that a person should always engage in Torah and mitzvos even for an ulterior motive since such activity will ultimately lead to learning and performing commandments only for the sake of Heaven. This implies that all Jews, not just baalei teshuva and converts, need a dose of pre-hearing, or inspiration, in order to eventually reach the exalted level of lishma implied by the commitment of na'ase v'nishma. Thus, the ladder of religious growth consists of initial inspiration, followed by intense commitment to the totality of Torah - its values and requirements, culminating with additional study only fully accessible and retainable with prior commitment which in turn continually deepens that commitment.

Hashem is always communicating to us, providing opportunities for inspiration - through the messages contained in Torah and through the messages he sends to us in our individual and communal lives. Our own generation, so used to relative stability, has witnessed massive cataclysms in just the past decade in world and Jewish history. It behooves all of us not to follow the example of the rest of world in the piercing words of the above-quoted Zohar to just hear but not listen and understand but to follow Yisro's example to internalize and understand as well. The call of the hour is certainly to come closer to Hashem Yisborach minimally by making incremental changes for the better in our life's activities and priorities in order to facilitate greater closeness to Avinu Shebashamayim and enhanced commitment to His service![5]

[1] Rav Y.D. Soloveitchik zt"l advocated having in mind the third definition when reciting the Shema twice daily since the accepted view of the Sages - as opposed to that of R. Yehuda who insists that the reciter hear the words of Shema - is that the word "Shema" teaches that its recital may be "בכל לשון שאתה שומע" - in any language you understand." (Heard from Mori v'Rabi Rav H. Schachter shlit"a.)

[2] See Mizrahi as to why the war against Amalek is not mentioned in the second Rashi.

[3] See Gur Aryeh, Be'er Yosef and others for insights as to why these specific two events inspired Yisro to join the Jewish people. Also see Mizrahi, Gur Aryeh and others as to why the other opinion in the Mechilta that Yisro heard about the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai was omitted by Rashi.

[4] See there for a magnificent, much more elaborate presentation than the small excerpt presented here. Also see the insightful article by Dr. Benny Gezundheit, an alumnus of Yeshivat Har Etzion, available here: <https://etzion.org.il/he/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/> נעשה-הנשמע-לעומת-ושמענו-ועשינו

[5] See also Inspiration, Application and Preservation for further elaboration on these themes and for techniques for applying inspiration to our lives.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas

פרשת יתרו תשפ"ד

זכור את יום השבת לקדשו

Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it. (20:8)

Two central themes characterize the observance of *Shabbos*. It is an expression of our belief that Hashem created the world in six days, which implies the existence of the Creator. We also observe *Shabbos* in remembrance of Hashem's kindness in liberating us from the bondage of Egypt. The Egyptians made labor on *Shabbos* mandatory. The *Midrash* teaches that the Egyptians forced the Jews to work on *Shabbos* and transgress all thirty-nine *melachos*, labors, that are prohibited on *Shabbos*. The *Arizal* teaches that the thirty-nine labors correspond to the thirty-nine curses which were the result of Adam's eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge. (Adam received ten; Chavah received ten; the *nachash* received ten; and the earth received nine.) The *Be'er Mayim Chaim* teaches that, by resting on *Shabbos*, thereby refraining from transgressing the thirty-nine labors, we ameliorate those curses. By forcing the Jews to work on *Shabbos*, the Egyptians were seeking a means to prevent them from receiving the *kedushah*, sanctity, associated with *Shabbos*. When we refrain from transgressing the thirty-nine labors prohibited on *Shabbos*, we recall the Egyptian's evil decree to make our ancestors work on the holy day. Thus, we establish a *zeicher*, memorial, *l'yetzias Mitzrayim*.

In the *Echad mi yodea*; "Who knows one?" chant at the end of the *Haggadah*, we ask: *Shivah mi yodea*, "Who knows seven?" The answer is: The seven days of the week. The obvious question is: Are we the only ones who are aware that a week is comprised of seven days? This certainly is not a Jewish exclusive. "I know seven" implies that only I, the Jew, knows seven. *Kuzari* explains that the Jewish calendar months are calculated on the basis of the lunar cycle of 29 or 30 days, which makes the year 254 days. The secular months of 30 or 31 days yield to the solar year of 365 days. However, the fact that a week has seven days – no more, no less – has no basis in science or astronomy. The seven-day week is based on the idea that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day – *Shabbos Kodesh*. The non-Jewish world, who refuses to accept the verity that Hashem created the world, does not know the reason that a week is comprised of seven days.

Furthermore, the number seven has profound significance in Torah, because it symbolizes *kedushah*. The number seven is used for: the seven weeks of counting the *Omer*; the seven years of *Shemittah* cycle; land returned to its owner after *Yovel*, jubilee/fiftieth year, comprised of seven cycles of *Shemittah*, *Eretz Yisrael* is blessed with seven fruits. This is in addition to the seven seas and the seven celestial Heavens.

We understand the importance of the number seven and its relationship to *kedushah*. It is no secret to those who oppose us that *Shabbos* is no ordinary day of rest, but rather, a day of spiritual elevation and reflection.

The *Bobover Rebbe*, ז"ל, *Horav Bentzion Halberstam*, explained why the Germans write the number seven with a small stroke in the middle. This stems from the fact that the German people are descendants of Amalek, the arch-enemy of the Jews and Hashem. Amalek's goal is to blot out any vestige of *kedushah*. They understand that the number seven has profound meaning to the Jewish People. Thus, his descendants draw a line through the number 7, eradicating the symbol of holiness.

I have always wondered why *Shabbos* observance is one of the first *mitzvos* which the various strains of secular Judaism target for archiving to a remote place in our history. Simply, to them *Shabbos* meant, "No." They were prohibited from doing what they wanted. Going where you want and eating what you want are inconsistent with the imperatives of *Shabbos* and *kashrus*.

Now, with the above in mind, I think their greatest fear was dealing with – and falling under – the rubric of *kedushah*. It is not sufficient for us to be good, moral and ethical. We must also strive for *kedushah*. Hashem wants us to be *anshei kodesh*, a holy people, because He is holy.

When we address issues concerning *kedushah*, we have no barometer for measurement. *Kedushah* is spiritual, and the spiritual is infinite. Thus, we have no idea concerning the value of even the smallest amount of *kedushah*. Likewise, we

have no clue what a small measure of *kedushah* can achieve. When one individual creates a change, which manifests itself in elevating *kedushah*, it is an enormous achievement – regardless of how limited the change.

The following story, related by *Rav Goel Alkarif*, demonstrates this idea. Sensitivity towards an infraction can vary from person to person. People have different values, experiences, and perspectives which influence their perception of a given misconduct. While diversity is, at times, beneficial, the Torah should determine our understanding and what is right and wrong in terms of *mitzvah* observance. The Torah should be the only barometer of sin. Having said this, I introduce the reader to a wonderful G-d-fearing couple from Bnei Brak. They both work in a *cheder*; he is a maintenance man, and she is a long-time preschool teacher. Their marriage of thirty-five years had been filled with harmony, respect and love. One thing has marred their otherwise happy marriage – they had no biological children. While thousands of children who entered the portals of the *cheder* had been positively influenced by their unique demeanor, they had no children of their own. Then suddenly, after thirty-five years of marriage, at the age of fifty-five, the wife gave birth to twins – a boy and a girl. Words cannot describe the joy that permeated the entire community. Everyone celebrated with them. Theirs was truly a community *simchah*.

When the proud parents were asked what they had done to earn such a Heavenly miracle, they responded with an incredible story. The husband began, "We live on *Rechov Chevron*, a street which is quite heavily traveled during the week. On *Shabbos*, however, fifteen to twenty cars use the street. It may not be a lot, but I figured if we could get the municipality to close the street for *Shabbos*, no cars would traverse, and the holy day would be enhanced. I was very distressed by the *chillul Shabbos* that was taking place right before our eyes, in a city that is the standard for Torah and *chassidus*."

The council member with whom he met explained that, in order to close a street for *Shabbos*, it was mandatory that all residents sign a consent form. "We decided to undertake the daunting challenge of going to every resident of the affected area, which included a number of four-story apartment buildings and ask the residents to sign. We understood that this task would involve a considerable amount of time, but, when one is childless, he unfortunately has a lot of available downtime. It took three years to sign everyone up. It involved much effort, since not every resident was predisposed to the idea. Some simply did not care. Others were loath to affix their name to any public document. Finally, we returned to the municipality with the requisite signatures. Alas, we discovered, to our chagrin, that a number of the early signatures were invalid. People had moved, and new people had moved in. We needed recent signatures. Had we not been driven by a burning desire to honor the *Shabbos*, we probably would have given up, but we were driven – and we returned to the task. We did it! The second time around was easier, and successful. The street was closed. Nine months later, we were blessed with a Divine miracle: the birth of our twins!"

Rav Alkarif sums up the story with an insightful comment: "Tel Aviv's mayor is secular. He is bent on opening businesses on *Shabbos*. (The fact that Tel Aviv is a Jewish city in a Jewish land and hosts a number of large Orthodox communities is not his concern. He wants a cosmopolitan city that will compete with large urban metropolises of the world.) In Bnei Brak, a simple committed Jew lives whose heart is pained when he sees even the slightest vestige of *chillul Shabbos*. Bnei Brak is a large Torah city in which very few cars drive through on *Shabbos*. *Rechov Chevron* has perhaps fifteen to twenty cars on a *Shabbos*. Nonetheless, those few cars were enough to inspire one Jew to take a stand on behalf of *Shabbos*... One should never think, 'What can I achieve? What difference can one person make?' We must remember that every Jew is a *keili*, vessel, to increase *kavod Shomayim*. Every minor change – however minute – brings him closer to his Father in Heaven. Who is prepared to relinquish such an opportunity?"

כבוד את אביך ואת אמך

Honor your father and your mother. (20:12)

The imperative to honor one's parents is etched on the same Tablets as the belief in Hashem and the admonishments prohibiting murder and immoral relations. It is a special *mitzvah* which defines, not only our relationship with our parents, but our relationship with Hashem as well. One who does not see the need to honor parents will not see the need to honor Hashem. The *mitzvah* has nothing to do with gratitude, because we received it in the wilderness at a time in which parents did not provide for their children's needs. Hashem did. [It has not changed. Hashem is still the sole Provider. He just does it through the agency of parents.] The *mitzvah* to honor one's parents is not contingent upon what they have done for us, but rather, it is based upon who they are and the institution they represent. Whether parents are good or bad, kindhearted, thoughtful, caring – or abusive, we honor them, because they partnered with Hashem in bringing us into the world.

Even the most loving parent can be demanding. This makes it difficult for their son or daughter, because he or she needs validation and acceptance. When they think it is not forthcoming, they become frustrated and even upset. This leads to friction, which is the precursor of transgressing the honor we owe our parents. Does this mean that it is always the fault of the son or daughter? I think not. If

anything, the parents share culpability. I recently read an article in which a distinguished writer related sitting with the son of a famous man who had died. He asked the son what he would emphasize in the eulogy he would render for his father. He said, "I will remember that my father always made me feel special. He may have judged my actions, but he never judged me. When I went through a period of rebellion and dressed inappropriately, he would make a point of putting his arm around me in public to demonstrate to everyone that, as far as he was concerned, I was perfect just the way I was."

This is an incredible testament by a son who must have been a challenge. He will remember his father as making him feel that he was good enough. Sadly, some of the parents who really mean well laud one child over another, expounding one child's successes in contrast to another child's failures. Their excuse for this cruel behavior, "I am motivating him to work harder, like his older brother." This is not motivation, but unvarnished, inexcusable abuse. Children should not have to earn their parent's affection. It should be free and forthcoming. Is this not the way our Heavenly Father acts towards us?

It all has to start someplace. The Torah teaches, "And these are the generations of Yitzchak ben Avraham; Avraham begot Yitzchak" (*Bereishis* 25:19). *Rashi* comments: "The *toldos* of Yitzchak are Yaakov and Eisav about whom the *parashah* will speak." This comment has an obvious problem of textual sequence. The Torah begins the *toldos* of Yitzchak and immediately informs us that Avraham begot Yitzchak. The offspring to whom the *pasuk* refers are those of Yitzchak – not Avraham.

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, offers an insightful explanation. The Torah alludes to us that, even when one is married and a father to his own children, he is (still) the son of his father. He must remember to honor his father. "Fatherhood" does not divert one from "sonhood." Furthermore, one should not forget the lessons and traditions of his youth. If he wants his son to follow his lessons, he must follow those his father has bequeathed to him.

One aspect of *kibbud av v'eim* we often seem to gloss over is the honor we must give our parents once they have passed from their earthly abode. The *Kedushas Levi* (*m'Berdichev*) was very stringent concerning *aveilim*, mourners, who are supposed to *daven* from the *amud*, lead the services, during their first year of mourning for a parent. He insisted that they recite *kaddish* at the appropriate place in *davening*. He explained that the souls of the departed benefit greatly from the positive spiritual activities of their children. Indeed, everything a child does affects the soul of his/her parent. Even if a son does not explicitly state that he is performing the *mitzvah l'iluy nishmos* his parents, it is automatically considered to be so. If one wants his activity to be counted on behalf of someone else, however, he must explicitly say the name of the deceased whose memory he is honoring.

I cite an incredible *Pele Yoetz* of which we should all avail ourselves. I will present parts of it with a free translation. "The principal way of honoring parents is after their death (*Kiddushin* 31b). One should do everything possible to bring pleasure to his parent's soul every single day without fail. Not like so many ignoramus who remember their parents only on their *yahrzeit* with a *kaddish*, a little *tzedakah*, or some Torah study. Woe is to those parents who expect their children to redeem them and elevate them because those children are doing practically nothing, and whatever they do is insignificant... instead, it is proper for a son to have his father's image seared in his mind's eye and imagine that his father is screaming at him bitterly from amid a burning flame, saying, 'My son, my beloved, I beg you, save me from the sword hovering above my soul...'." The author goes on passionately exhorting everyone never to forget about their parents, even for one moment.

The *Chida*, *zl* (*Kikar L'Eden, Likutim* 5), writes that every *tefillah* and *mitzvah*, every word of Torah studied and every *chiddush*, original, innovative Torah thought, bestow reward on one's parent as if they themselves had performed it... "As, in this way, he fulfills the *mitzvah* of honoring one's parents more than any honor that he showed them in this world, and he will be a source of *nachas* for them."

The *Minchas Elazar* (*Munkatch*) writes: "One should recite the phrase, *HaRachaman Hu yevareich es avi mori v'im morasi*, 'May He bless my father, my teacher... and my mother, my teacher,' even if he is not presently sitting at their table." The *Sefer Darkei Chaim v'Shalom* writes that one should continue reciting this phrase even after his parents have passed on, for they require a blessing even in their Heavenly repose. *Rebbetzin Zilberstein, A.H.*, daughter of *Horav Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, zl*, and wife of *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, made a point to eat a piece of bread daily in order to *bentch* and say the above phrase: *Ha'Rachamon*. She explained that she lived in Bnei Brak, and her elderly parents lived in Yerushalayim. It was very difficult to travel back and forth daily. As a result, she was missing out on the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eim*. She felt that by, reciting the *Ha'Rachamon* every day, she was honoring her parents – so she ate bread.

היה לאה בת שמעון ע"ה

נפטרה ח"י שבט תשס"ט

By her children Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Ohr Somayach Insights into Halacha

For the week ending 7 February 2015 / 18 Shevat 5775

More Common Kiddush Questions

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Kiddush B'makom Seudah

Have you ever wondered why after partaking of Kiddush in shul, many people nonetheless make Kiddush again at the onset of their Shabbos Day Seudah? If one already fulfilled their Kiddush obligation in shul, what could the requirement possibly be for another at home? How many times must Kiddush be recited? Additionally, if people generally make Kiddush on Mezonos on Shabbos Day, why don't we do that on Friday night as well? Interestingly, the answers to all of these questions are intertwined. But to gain a proper understanding of the relevant issues, some background is order.

Mattan Torah, the most pivotal event in Jewish history, is prominently featured in this week's parsha, Parshas Yisro. The fourth of the Aseres Hadibros is the exhortation to remember and keep the Shabbos properly. In fact, the Gemara (*Pesachim* 106a) teaches us that 'Zachor es Yom HaShabbos lekadsho'[1] is not only the basis of our obligation to make Kiddush upon Shabbos's entrance on Friday night, but also a support for making Kiddush on Shabbos day.

There are differences, however. Friday night's Kiddush, marking the beginning of Shabbos, is an actual *chiyuv D'oraysa*, based on the *pasuk*.[2] Yet, Shabbos Day's Kiddush is purely a rabbinic enactment to honor the Shabbos. As the *Rashbam* (*Pesachim* 106a s.v. amar) citing the *Sheiltos D'Rav Achai Gaon* (*Parshas Yisro*: 54) explains, the reason why we make Kiddush on Shabbos day is in order to show honor to the day, by drinking wine, which highlights the difference between weekday and Shabbos.[3] One practical difference between the two is that the preamble to Friday night Kiddush (*Vayechulu*) is actually part of the Kiddush, attesting to Hashem's creation of the world in six days, as opposed to Shabbos Day, when the sum total of the Kiddush is really just the bracha of 'Hagafen'.[4]

Defining Delight

Yet, there is another integral component to Kiddush besides the Kiddush itself. The Gemara *Pesachim* (101a), citing *Shmuel*, and duly codified as halachah,[5] rules that Kiddush must be performed B'makom Seudah, in the same place as a meal. In other words, in order to fulfill the Kiddush obligation, it must serve as the preamble to an actual Seudah.

The *Rashbam* (ad loc. s.v. af) explains that this halachah is gleaned from the *pasuk* in *Yeshaya* (Ch. 58: 13) 'V'karasa L'Shabbos Oneg, and you will proclaim Shabbos as a delight for you', meaning in the same place where you proclaim Shabbos (making Kiddush), there must also be the delight (referring to celebrating the Shabbos Seudah).

But now that we know that Kiddush must always come before a Seudah, what exactly must this Seudah consist of? How do we define this 'delight'? Here is where it gets complicated. Both *Tosafos* and the *Rosh* explicitly state that this Seudah must be an actual bread meal,[6] meaning the full Shabbos repast replete with washing,[7] *Mayim Acharonim*,[8] and *Bentching*. However, the *Tur* cites an opinion of the *Gaonim* that for this halachah, Seudah does not necessarily mean a full Seudah, but rather eating only a bit ('achal davar mu'at') or even drinking a cup of wine is sufficient.

The *Beis Yosef*[9] opines that *Tosafos* and the *Rosh* did not mean to actually argue on the *Gaonim*, but rather they would agree that a full meal is not mandated. In this case, in order to constitute a meal, a small amount of bread would suffice, as would drinking a cup of wine. Although many question the *Beis Yosef*'s supposition of *Tosafos* and the *Rosh*'s opinion,[10] nevertheless, in his *Shulchan Aruch*, the *Beis Yosef* codifies this as actual halachah, that one may fulfill his obligation of Kiddush B'makom Seudah utilizing (an additional cup of) wine as his Seudah.[11]

Munching Mezonos

The *Magen Avraham* takes this ruling a step further.[12] He explains that if a Seudah for Kiddush purposes includes wine, whose bracha is *Hagafen*,[13] then certainly it would include 'minei targima', types of cakes and cookies (of the five grains), whose bracha is *Mezonos*. This is because in the order of preference of brachos (*hamega'eish*),[14] *Mezonos* is considered more important than *Hagafen*. If so, certainly one may consider noshing on *Mezonos* as a Seudah for Kiddush purposes.

This novel approach of the *Magen Avraham*'s was accepted and considered 'Minhag Yisrael' by all sectors of world Jewry.[15] That is why by almost any Kiddush in almost any shul anywhere in the world it is de rigeur to have a Kiddush with *minei Mezonos* as the Seudah.

Kiddush Controversy

However, not every authority agreed with the *Magen Avraham*'s view. For example, *Rabbi Akiva Eiger* argues that neither wine nor *Mezonos* should fit in the Seudah category. Moreover, the *Vilna Gaon* famously did not rely on this

leniency, and made certain that his Kiddush (even on Shabbos day) was exclusively 'B'makom Seudah Gemurah', meaning, a full bread Shabbos Seudah, 'from soup to nuts'. [16] Although here the Vilna Gaon's shitta is considered a minority opinion, nevertheless, the Pri Megadim, Mishna Berurah, and Aruch Hashulchan all ruled that it is preferable to be particular to perform Kiddush along with a full Seudah. [17] Based on this, as well as the opinions of many Rishonim, there are those who are makpid not to make Kiddush unless as part and parcel of a full bread-based Seudah.

Night or Day?

Although the Magen Avraham did not distinguish between the Friday Night and Shabbos Day Kiddush, and held that his ruling should apply equally, on the other hand, Rav Yitzchok Elchanan Spektor, the Kovno Rav and Gadol Hador of the late 1800s, did. He explained that on Shabbos Day, when Kiddush is only mandated derabbanan, one may certainly rely on Mezonos as a Seudah. Yet, on Friday night, when Kiddush is an actual chiyuv d'oraysa, due to the strength of the opposition to the Magen Avraham's approach, he maintains that one should not rely on mere Mezonos, but should ensure that Kiddush is recited along with an entire bread-based Seudah. [18]

This is why one does not often see a Friday night Kiddush being performed with Mezonos instead of Hamotzi. An interesting upshot of this shitta is that many Yeshivos, following the Chazon Ish's precedent based on this approach, [19] do make Kiddush on Simchas Torah night on Mezonos, as the Kiddush on Yom Tov, even at night, is also derabbanan.

Kiddush X 2

This also explains why many are makpid to make Kiddush again as part of their Shabbos Day Seudah at home, even after partaking of Kiddush in shul. As Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, and later Rav Moshe Sternbuch pointed out, [20] although according to the normative halachah Kiddush-goers had already fulfilled their obligation in shul, nevertheless, according to the Vilna Gaon, they have not done so at all. Therefore, they aver, in order to ascertain that one be yotzei Kiddush B'makom Seudah according to all opinions, one should make Kiddush again as part of the actual Seudah.

Rav Moshe Feinstein [21] takes a different approach to explain the halachic preference of making Kiddush again at home. He explains that in his opinion, 'V'karasa L'Shabbos Oneg' has a second, opposite meaning - that in a place where one wants to have an oneg (and any additional eating one does on Shabbos is considered oneg as well) he must also make Kiddush. (This would only apply until one has made Kiddush with bread.)

In view of this, Rav Moshe is able to synthesize the opinions of Tosafos and the Rosh with that of the Gaonim. He maintains that Tosafos and the Rosh were referring to the general understanding of the pasuk, that a Seudah for Kiddush requires bread. However, the Gaonim were referring to the secondary understanding of the pasuk, meaning that whenever one wants to eat, one should make Kiddush first. This would include eating Mezonos or even drinking wine, as commonly done at a Kiddush in shul.

It should be clear, however, that according to Rav Moshe, one will not fulfill his full chiyuv of Kiddush B'makom Seudah until making Kiddush again along with a full Seudah.

So the next time you arrive home Shabbos morning to the delicious Seuda waiting, rest assured that by making Kiddush (even after enjoying a Kiddush in shul) you are partaking in the beautiful mitzvah of "V'karasa L'Shabbos Oneg." [22]

The author wishes to thank Rabbi Eliezer Brodt for making available his unpublished ma'amar on topic.

[1] Parshas Yisro (Ch. 20: 7 - 11). Although not exact to the lashon of the Aseres Hadibros featured in Parshas Va'eschanan (Ch. 5: 12), 'Shamor es Yom HaShabbos Lekadsho', nevertheless, we know that 'Shamor V'Zachor B'Dibbur Echad' (as mentioned in Rav Shlomo Alkabetz's timeless 'Lecha Dodi'). In fact, it is precisely this nuance that teaches us the joint obligations of positive and negative commandments (Zachor V'Shamor) on Shabbos, which obligates women the same as men. This was discussed at length in a previous article titled 'Facts and Formulae for the Forgetful'.

[2] See Gemara Brachos (20b & 27b), Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos Ch. 29: 1 & 4), Sefer HaChinuch (Parshas Yisro: Mitzva 31), Tur & Shulchan Aruch and main commentaries (Orach Chaim 271) at length, and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (77: 1).

[3] Similar sevaros are given by other Rishonim, including the Meiri and Tosafos Ri'd in their commentaries (Pesachim ad loc.). See also Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Orach Chaim 289: 2) and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 3).

[4] This nuance, as well as its practical ramifications, was discussed at great length in a previous article titled 'Common Kiddush Questions'.

[5] See Rif (Pesachim 20a), Rosh (ad loc. Ch. 10: 5), Tosafos (ad loc. 100b s.v. yedei Kiddush), Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos, Ch. 29: 8 & 10), and Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 273: 1).

[6] Tosafos (Pesachim 101a s.v. ta'eemo) and Rosh (ad loc. Ch. 10: 5). Tur (Orach Chaim 273: 5).

[7] Several issues related to what types of water with which one may wash Netillas Yadim were discussed in a previous article titled 'The Colored Water Caper'.

[8] The importance of Mayim Acharonim was discussed in detail in a previous article titled 'Mayim Acharonim, Chovah?'.

[9] Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 273: 5 s.v. kasvu Hagaonim).

[10] For example, the Drisha (Orach Chaim 269: 3 s.v. ode) argues that although this shitta of the Gaonim would fit with the Rambam's (Hilchos Brachos, Ch. 4: 1) and the Rashbam's (Pesachim 101b s.v. aval) definition of Seudah, nevertheless, it cannot fit with the shitta of Tosafos and the Rosh; an assessment later shared by Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Orach Chaim 273: 7), the Mekor Chaim (ad loc.), the Tosefes Shabbos (ad loc. 11), and the Erech Hashulchan (ad loc.). Rav Yitzchok Elchanan Spektor (Shu"t Ein Yitzchok Orach Chaim, 12: 7), Rav Yitzchok Isaac Chaver (Shu"t Binyan Olam 8), and Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky as well (Emes L'Yaakov on Pesachim 51b and Emes L'Yaakov on Tur & Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 273: 5) conclude that the Beis Yosef's position is tzarich iyun. Additionally, Rav Nitronaei Gaon (Shu"t Hagaonim, Orach Chaim 79), and as well as other Rishonim, including Rabbeinu Yonah (Ch. 7, 36b in the Rif's pages, s.v. birchas) and the Rashba (Shu"t vol. 5: 212, and in his commentary to Brachos 51b s.v. shehayayin), maintain that Seudah can only mean a bread-based meal. However, several Acharonim do suggest different mehalchim to answer up these kushyos; see the Maharsham's Daas Torah (Orach Chaim 273: 5 s.v. kasvu Hagaonim), Shu"t Beis She'arim (96), and Shu"t Minchas Yitzchok (vol. 8: 46, 2) for possible solutions. Rav Moshe Feinstein as well (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim vol. 4: 63, 7 & 8; cited later on in the article) proposes a novel approach to solve the issues.

[11] The Be'er Heitiv (Orach Chaim 273: 6), citing the Bach (ad loc. 3 s.v. aval), Levush (ad loc. 5), and Taz (ad loc. 4), explains that an additional cup of wine (or at least another reviis), aside for the one drunk as Kiddush, must be drunk as the Seudah.

[12] Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 273: 11).

[13] Or is it Hagefen? This was discussed in a previous article titled 'Geshemor Gashem?!'.

[14] Hamega'eish: Hamotzi, Mezonos, Hagafen, Ha'eitz, Ha'adamah, Shehakol.

[15] See Shu"t Ginas Veradim (Orach Chaim 3: 12), Birkei Yosef (Orach Chaim 273, 2 & 6), Be'er Heitiv (ad loc. 7), Shaarei Teshuva (ad loc. 7), Shulchan Aruch Harav (ad loc. 7; interestingly, in the next siman: 5, he writes that even so, one must have another Seudah on bread, as the Mezonos at a Kiddush does not constitute a meal to fulfill one of his three Shabbos Seudah obligations), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eishel Avrohom 11), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 6: 22), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (77, 14), Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parshas Bereishis 7), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 273: 8), Mishna Berurah (ad loc. 25), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 41). Many contemporary poskim as well, including Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (see Halichos Shlomo on Moamid vol. 1, Ch. 1: footnote 72 and Va'aleihu Lo Yibol vol. 1 pg. 141), Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Kovetz Teshuvos vol. 1: 24 s.v. umet), and Rav Moshe Feinstein (see footnote 21), rule that the ikar halachah follows the ruling of the Magen Avraham.

[16] Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Orach Chaim 273, 7 & 9), based on the words of Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah in Brachos (ibid.) that the Magen Avraham himself cites in Orach Chaim (188: 9). The Gr"a's shitta is recorded in Ma'aseh Rav (122) and cited in Biur Halacha (275: 5 s.v. kasvu). See also footnote 10.

[17] Although, in his Mishna Berurah (ibid.), the Chofetz Chaim fully rules like the Magen Avraham, on the other hand, in his Biur Halacha (ibid.), he only cites the Vilna Gaon's opinion, implying his predilection to be machmir for this shittah. This is similar to the Pri Megadim, who, likewise, in Orach Chaim 273 (ibid.) rules like the Magen Avrohom, but in Orach Chaim 271 (Eishel Avrohom 3), he writes that 'mikol makom lechatchilla tov pas'. The Aruch Hashulchan (ibid.) as well, although stating that the ikar halachah follows the Magen Avraham's ruling, nevertheless concludes that it is preferred (mehadrin) to be makpid on only making Kiddush with a full Seudah. Several contemporary sefarim including Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa (vol. 2, Ch. 54: 22) and Yalkut Yosef (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 273: 9, in the parenthesis) write that indeed it is preferable to be machmir on making Kiddush with actual pas as the Seudah. It is recorded (Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 1, pg. 125) that the Chazon Ish was machmir for the Gr"a's shittah for himself, but not for others.

[18] Shu"t Ein Yitzchok (Orach Chaim, 12: 11). See also the lashon in the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (77, 14), who implies this way as well.

[19] See Shu"t Ein Yitzchok (ibid. 5) who explains at length that the obligation for Kiddush on Yom Tov is derabbanan. The Chazon Ish's ruling for making Kiddush on Mezonos as the Seudah on Simchas Torah night is widely known; it is cited in Piskei Teshuvos (273, end footnote 68), and is customary in many Yeshivos.

[20] Shu"t Salmas Chaim (old print vol. 1: 59; new print Orach Chaim 255) and Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1: 264). This is similar to Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin's assessment (Shu"t Gevuros Eliyahu vol. 1: 83 s.v. umatzinu) of why one who makes Kiddush as part of davening in shul is not yotzei and nevertheless needs to make Kiddush again at his Seudah at home. Rav Henkin explains that 'lo yotzei' here does not mean that he was not allowed to do so, but rather that he still has not yet fulfilled his obligation; as such, he must be metaken and mashlim his chiyuv by making Kiddush at his Seudah.

[21] Shu"t Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim vol. 4: 63, 7 & 8). See also Shu"t Vedibarta Bam (72), quoting Rav Dovid Feinstein. According to this understanding, Rav Moshe also rules that the ikar din follows the Magen Avraham, that one may make Kiddush on Mezonos. However one will not have fully fulfilled his obligation of Kiddush B'Makom Seudah until making Kiddush again as part of a full bread-based Seudah.

[22] For more issues related to Kiddush B'makom Seudah see R' Zvi Ryzman's Ratn KaTzvi (vol. 1: 11) and Shu"t Divrei Pinchas (vol. 1: 27).

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspit@ohr.edu.

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

This article was written L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben Yechezkel Shrag, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi L'Refuah Sheleimah for R' Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, Henna Rasha bas Yitta Ratza and Rochel Miriam bas Dreiza Liba, and I'zechus Yaacov Tzvi ben Rivka and Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!

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לע"נ

סרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

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 Mitzrayim. 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 Mitzrayim 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 Canaan:

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.

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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 OMITTS 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'g'vurah 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?

AHAVAH 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

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 "I'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'Ramban, 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 lightning 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 v'ha'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 v'ha'Elokim ya'anenu b'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 achronim. 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 it 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 Hilkhos Gezeilah 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 haDibrot:

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 opens 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 Pesachim 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 constituted 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.

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