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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 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.

The news last Motzi Shabbat (January 15) was about a British Muslim terrorist taking Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker of Congregation Beth Israel (Colleysville, TX) and three congregants hostage for twelve hours during Shabbat morning services. Fortunately, Rabbi Cytron-Walker distracted the terrorist long enough for the congregants to escape and then threw a chair at the terrorist. At that point, the rabbi escaped. FBI personnel were then able to shoot and kill the terrorist. [

Note: for much more about the terrorist, see https://www.jns.org/opinion/the-unspoken-truths-behind-the-texas-synagogue-attack/?utm_source=The+Daily+Syndicate&utm_campaign=446ae152b8-Daily+Syndicate+1-16-22+%28new%29_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8583953730-446ae152b8-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D&ct=t%28Daily+Syndicate+1-16-22+%28new%29_COPY_01%29]

A few days later, news sources reported that a criminal with at least a dozen outstanding warrants against him from the east coast had entered an upscale furniture store on La Brea Avenue in a black hat Orthodox neighborhood and killed a UCLA student who was the only store employee at the time. This attack and murder, on January 13, was two blocks from the largest Orthodox elementary day school in the country outside metropolitan New York, with more than 1000 students. The yeshiva also has several other buildings, including schools for older students, within a couple of blocks of the elementary school. This yeshiva is also less than half a mile from the location where a man approached and threatened an Orthodox day school student last summer. (My family lived approximately a mile from the scene of the murder when I was growing up.) Anyone looking for a random person to attack within a few miles of the furniture store would have an overwhelming probability of picking out an Orthodox Jew.

Our parsha this week, Yitro, carries the name of a non-Jew – perhaps a strange name for the parsha that introduces B'Nai Yisrael to the Revelation and Aseret Dibrot (Ten Statements). One can readily see that chapter 18, the section reporting Yitro's approach and visit with Moshe, is out of place chronologically. Chapter 17 (the end of Beshalach) takes place at Rephidim (17:1). Chapter 19 opens by reporting that B'Nai Yisrael left Rephidim and traveled to the mountain of God, which we learn later is Har Sinai. Chapter 18, however, takes place with B'Nai Yisrael already camped at Har Sinai, where they end up staying until well into Sefer Bemidbar (10:33). As many commentators have stated, chapter 18 must have taken place after the Revelation. Why, then, did the Torah move this chapter and place it before Aseret Dibrot? (Rabbi Antine discussed this question in his parsha class this week, and my discussion includes some of his material.)

As Rabbi Menachem Leibtag and many others observe, the order of topics in the Torah takes one of two forms. Narrative tends to be chronological, unless there is a compelling reason to change the order. Legal sections, however, are normally thematic. In short, two separate topics in a legal section of the Torah are normally related thematically. This generalization may give a hint to what is going on. The topic of the end of Beshalach is Amalek's attack on B'Nai Yisrael, focusing on the weakest members of the community, at Rephidim, when they were tired after undergoing thirst (before God made water come out of a rock) (Bereishis 17:8-16; Devarim 25:17-19). Since Amalek was an illegitimate son of Esav's grandson Eliphaz, the Amalek were cousins of B'Nai Yisrael. (To see the family tree, see Stone Chumash, p. 197.) Amalek shows the ugliness of un-provoked hatred from non-Jews, something that our people have had to face in every generation.

The Torah immediately presents the opposite way in which non-Jews have related to our people at various times. Yitro, while Moshe's father-in-law, had earlier been one of Paro's magicians and ministers. Yitro was from Midian, a non-Jewish tribe that lived in the Midbar outside Canaan. By moving the story of Yitro adjacent to that of Amalek, the effect is that the Torah shows a contrast between honorable and dishonorable gentiles. In learning how to relate to non-Jews, we must realize that the world contains both friends and enemies among other nations. Our task is to recognize the difference and treat both kinds of neighbors the way they deserve. Even better, in an ideal world, we should try to find a way to keep our friends and turn enemies into friends. (Israel has been trying to move past long-standing anti-Semitism among Arab countries and turn some of these countries into allies.) [Note: This interpretation is not necessarily a traditional view of why the Torah moves Yitro's visit to chapter 18.]

This Shabbat, we get up early to stand as we listen to the Aseret Dibrot, summary statements that cover all 613 mitzvot in the Torah. Next week, in Mishpatim, the Torah translates the Aseret Dibrot into many specific mitzvot that illustrate how to implement the Ten Statements into everyday life. After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the sages who established the order of our prayers considered but decided not to include Aseret Dibrot in our daily davening – to avoid placing too much emphasis on the Ten Statements over the many other mitzvot. The outlines and summaries of our mitzvot are extremely important, but they do not take the place of the importance of each mitzvah. As the Torah states, we must take care not to trample even what appear to be the least significant of our mitzvot (Rashi to Devarim 7:12).

Note: in writing these words, I recall anti-Semitic attacks on my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, such as his getting arrested and spending time in jail for petitioning for Soviet Jews in front of the Soviet Embassy and spending all day in shul on Yom Kippur after high school thugs pelted him with raw eggs while he walked to services. In contrast, one of Rabbi Cahan's closest friends was a minister with whom he co-taught a Bible course for many years (with some services at Har Shalom and others at the Lutheran Church). Hopefully all of us can remember many episodes of positive interactions with non-Jews as well as any anti-Semitic incidents.

Special Mazel-Tov to our close friends Jon and Jen, and family, on the birth of a baby boy on Wednesday.

Shabbat Shalom,
Alan & Hannah

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.
Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Yisro: Return to Sender

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

Yisro is the portion in which the Children of Israel arrive at their spiritual, intellectual, and moral destination. It is the portion in which the former Hebrew slaves choose to become the Chosen People, choosing the responsibilities of 613 mitzvos and all their accountability. This week the Jews accept the Torah at Mount Sinai.

It does not come easy. Hashem prefaces the offering with an overpowering charge. He sends Moshe to speak to both the men and women. “You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation” (Exodus19:6). Accepting the Torah included the responsibilities of a holy nation — a new moral divining rod for a world fraught with immorality. But they were up to the challenge and they responded as such.
They did not murmur their response nor did they mumble their acceptance. The Jews affirmed their agreement in unison with words that resound throughout history as the battle cry of Jewish faith. They shouted in unison, “All that Hashem has commanded, we shall do!” (Exodus 19:8). The response, declaring total submission to Torah dictates, was proudly noted by the Almighty, handing the Jews a most chosen nation status through all their ordeals.

But Moshe did not look up to heaven with a content smile, as if he was a proud brother sharing nachas with a father who was watching from the bleachers. The Torah tells us, “and Moshe related the words of the people to Hashem” (Exodus19:9). He returned to the Master of the Universe and reported the good news. He repeated the response, verbatim, to Hashem.

The question is obvious. Moshe knew, perhaps better than any mortal being, that every action, gesture, and thought of any inhabitant of this planet is duly recorded by the Almighty. Why, then, did he report back the response? Hashem was well aware of the enthusiasm and willing acceptance of the people. Furthermore, by telling us that Moshe went back to Hashem, isn’t the Torah opening a Pandora’s box? Could one possibly infer that Hashem, needed Moshe to find out the response? Obviously there is a deeper lesson to be learned!

In New York State when a baby is born, tests are administered to determine if the baby has any genetic diseases. Among them are tests for histidinemia. This condition causes excessive levels of the protein histadine to build up in the blood, which can damage the nervous system and cause retardation. The disease must be attended to immediately. A histadine level of 1 or 2 points is considered normal.

Ten days after a baby was born to a young couple, the hospital frantically tracked down the parents to tell them that their child had a histadine level — of 12! The hospital told the young couple to rush back with the baby. The father instantaneously called his Rebbe, Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky who was the sandek at the baby’s bris just a few days ago.

Reb Yaakov said he would pray for the child who appeared fine at the bris. Then he told them to insist that the histadine test be repeated before any treatment is administered. The parents rushed back to Bellevue Hospital where they were greeted by an assortment of doctors, nurses, nutritionists, and therapists. The staff wanted to admit the newborn into the hospital immediately. They warned that if the baby was not admitted, permanent brain damage could result. The parents insisted that the test be re-administered to which the doctors grudgingly replied, “we will re-do the test, but understand,” they grumbled, “that these tests are extremely accurate. We never get a false reading.”

They re-administered the procedure and came out with a totally different figure than the first time. The histadine level was a bit over one! After further review, they realized that the first test was not off — the technician was! He put the decimal in the wrong place. The original reading should not have been 12, but rather 1.2!

The couple, quite upset about the unnecessary scare and trauma, drove with the baby straight to the home of Rabbi Kamenetzky to inform him that the whole ordeal was a mistake. Reb Yaakov, who was elated at the news, held the young father and kissed him. “Thank you for coming and telling me the news,” said the Torah sage. “So many people just tell me their tzorus (problems), they ask me for advice, even prayers, but when things get better, I never find out. I am left bearing the burden of their worries.”

Moshe knew that Hashem heard the answer of the Jewish nation as loud, if not louder, than he did. But he was sent on a mission and he had a responsibility to convey the good news. But he wanted to send the Jewish people a message as well. He taught his people that before one can receive the Torah he must be a good messenger. Everything that we study – everything we do on this earth is but a message that must be accounted to for Hashem. Even if Hashem knows what we

are doing, we must return with a report of accomplishment. And Moshe taught us that Derech Eretz must not only precede the learning of the Torah, it must precede the giving of it as well.

Good Shabbos

What does memory have to do with belief in God?

By Rabbi Dov Linzer *
Rosh HaYeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2022

For some people, belief comes easily. From a young age they have believed in God, and that has remained a constant throughout their lives. For others, not so much. There are those who have always struggled with belief. There are those who believed in God in the past, but now find that they have serious doubts and questions and that belief eludes them.

This struggle can be a source of much personal, religious angst. And turning to the Torah can — at first glance, at least — make this even harder.

“I am the Lord your God who has taken you out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 20:2) is the first of the Ten Commandments, a verse that Rambam interprets to be a mitzvah: we are commanded to believe that God exists. It is hard to understand this position if for no other reason than that it is logically circular — if a person doesn’t believe in God, how can she be told that God has commanded her to believe? More practically, how is a person supposed to fulfill this mitzvah? Belief is not something that someone can achieve through strength of will. There is no muscle that he can move to make himself believe. At best, he can work to cultivate belief. For some, even that demand would feel like an exercise in futility.

A shift in perspective is necessary. First, there are those who reject Rambam’s position. The inclusion of this verse in the Ten Commandments is not an indication as to whether it is or is not a mitzvah. The term used in the Torah is aseret ha’devarim; in Rabbinic literature, aseret ha’dibrot. They are the Ten Utterances, not the Ten Commandments. Moreover, there is no imperative to be found in this verse, no “you must.” It is a preamble, a declaration of who God is and a frame for the mitzvot that follow.

Therein lies the rub. For, commandment or no, belief in God and in the mitzvot as commanded by God underpins our life of Torah and halakha observance. It frames our actions as part of our relationship with God, as our avodat HaShem. Absent this frame, we are living a religious lifestyle, but not a religious life.

Where does that leave someone who struggles with that belief?

The key is understanding what belief, as the Torah understands it, is really about. Maimonidean belief is belief that. It is the assertion of the truth of a statement: “I believe that God exists, that God took us out of Egypt.” It is intellectual and philosophical, not relational. This is not the belief that we find in the Torah.

The Torah’s word for belief is emunah. This word means not belief that, but belief in. The root is ‘omein’, to raise, to be a nursemaid, to cultivate. Mordechai was “omein et Hadassah” (Esther 2:7), he raised Esther. It is relational. It is faith.

At the splitting of the sea, we are told “va’ya’aminu ba’Hashem u’ve’Moshe avdo” (Ex. 14:31), “And they believed in God and in Moshe, God’s servant.” At that moment, they didn’t believe in some fact statement about Moshe or about God. What the verse is telling us, rather, is that at that moment of salvation, they knew that they could totally rely on Moshe and God. They knew that God was there for them and would always be there for them. They had trust. They had faith.

This is the belief that the Torah is looking for. And this is why the Torah does not focus on how we can logically or philosophically prove things about God. It’s focus – repeated time and again in various mitzvot — is how we can cultivate a relationship and a framework. Central to this is how we can cultivate memory.

We are told to “Remember the day that you left Egypt all the days of your life” (Deut. 16:3). But how do we remember something that we did not experience? Through speech, through ritual, and through imagining. Every day in Shema we read the verse that God took us out of Egypt. We observe the Yamim Tovim that remind us and ritualize those events. And on Pesach, we immerse ourselves in telling and retelling the story, in concrete expression through mitzvot, in imagining what happened, and in seeing ourselves “as if we left Egypt.”
This is the way that we realize and bring to life the declaration: “I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt.” This is what provides the religious frame of our life of Torah and mitzvot.

It is not about answering a question of whether God exists or what actually happened. It is not about history. It is about memory, about cultivating a personal and shared communal image of what happened in the past and a lens through which to look at the present.

So it is with the standing at Mt. Sinai itself. The verse tells us that we are to never forget the day that we stood before God at Mt. Sinai (Deut. 4:10). Technically speaking, we can’t forget it, because we never personally experienced it! So there is only one option left — we have to imagine it, think about it, talk about it, make it a memory that shapes our orientation to mitzvot, to the world and to our fellow human beings.

For those who struggle with belief, there is a way forward. It is to move from belief to faith, from history to memory. Through actions, speech, and imagination we likely won’t come to believe something that we did not already believe in before, but we can come to see things in a different way, in the way that God and the Torah would have us see them.

Shabbat shalom.

https://library.yctorah.org/2022/01/what-does-memory-have-to-do-with-belief-in-god/

Yisro is Coming!

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2022

A sense of excitement swept the camp. From tent to tent people whispered the news: “Yisro is coming!"

Yisro was the father-in-law of Moshe. But, to the Jewish people he was much more than that. Yisro was the only advisor of Pharoh who took a stand against the proposal to enslave the Jews. When he realized that he couldn’t influence the terrible decision, he fled so as not to participate in the plan.

Yisro found refuge in Midyan, where, at first, he was respected as an elder and a priest. Later, the local people excommunicated him when his penetrating mind and sincere heart caused him to reject idol worship in favor of monotheism. His daughter Tzipporah was found worthy to marry our teacher, Moshe. In the Jewish world, Yisro was a hero.

Yet, Yisro himself did not recognize his greatness. As he approached the Jewish encampment, he did so with trepidation. “Will they be willing to greet me,” he wondered. After all, he was an outsider.

Yisro, plagued by self-doubt, sent a message to Moshe. “Behold I am coming to you together with your wife and two children.” As Rashi explains, “If you won’t come out to greet me, at least come out for the sake of your wife or your children.”

Little did Yisro know how much Moshe and the Jewish people valued him. By the time he got to the Jewish camp a full delegation had gathered. Led by Moshe and Ahron, the entire Jewish people came out to greet Yisro. A festive banquet was tendered in his honor. Moshe himself was the waiter, because to him it was a meal filled with sanctity. Yisro was worthy of honor. He was a person who yearned for truth despite his background.

One of the interesting facts about treasured people is that they don't realize that they are treasured. Yisro did not appreciate how much Moshe respected him. Yisro viewed Moshe with awe. He saw in Moshe a human being who had come so close to G-d. He saw in Moshe a person who was able to stand up to Pharoh's evil and be victorious over him. "Moshe is busy," Yisro thought to himself, "He is tending to the needs of a great nation. Why would he bother himself with me?"

It wasn't until Yisro showed up that he realized the truth about himself. The Jewish people were very proud of him. While they were born and raised in greatness of spirit, Yisro had achieved it by choice later in life. The Jewish people respected Yisro. To them, Yisro was a hero.

Some people say that what you don't know can't hurt you. But the truth is that if a person doesn't know how much they are valued, they struggle alone without realizing how much respect and admiration people feel for them.

Imagine the tragedy that could have happened if Yisro had never come. Picture the loneliness that this great man would have felt if he had continued his righteous journey all alone. Now we can appreciate the dramatic invigoration that became his as a result of the excitement that swept the camp with the words, "Yisro is coming!"

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org. **Teach613 recently started a new Shulchan Aruch Zoom class this week. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

The "Bystander Problem" – Thoughts for Parashat Yitro

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

A Talmudic passage (Sotah 11a) offers an imaginary scenario relating to when Pharaoh was deciding to enslave the Israelites and murder their male babies. "Said Rabbi Hiyya son of Abba in the name of Rabbi Simai: Three were involved in that decision: Bilam, Job and Yitro." Bilam, who advised in favor of these evil decrees, ultimately died a violent death. Job, who remained neutral, was later punished with horrible sufferings. Yitro, who opposed Pharaoh's decrees, had to flee, but was ultimately rewarded so that his descendants were great teachers of Torah.

The moral lesson of this teaching is that those who promote evil — like Bilam -- are eventually punished. Those who courageously resist evil — like Yitro -- may suffer in the short run, but will ultimately be rewarded. Those —l ike Job – who remain neutral in the face of wickedness will endure horrible sufferings.

Bilam went along with Pharaoh's decisions either because he actually agreed with Pharaoh, or because he thought it was in his own best interest not to resist the monarch. By being a "yes man," Bilam would gain power and favors from Pharaoh. He had no qualms about becoming an accomplice to enslaving a whole nation and murdering their babies. Justice demands that Bilam be punished for his moral turpitude. Yitro resisted Pharaoh's decisions, even at personal risk. Yitro would not be party to wicked decrees. He stood up on behalf of the endangered Israelites and was compelled to flee from Pharaoh's wrath. Justice demands that Yitro be rewarded for his moral heroism.

But what about Job? What is the nature of his sin that made him deserving of terrible sufferings? After all, Job did not say that he agreed with Pharaoh; he did not validate Pharaoh's decrees. He simply stayed silent. He was prudent. He may have thought: "Pharaoh is going to do this regardless of what I say. Why should I endanger myself? Why should I incur his anger? Why should I stand up for the Israelites, or for righteousness, or for compassion? The safest thing for me is to remain neutral." For his neutrality, Job was punished. Abstaining from moral responsibility is also taking a stand! When

evil is not resisted directly, it is thereby allowed to flourish. As the great 19th century political thinker Edmund Burke said: “All that the forces of evil need to prevail is that enough good men do nothing.”

Evil flourishes in a moral vacuum. It cannot be extirpated without active resistance. Individuals and nations who “abstain” in the face of evil are accomplices of evil. Neutrality in the face of injustice and cruelty is not a morally acceptable position. Psychologists have written extensively on the “bystander problem.” Why do so many stand aside when they witness violence, cruelty, injustice? Why doesn’t everyone feel a moral commitment to stand up on the side of righteousness? Why are there so many Jobs and so few Yitros?

Job’s neutrality — the “bystander problem” — might stem from perceived self-interest. Why should I get involved? Why should I take risks that might have negative consequences for me? Why should I antagonize those in power? A main reason for the “bystander problem,” though, seems to be that people do not assume personal responsibility. They rationalize: there are others who can intercede, there are others who are better able to help, somebody else will take responsibility so it isn’t necessary for me to get involved or to make personal sacrifices. It isn’t that bystanders are necessarily immoral or heartless; rather, they may simply not take things personally. They think: It isn’t my issue, it isn’t my responsibility, it’s for others to solve.

Erich Fromm observed: “Most people fail in the art of living not because they are inherently bad or so without will that they cannot live a better life; they fail because they do not wake up and see when they stand at a fork in the road and have to decide.” This is the root of Job’s sin: he did not wake up and realize he was at a fork in the road where he had to make a decision. That decision would define the nature of his character, his life itself. By remaining silent, he chose to be a “bystander,” to let the forces of evil gain sway. He forfeited personal responsibility, not because he was a bad person but because he was a weak or self-centered person. The sufferings of others did not awaken moral indignation within him. As a result, he himself ultimately underwent horrendous sufferings.

The Talmudic lesson reminds us that we must not be part of the “bystander problem,” but must take moral stands in the face of injustice, corruption and wickedness. We must accept personal responsibility, and not assume that others will solve the problems for us. The world is full of Pharaohs who promote wickedness and injustice. The world is full of Bilams who are only too happy to go along with the powerful Pharaohs. The world is very full of Jobs who stay silent and neutral in the face of evil. The world has a shortage of Yitros who realize that they stand at a fork in the road and have to decide, and have to take personal responsibility.

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/bystander-problem-thoughts-parashat-yitro

** The Angel for Shabbat column is a service of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, fostering an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Please join our growing family of members by joining online at www.jewishideas.org

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The Ongoing Revelation

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The Revelation at Mount Sinai was a national experience for all the people of Israel — but it also was very personal. Each Israelite heard the same words — but in different ways!

The Midrash teaches (Shemot Rabba 29:1) that God spoke “bekoho shel kol ehad ve-ehad,” according to the individual abilities of each listener. The universal message of Torah was made direct and personal. The miracle at Mount Sinai was not only the Revelation of God to the nation of Israel, but the individualized Revelation to each and every Israelite man, woman and child.

The message of this rabbinic teaching goes further. It does not merely refer to the receptivity and ability of Israelites at the moment of Revelation at Mount Sinai. It also recognizes that each individual’s koah — strength of understanding — is not stagnant. As we grow, deepen our knowledge, expand our sensitivities and open our minds and hearts — our koah evolves. In a sense, we receive the Revelation anew at each stage in life — actually, every day and every moment of life. This is the wonder and glory of Torah: it speaks to us directly and personally throughout our lives.

The foundational experience of the Revelation has an ongoing impact on how we confront life. Among the lessons is the importance of interiority, of being strong within ourselves.

The Me'am Lo'ez, the classic Ladino biblical commentary (Turkey, 18th century), notes that the original Revelation on Mount Sinai was a highly dramatic episode. Moses ascended the mountain as the people of Israel gathered below with great anticipation. The scene was marked by thunder and lightning and the sound of the shofar. The voice of God was heard by all. Yet, shortly afterward, the Israelites were dancing around a golden calf! When Moses came down the mountain and witnessed this idolatrous behavior, he threw down and shattered the tablets of the law.

Later, Moses ascended the mountain again. This time, there was no public fanfare, no miraculous sounds and lights. God told Moses that he himself would have to carve out the stone on which the Ten Commandments would be inscribed. The second set of the tablets of the law – received by Moses alone and through his own hard labor – was preserved.

The first tablets of the Ten Commandments, given with so much drama, were destroyed. The second tablets, given privately and quietly, survived and became the spiritual foundation of the people of Israel.

The Me'am Lo'ez points to the moral of this story: the really important and lasting things in life are often done by individuals in privacy, through their own exertions. Things done with much publicity may not be as permanent. We ought not judge the value of a person or an event based on external glitter and fame. Rather, we ought to realize that greatness and permanent value are often found in obscurity, in seemingly small and unnoticed acts of kindness or spiritual insight.

External fame, power, and popularity do not necessarily correlate to internal worth. What is truly important is what we do through the sweat of our own brow, quietly, without seeking publicity or glory. What is valuable and lasting in us are those things which are authentic, honest and good in the eyes of God, and which bring goodness and kindness to our fellow human beings.

Another lesson of the Revelation is that the Torah provides a grand and universal religious vision. A famous Midrash teaches that the Revelation at Sinai was split into 70 languages i.e. contained a message for the 70 nations of the world (understood to refer to all humanity). The Torah is not to be understood or limited as being a narrow message intended for a small sect. The Torah is not to be limited to a reclusive people living in self-contained ghettoes; rather, it is to provide spiritual insight to all humanity. The great 19th century Rabbi Eliyahu Benamozegh stressed Israel’s role as the most universal of religions, a religion that provides the moral framework for civilization a whole.

The Revelation accounts in the Torah also provide guidance on how to live as full, real people, with a healthy and wholesome sense of self. The Talmud reports (Berakhot 8b) that the holy ark in the Tabernacle contained the two sets of

the Tablets of the law: the broken pieces of the first set, and the complete tablets of the second set. “Luhot veshivrei luhot munahot ba-aron.”

A lesson from this is: we each have “complete” and “broken” tablets within ourselves. We have our greatest strengths and achievements; and we also have our failures and shortcomings. If we only focus on the “complete” aspects of our lives, we may tend to become arrogant and egotistical. If we focus on the “broken” aspects of our lives, we may become demoralized and crushed. To be whole and strong human beings, we need to value both sets of tablets within us. We need to draw on our strengths and learn from our failings. We need to balance self-confidence with honest awareness of our limitations and weaknesses.

The awesome Revelation at Mt. Sinai was a singular experience that took place thousands of years ago. The ongoing revelation continues within each of us, for all generations.

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/ongoing-revelation

Yisro – Don’t Forget The Basics

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer* © 2021

The Ten Commandments are the essence of our bond with G-d. It is the pact through which we accepted to become His nation for all time. They include the fundamental concepts of our belief in G-d, respect for G-d, respect for others and for justice. Our rabbis teach us that all of Torah in its entirety is contained within the Ten Commandments given at Sinai. (See Rash”i Shemos 24:12)

In this vein, we find a fundamental principle which lies at the core of many mitzvos in the fourth commandment, the mitzvah of Shabbos. Hashem told us, “Remember the Sabbath day to make it holy.” (Shemos 20:8). The Ramba”n explains that this mitzvah follows directly from the previous mitzvahs. The first three of the ten commandments encapsulate our belief and respect for G-d. The first is to recognize that G-d is the Creator who understands all that happens and is all-capable, as demonstrated through our Exodus from Egypt. The second is to recognize that He is the One and Only G-d and to honor Him alone. The third is to show Him the great honor and distinction of respecting even the mention of His name.

After Hashem establishes and defines our responsibility to recognize and respect Him, we are then commanded to make a sign and a constant reminder to ourselves that He is the Creator of all. This, says the Ramba”n, is the mitzvah of Shabbos, which is a reminder of how Hashem created the world in six days.

The Ramba”n here is presenting Shabbos in a different light then we usually hear it. Shabbos is usually presented as our testimony to the world that we recognize the world has a Creator. It is the day Hashem rejoices over creation itself, and we are joining in His celebration. The Ramba”n, however, is saying that Shabbos is not just a celebration and is not just a testimony for others – it is a reminder to us ourselves that there is a Creator. Having a weekly reminder of such a basic concept seems unnecessary. Most reminders of historical events, such as Pesach and Shavuos, remembering the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah respectively, happen once a year. We don’t spend the whole year thinking about them. By celebrating the anniversary of the event, we remember it and pass on the legacy to future generations. Why is Shabbos different that we need a weekly reminder for the most well-known and basic concept of all?

The Ramba”n takes this new concept even further. He says that the mitzvah to remember Shabbos is to remember Shabbos every single day. As we go through our week, we should recognize every day as a weekday and distinct from Shabbos, which is designated as a holy day. He concludes by saying, “by remembering Shabbos always, we will remember creation at all times, and we will acknowledge at all times that the world has a Creator, and that He commanded us in this sign as it says, ‘for it is a sign between Me and you’ (Shemos 31:13). And this is a great foundation in the trust in the Almighty.”

To understand this Ramba"n consider one who goes shopping to buy food for dinner. On the way to the store, he hears that an old and very dear friend is in town and eagerly takes a detour to see his friend. Catching up with his friend, the time flies and exhilarated he returns home, never having gone to the store. In life, there are many things that excite us and bring us enjoyment and can distract us from our immediate goals.

The Ramba"n is teaching us that the first three commandments require us to understand that our recognition of G-d and connection with Him is the essence of life. This is the beginning and first steps of our pact with G-d. Through this recognition, we elevate the world and deepen our connection with G-d. Yet, it is so easy to get involved in our daily pursuits and life's activities and lose focus on our recognition of G-d and connection with Him. To maintain this awareness we need constant reminders. Shabbos, as well as many mitzvos, help us to maintain this focus in everything we do, living a life connected with G-d.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Because Rabbi Singer's Dvar Torah was not in time for my deadline, I am printing his Dvar Torah from 2021.

Jews and Mobile Education Part 2: From Farmers' Markets to Stopping Anti-Semitism

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

On my Uber ride back from the MLK Unity breakfast at the Birmingham JCC, my driver told me all about his former career as a truck driver. He told me how he used to drive all across the country. He told me how he now works more on the managerial side of the business, hiring and dealing with all the drivers under him.

I thanked him for his work and asked him what he thought about the current hiring and supply chain crisis I keep hearing about on the news. Does he have any trouble finding people willing to drive a truck? He answered yes and that many companies now offer up to a $15,000 signing bonus plus competitive salaries that can start at $50,000 and reach up to $100,000.

This floored me. Six figures for driving a truck!? Why weren't people running towards this? College graduates now dream of such an offer and truck driving does not even require a degree.

The full socioeconomic answer to this may be outside the purview of this email. But we can make a suggestion and connect it to the broader world of the purposes of education and its consequences that we were talking about last week.

To get there though we will have to travel through farmers' markets, Publix, and a theory on the source of anti-Semitism. But I promise we will end with hope.

A gut reaction we can have when thinking about the truck driving profession is that it's unglamorous. One major element of truck driving that contributes to this is that it's a middleman profession. Truck drivers do not make anything in their work. They transport items that other people have made. Many of us have a desire for work that allows us to see and feel the results at the end of the day. Truck drivers have less of that. (Our Sages relate that one of the worst elements of the slavery in Egypt was that Pharoah forced us to build on Pisom and Raamses. These were places that had quicksand so whatever the Jews built went to pieces quickly after. We suffered more by not seeing the results of our work.)

Also, think about this. Which method of shopping strikes you with an immediate shot of spiritual warmth? Shopping at Publix or shopping at a farmers' market? I thought so

It may be the same produce. But buying directly from the person who produced the product makes it feel more real. This also leads us to forgive and feel empathy for a farmer even if he raises his prices, because we assume it's due to factors beyond his control. But if Publix, the great corporate middleman, raises prices, even if it has the very reasonable explanation that it's due to the supply chain, we're more willing to blame and attack the corporation.

This middlemen bias may not only affect our shopping or job preferences, but also be a basis of some of the worst expressions of hate in human history. In Thomas Sowell's essay "Are Jews Generic?," he zooms in on what he calls the "middleman minority." The overarching argument of the essay is that while anti-Semitism comes from many motivations like ethnic hatred, racism, and anti-Zionism, it achieves its most horrifying expression (like pogroms and outright

genocide) in societies where Jews work or have a historic reputation for working in the middleman professions like shopkeepers, peddlers, porters, moneylenders and traders.

Sowell states, "Other kinds of minorities, have of course suffered violence, but the scale of lethal mass violence against middleman minorities has been unequalled."

He proves this by looking at the violence that have happened throughout history to people of other cultures like the Armenians in Turkey, the Ibos in Nigeria or the Lebanese in Sierra Leone. All involved groups who were minorities in a culture and worked in middleman positions.

Like the Jews, these people were immigrants and chose these professions because that's the only work they could find. (Newcomers in a country rarely have enough capital to buy land and start farming or start a factory.) Like the Jews, they were good at it and worked from the wee hours of the morning to late at night to make ends meet in their new home and eventually acquired success. Like the Jews, the majority culture around them saw them as redundant, parasitic and as thieves from the authentic dwellers of that land who worked in production rather than trade.

Redundant and parasitic? Hardly. Middleman jobs like distribution, truck driving, trading, and facilitating connections between people, while lacking the pastoral romance of the land, is one of the most essential jobs we have in human society. How many of us live near a farmer to be able to buy our food? How many of us rely on home delivery to receive the mailings and items we need? How many of us could have received the vaccine except of course for those who live near Moderna's and Pfizer's headquarters?

Thank you to all our middlemen who perform these necessary functions in our lives. Whatever grief you receive from taking on these professions is too much.

With this information, what do we make of our Jewish nation's remarkable abilities in mobile education that we discussed last week? In our entry to countries, and throughout our history, we have taken on the role of middleman (like peddling or moneylending) in our efforts to adapt, evolve and make the best of our situation. We're good at it. We've succeeded at it beyond our wildest expectations everywhere we've traveled. And yet, it may be this ability that has invited the most lethal ire against us.

This week, we read about the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The Talmud tells us that the mountain name symbolizes that the Torah causes "Sinah" or hatred against us from others. What does this mean? It means the things that make Jews special and necessary, our Torah and our ability to learn, educate, and adapt, can be the very things that cause others to hate us.

What about you? What makes you special? Have you found that the everything that sets you apart is often the thing that invites the most disdain?

So what can Jews do? Never work as middlemen again? Not go into the professions available to us when necessary because we're scared? Of course not.

But I have hope and it comes from observing the current events that surround us.

With the emergence of the global economy, middlemen are no longer a minority. So much trade goes on between people, states, and countries that humanity is slowly realizing how necessary middlemen are. All the Amazon Prime members can speak to that. The latest crisis with the supply chain and the truck driver shortage compounds this realization tenfold.

Maybe we can see this as a worldwide training ground for appreciation of the middleman. If it's true that this is the source of the worst types of violence, then maybe we will see it fade away in the coming years. Hatred will end because we're realizing how much we need each other

Granted this will take time. Anti-Semites, especially terrorists, still use the language of a "Jewish world conspiracy" born from the idea that Jews control all the money due to our historical prominence in middleman professions. But with the changing state of the world, we can hope.

So the next time you get a delivery from UPS, Amazon, or Shipt, give that middleman a smile.

Shabbat Shalom.

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Rav Kook Torah
Yitro: Reward and Punishment

How did Moses present the Torah to the Jewish people?
According to Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, Moses first announced the penalties for transgressing the Torah's precepts. Then he described the rewards that one gains for observing the mitzvot.

The Talmud, however, quotes a second opinion that asserts the order was just the opposite. First Moses described the rewards for observing the Torah, and only afterwards did he publicize the penalties for violating it.

This disagreement, Rav Kook explained, reflects two very different educational approaches.

First: Liberate the Soul

Rabbi Yehudah felt that in order to educate and enlighten, it is necessary to first battle one's darker tendencies, the body's self-centered and materialistic forces. Only then will the soul be free to elevate itself in purity and realize its lofty potential.

Initially, the unbridled traits of crassness and vice must be neutralized and uprooted. The bad and the ugly must be separated from our true desires and inner essence. We need to recognize evil's despicable and destructive nature.

Then, when the light of the Torah illuminates, there is nothing to obscure its clarity. Our spiritual enlightenment is unsullied and pure. For this reason, Moses began by announcing the penalties for transgressing the Torah, thus weakening the grip of evil. With the foundations of vice uprooted from their souls, Moses went on to describe the rewards for observing the Torah, so that their souls' yearnings for good and truth would be wholehearted.

Refining All Forces of the Soul

But there is another educational approach, one that seeks to take advantage of the crass, unbridled forces and sublimate them for holy purposes. We do not attempt to uproot the bad from the start. Rather, we flood the soul with pure, holy light. If there exist some negative traits among the soul's forces, they do not hinder the light. On the contrary, the Divine light shines more brightly, as it utilizes those raw energies which gravitate towards evil to serve holy matters.

After the negative traits have been utilized for the highest good, we then uproot any remaining dregs which could not be refined and streamlined into elevated life.

According to this approach, Moses began by describing to the Jewish people the rewards for observing the Torah. He spoke words which are "meishivin da'ato shel adam," thereby bolstering their self-confidence and kindling the inner light in their souls. As the sparks were elevated to the ultimate good, all life-forces were drawn towards holy service. Negative powers were also refined, and boosted their souls' spiritual strength.

Only the most hardened dross remained unredeemed. In order to eliminate these darkest traits, Moses described the penalties for abandoning the Torah. Then their souls' capacity for holiness was fully engaged, in complete strength and purity.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 181-182 on Shabbat 87a.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/YITRO62.htm

To Thank Before We Think (Yitro 5776)

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

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 aseret hadevarim (Ex. 34:28), and tradition terms them aseret 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 believe that, married as they are to attractive women, the local ruler will kill them so that they can 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,* 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.[3]

Jews have especial reason to fear envy. It surely played a part in the existence of anti-semitism 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[4]). It is absolutely essential that we, as Jews, should conduct ourselves with an extra measure of humility and modesty.

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

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

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

The antidote to envy is gratitude. "Who is rich?" asked Ben Zoma, and replied, "One who rejoices in what he has." There is a beautiful Jewish practice that, done daily, is life-transforming. The first words we say on waking are Modeh ani lefanekha, "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.

Footnotes:

[1] To be sure, Maimonides held that the first command is to believe in God. Halakhot 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 R. 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] The classic work is Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: a Theory of Social Behaviour,* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969. See also Joseph Epstein, *Envy,* New York: New York Public Library, 2003.

[4] See on this Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples,* Oxford University Press, 2003.

* 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. For older Devrei Torah, footnotes are not always available.

https://rabbisacks.org/to-thank-before-we-think-yitro-5776/

The Chieftain of Midyan

By Chaya Mushka & Nechama Krimmer *

This week's parsha is named after Yisro (Jethro), Moshe's father-in-law, the Chieftain of Midian. Yisro was an experienced Magician and High Priest, well versed in the study of the idols of the land and, according to the Biblical commentator Rashi, he had worshiped them all.

Yisro, however, began to hear stories of the miracles that G d had performed for the Jewish people: the splitting of the Red Sea, the Manna that provided sustenance to the Jews in the desert, and the Well of Miriam which never ran dry during her lifetime.

Moshe told his father-in-law about the trials of the Jewish people under Pharaoh's reign in Egypt, the plagues that G d inflicted on the Egyptians, and the miraculous escape of the Jewish people from the clutches of Egypt and Egyptian slavery.

Upon hearing Moshe's words, Yisro proclaimed, "Blessed is G d, who has rescued you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh...Now, I know that G d is greater than all gods…" (Shemos 18: 10-11)

After his proclamation, Yisro wasted no time changing his idolatrous ways. He ardently began to serve G d as the Creator and Master of the Universe.

Soon after Yisro's personal revelation of G dliness, the Jewish people experienced their own G dly revelation, the momentous and miraculous event of the Giving of the Torah, which changed the very nature of both the Jewish people and the world.

Yet here a question arises. Since the Revelation at Sinai takes place after Yisro's recognition that G d is the one and true G d, is there a connection between the two events? Did the conversion of a High Priest and idol worshipper like Yisro somehow precipitate the Giving of the Torah?

Indeed it did. When Yisro converted, his past of idol worship and profanity was elevated to holiness, as it was through his knowledge and understanding of foreign gods that he was able to come to the truth about the one G d. Yisro's elevation of the profane acted as a conduit for the Giving of the Torah and the Torah's ability to flow to the lowliest of places in order to transform the unholy to good.

We all have a bit of Yisro in us. We all have the power to elevate our past misdeeds and transgressions through contrition, the resolve to correct our behavior in the future, and connecting more fully to G dliness through the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvos. May we all reach inside ourselves and harness this tremendous power.

* Chabad of Greater Dayton, OH.

https://www.chabaddayton.com/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/5382384/jewish/Yisro.htm

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Why Was Moses Reluctant to Delegate?

By Yossi Ives *

One of the more baffling stories in the Torah is that of Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, pointing out that it was not viable for Moses to do everything himself, and that he would need to delegate. Everything about this story is perplexing.1 The essence of the story is that after the Torah was given on Mount Sinai, Moses sits down to judge and guide the people. There must have been long lines2, and Jethro noted that both Moses and the people were going to be exhausted by this arrangement. He therefore proposed a system of higher and lower courts to better accommodate the needs of the people. Moses accepted Jethro's advice, and with G d's blessing instituted a comprehensive leadership system.

For generations, the commentators have struggled with this story3: Why would Moses not have come to this realization on his own? Even the most ordinary person would understand the need for delegation. Surely a person of Moses's stature would not have needed help understanding that he would do well to have a support system in place. Moreover, Jethro

was pointing out that the prevailing arrangement was causing great hardship for the people. Surely, as a compassionate leader, Moses would have been sensitive to this. And if the need for delegation was so blatant, why did no one else raise this issue?

Overwhelmingly, the efforts to explain this conundrum center on providing some reasoning for why Moses was oblivious to this seemingly obvious issue. The general sentiment has been that despite Moses's enormous greatness, he was still subject to some trace of lingering self-importance that rendered him blind to the consequences of his actions. Many recent scholars use this incident to demonstrate how we are all capable of subconscious drives that can subtly influence us. If a person of Moses's stature was capable of erring in this way, they say, all the more that ordinary people should be alert to potential distortions in their perceptions.

There is a major problem with this whole line of reasoning. The need for delegation seems so readily apparent that it is hard to imagine that, whatever invisible influences may have been at play, Moses could have got this so majorly wrong. Moses was not just an individual of towering intellect; he was also credited with unparalleled humility. It really does not stand to reason that he would have been subject to this level of distortion when it is hard to imagine a much lesser person failing to see the glaringly obvious. It strains credulity to imagine that whatever the supposed potential of unconscious influences that Moses could have failed in such a basic way.

The Rebbe does something striking, turning the whole matter on its head.4 The reason why Moses did not see anything wrong with what he was doing was because … there was nothing wrong with what he was doing. Just like that we have the potential for a completely new perspective. Consider which would be preferable: to have your problem solved or to have the problem disappear? Moses's way of addressing problems was to raise the person to a level where the problem had no effect on them; in effect, it ceased to be a problem. This approach was entirely superior to any alternative, and it was one that only Moses was capable of.

Moses in a sense was right that what the people could get by hearing from him directly could not be replicated through delegating to others. The rabbis5 describe the unique way that Moses served as a vehicle for the Divine voice as "the Shechina speaks through his throat." Moses was able to elevate people to a level of connection to G d that allowed them to transcend their issues. In the long run, this would leave the people fundamentally elevated and transformed. Delegating to others would have denied the people the opportunity to be touched by the contact with pure holiness that only Moses could bring. Moses, at least, was not about to advocate withdrawing this unique phenomenon.

In fact, this was nothing new for Moses and the Israelites. At Sinai, the people asked not to hear directly from G d, as they were finding the experience of hearing unmediated from the Divine totally overwhelming. Moses, the rabbis tell us,6 was greatly disappointed that the people turned down the most unique of opportunities to hear directly from G d. But in the end, G d agreed with the people and expressed Himself via Moses. Here, too, Jethro was saying that while the intensity of the revelation from Moses is greatly superior to receiving guidance secondhand, there is a case to be made that it would still be better for the people that way.

Jethro thought this new arrangement was a step down. He used an Aramaic term, techze, when advising that Moses look for suitable people to help him. He recognized that this meant that the people were going to get something less than what they would get when dealing with Moses directly, represented by a word from the Hebrew language. He felt, however, that when focusing on their worldly reality, they need to be able to operate and function on an everyday level. Transforming people into angels was not the answer, argued Jethro. The people should still come directly to Moses to learn Torah, as this would afford them the most transportive experience into the "Wisdom and Will of G d,"7 which is the true essence of Torah learning.

Jethro was a newcomer, a convert from a foreign land. He saw the people on the ground. He recognized that they needed to deal with their mundane squabbles or difficulties by working them out in accordance with Torah, but on the level of their own lived reality. We were going to make ourselves and the world better by resolving them correctly in this world, not by becoming elevated beyond their reality. G d agreed that while in an ideal world what Moses could offer was immensely preferable, in practical reality this was not in the best interest of the people. Just like when the people requested an intermediary to hear from G d at Sinai, so here G d supported the position that "people need to be people."

A key reason was that Moses was not going to be around forever. Eventually, new leadership would emerge, and they would not be able to provide the special experience of speaking to Moses directly. Now they were in a cocoon, living in the desert under miraculous conditions, but ultimately, they were destined for the Promised Land, where they would need

to live an everyday existence. Moses needed to prepare the people for the reality that lay ahead, and if that meant compromising on the ultimate in spiritual revelation, so be it.

Jethro's idea was actually the one that was controversial. Imagine proposing taking advice from a tier-5 judge when you can speak to Moses instead?! What Moses could do was qualitatively superior, and nothing anyone else could offer came even close. Jethro was actually proposing a significant innovation. So here we have an entirely refreshing approach to this episode. We are done trying to explain how Moses erred to explaining how it could be that anyone would have thought that going to anyone but Moses could be remotely appropriate. The Midrash8 says that Jethro "added" (yeter) a new portion to the Torah. Jethro's idea was, in fact, that innovation here.

So here we have a powerful practical lesson. We are here on earth to develop wings to fly and reach the highest heights. Above all, however, we are here on earth to live our lives as full human beings who can grapple and overcome real-world challenges. Rather than escape our human struggles, we recognize that facing them is a key way we draw G dliness into our lives and into the world — illuminating our individual lives and elevating the entire world around us.

Adapted from Likkutei Sichot vol. 16, Yitro III (pg. 203-210)**.**

Footnotes:

1. Exodus, chap. 18
2. Exodus 18:13
3. E.g. Akeida (1420-1494), Abarbanel (1437-1508) Shach Al Hatorah (1621-1662).
4. Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 203-10.
5. Shemot Rabbah 80:3.
6. Deuteronomy 5:24 and Rashi thereon.
7. Tanya, vol. 1, chap. 4.
8. Mechilta (and Rashi) beginning of the parsha.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5025150/jewish/Why-Was-Moses-Reluctant-to-Delegate.htm

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Every Day is a Mount Sinai Day

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky ***** © Chabad 2022

Receiving the Torah Each Day

Jethro heard about all that G-d had done for Moses and for His people Israel (Exodus 18:1)

After hearing about the Exodus from Egypt, the Splitting of the Sea, and the war with Amalek, Jethro went to meet Moses and the Jewish people, who were camped at Refidim, a short distance from Mount Sinai. He now decided to become a Jew.

The Splitting of the Sea, the war with Amalek, and Jethro's conversion to Judaism were all prerequisites to the Giving of the Torah.

We must relive these events in our daily lives, for G-d gives us the Torah anew each day, granting us new and higher insights into life every day from the infinite well of the Torah. But before this can happen, we must first subdue our inner Amalek, i.e., silence our doubts about Divine providence.

Then, we must convert our inner Jethro, i.e., win over the part of us that still prefers to serve the idols of excessive material desires, despite what we know to be the truth.

But in order to take these steps, we must first "split the sea and enter it," i.e., temporarily immerse ourselves totally in holiness, through our morning prayers and regular Torah study. The Divine consciousness we experience this way enables us to bring a higher awareness into all aspects of our daily lives: eating, earning a living, interacting with others, and so on.

Then, when we make time during our day to study the Torah, we will be able to uncover new insights that make it eternally relevant, thus hearing G-d's voice from Sinai on a day-to-day basis.

* — from *Daily Wisdom*

Gut Shabbos,

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Likutei Divrei Torah

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Structure of the Good Society

In the House of Lords there is a special chamber used as, among other things, the place where new Peers are robed before their introduction into the House. When my predecessor Lord Jakobovits was introduced, the official robing him commented that he was the first Rabbi to be honoured in the Upper House. Lord Jakobovits replied, "No, I am the second." "Who was the first?" asked the surprised official. The chamber is known as the Moses Room because of the large painting that dominates the room. It shows Moses bringing the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai. Lord Jakobovits pointed to this mural, indicating that Moses was the first Rabbi to ever be honoured in the House of Lords.

The Ten Commandments that appear in this week's parsha have long held a special place not only in Judaism but also within the broader configuration of values we call the Judeo-Christian ethic. In the United States they were often to be found adorning American law courts, though their presence has been challenged, in some states successfully, on the grounds that they breach the First Amendment and the separation of church and state. They remain the supreme expression of the higher law to which all human law is bound.

Within Judaism, too, they have always held a special place. In Second Temple times they were recited in the daily prayers as part of the Shema, which then had four paragraphs rather than three.[1] It was only when sectarians began to claim that only these and not the other 603 commands came directly from God that the recitation was brought to an end.[2]

The text retained its hold on the Jewish mind none the less. Even though it was removed from daily communal prayers, it was preserved in the prayer book as a private meditation to be said after the formal service has been concluded. In most congregations, people stand when they are read as part of the Torah reading, despite the fact that Maimonides explicitly ruled against it.[3]

Yet their uniqueness is not straightforward. As moral principles, they were mostly not new. Almost all societies have had laws against murder, robbery and false testimony. There is some originality in the fact that they are apodictic, that is, simple statements of "You shall not," as opposed to the casuistic form, "If … then." But they are only ten among a much larger body of 613 commandments. Nor are they even described by the Torah itself as "Ten Commandments." The Torah calls them the asseret ha-devarim, that is, "ten utterances." Hence the Greek translation, Decalogue, meaning, "ten words."

What makes them special is that they are simple and easy to memorise. That is because in Judaism, law is not intended for judges alone. The covenant at Sinai, in keeping with the profound egalitarianism at the heart of Torah, was made not as other covenants were in the ancient world, between kings. The Sinai covenant was made by God with the entire people. Hence the need for a simple statement of basic principles that everyone can remember and recite.

More than this, they establish for all time the parameters – the corporate culture, we could almost call it – of Jewish existence. To understand how, it is worth reflecting on their basic structure. There was a fundamental disagreement between Maimonides and Nahmanides on the status of the first sentence: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Maimonides, in line with the Talmud, held that this is in itself a command: to believe in God. Nahmanides held that it was not a command at all. It was a prologue or preamble to the commands.[4] Modern research on ancient Near Eastern covenant formulae tends to support Nahmanides.

The other fundamental question is how to divide them. Most depictions of the Ten Commandments divide them into two, because of the "two tablets of stone"(Deut 4:13) on which they were engraved. Roughly speaking, the first five are about the relationship between humans and God, the second five about the relationship between humans themselves. There is, however, another way of thinking about numerical structures in the Torah.

The seven days of creation, for example, are structures as two sets of three followed by an all-embracing seventh. During the first three days God separated domains: light and dark, upper and lower waters, and sea and dry land. During the second three days He filled each with the appropriate objects and life forms: sun and moon, birds and fish, animals and man. The seventh day was set apart from the others as holy.

Likewise the ten plagues consist of three cycles of three followed by a stand-alone tenth. In each cycle of three, the first two were forewarned while the third struck without warning. In the first of each series, Pharaoh was warned in the morning (Ex. 7:16; 8:17; 9:13), in the second Moses was told to "come in before Pharaoh" (Ex. 7:26; 9:1; 10:1) in the palace, and so on. The tenth plague, unlike the rest, was announced at the very outset (Ex. 4:23). It was less a plague than a punishment.

Similarly, it seems to me that the Ten Commandments are structured in three groups of three, with a tenth that is set apart from the rest. Thus understood, we can see how they form the basic structure, the depth grammar, of Israel as a society bound by covenant to God as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:6)

The first three – no other gods besides Me, no graven images, and no taking of God's name in vain – define the Jewish people as "one nation under God." God is our ultimate sovereign. Therefore all other earthly rule is subject to the overarching imperatives linking Israel to God. Divine sovereignty transcends all other loyalties (no other gods besides Me). God is a living force, not an abstract power (no graven images). And sovereignty presupposes reverence (Do not take My name in vain).

The first three commands, through which the people declare their obedience and loyalty to God above all else, establish the single most important principle of a free society, namely the moral limits of power. Without this, the danger even in democracy is the tyranny of the majority, against which the best defence against it is the sovereignty of God.

The second three commands – the Sabbath, honouring parents, and the prohibition of murder – are all about the principle of the createdness of life. They establish limits to the idea of autonomy, namely that we are free to do whatever we like so long as it does not harm others. Shabbat is the day dedicated to seeing God as creator and the universe as His creation. Hence, one day in seven, all human hierarchies are suspended and everyone, master, slave, employer, employee, even domestic animals, are free.

Honouring parents acknowledges our human createdness. It tells us that not everything that matters is the result of our choice, chief of which is the fact that we exist at all. Other people's choices matter, not just our own. "Thou shall not murder" restates the central principle of the universal Noahide covenant that murder is not just a crime against man but

a sin against God in whose image we are. So commands 4 to 7 form the basic jurisprudential principles of Jewish life. They tell us to remember where we came from if we are to be mindful of how to live.

The third three – against adultery, theft and bearing false witness – establish the basic institutions on which society depends. Marriage is sacred because it is the human bond closest in approximation to the covenant between us and God. Not only is marriage the human institution par excellence that depends on loyalty and fidelity. It is also the matrix of a free society. Alexis de Tocqueville put it best: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone."[5]

The prohibition against theft establishes the integrity of property. Whereas Jefferson defined as inalienable rights those of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," John Locke, closer in spirit to the Hebrew Bible, saw them as "life, liberty or possession."[6] Tyrants abuse the property rights of the people, and the assault of slavery against human dignity is that it deprives me of the ownership of the wealth I create.

The prohibition of false testimony is the precondition of justice. A just society needs more than a structure of laws, courts and enforcement agencies. As Judge Learned Hand said, "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it."[7] There is no freedom without justice, but there is no justice without each of us accepting individual and collective responsibility for "telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Finally comes the stand-alone prohibition against envying your neighbour's house, wife, slave, maid, ox, donkey, or anything else belonging to him or her. This seems odd if we think of the "ten words" as commands, but not if we think of them as the basic principles of a free society. The greatest challenge of any society is how to contain the universal, inevitable phenomenon of envy: the desire to have what belongs to someone else. Envy lies at the heart of violence.[8] It was envy that led Cain to murder Abel, made Abraham and Isaac fear for their life because they were married to beautiful women, led Joseph's brothers to hate him and sell him into slavery. It is envy that leads to adultery, theft and false testimony, and it was envy of their neighbours that led the Israelites time and again to abandon God in favour of the pagan practices of the time.

Envy is the failure to understand the principle of creation as set out in Genesis 1, that everything has its place in the scheme of things. Each of us has our own task and our own blessings, and we are each loved and cherished by God. Live by these truths and there is order. Abandon them and there is chaos. Nothing is more pointless and destructive than to let someone else's happiness diminish your own, which is what envy is and does. The antidote to envy is, as Ben Zoma famously said, "to rejoice in what we have" (Mishnah Avot 4:1) and not to worry about what we don't yet have. Consumer societies are built on the creation and intensification of envy, which is why they lead to people having more and enjoying it less.

Thirty-three centuries after they were first given, the Ten Commandments remain the simplest, shortest guide to creation and maintenance of a good society. Many alternatives have been tried, and most have ended in tears. The wise aphorism remains true: When all else fails, read the instructions.

[1] See Mishnah Tamid 5:1, Brachot 12a.
[2] We do not know who the sectarians were: they may have included early Christians. The argument was that only these were directly heard by the Israelites from God. The other commandments were given indirectly, through Moses (see Rashi to Brachot 12a).
[3] Maimonides, Responsa, Blau Edition, Jerusalem: Mekitzei Nirdamim, 1960, no. 263.
[4] Maimonides, Sefer ha-Mitzvot, positive command 1; Nahmanides, Glosses ad loc.
[5] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, abridged with an introduction by Thomas Bender (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), I:340.
[6] The Two Treatises of Civil Government (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 136.
[7] Learned Hand, "The Spirit of Liberty," "'I Am an American' Day" ceremony (Central Park, New York City, May 21, 1944).
[8] The best book on this subject is Helmut Schoeck's Envy; A Theory of Social Behaviour, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"You shall not climb up My altar with steps, so that your nakedness will not be revealed on it." (Exodus 20:22) In the time when the Torah was given, all religions were intimately connected with sexuality, temple prostitutes, and orgiastic rites. One of the great moral revolutions that Judaism brought to the world is the notion that holiness requires modesty in the realm of sexual matters and, by extension, all areas of life.

The Torah forbids the use of steps in ascending the altar, instead mandating the more gradually ascending ramp, in order that the priest's nakedness not be revealed. This underscores the lesson that worship of God and sexual immorality are incompatible.

The significance of the ramp leading up to the altar can also be understood in another way. One of my mentors, Rabbi Moshe Besdin, z"l, explained to me that with a ramp you can either go up or go down, progress or regress. However, with steps, you can rest. The Torah may well be teaching us that, when ascending God's altar, you cannot stop to rest; you dare not fall into the trap of self-satisfaction and complacency. Judaism asks for constant examination, self-criticism and growth.

The Tzemach Tzedek, one of the great Chabad rabbis, once asked his students: Who stands higher on the ladder, the individual on the third rung or the individual on the tenth rung? The individual on the tenth rung, they all responded. Not necessarily, he qualified. If the individual on the tenth rung is going down or standing still, and the individual on the third rung is going up, the individual on the third rung stands higher than the individual on the tenth rung!

I would like to add an additional interpretation to this verse. The Torah uses the word ma'alot, usually translated as steps, but which can also be translated as "good character qualities." So now the verse reads, "Do not climb up to My altar with your good character qualities; so that your nakedness will not be revealed on it."

According to this reading, God warns us that if we ascend to the altar of God flashing our good qualities, proud of our achievements and self-satisfied about all that we know, then the danger is that our nakedness—our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities, our flaws—will be revealed. The altar cannot be a center for self-aggrandizement, a stage of religious worship from which we let others know how great we are; if we fall into this trap, God tells us that ultimately our nakedness—not our greatness—will be revealed.

The altar of God must be approached with a sense of humility, with full awareness of our inadequacies; it dare not become a center of self-satisfaction, religious one-upmanship, and arrogance.

The following Hassidic tale illustrates this point. In a town in pre-war Europe, there lived two Jews: One, named Reb Haim, a great scholar, and the other, also called Haim, an indigent porter who could barely read the Hebrew letters. The scholar married well: the richest man in town came looking for the most brilliant mind in the yeshiva as his son-in-law, and gladly supported him generously.

The two Haims, such very different people, crossed paths frequently. Haim the porter would pray early in the morning so that he could start working as soon as possible in order to earn his meager living. Rushing out after the service, he would invariably run into the great Reb Haim arriving early for another minyan, since he stayed up until the early hours of the morning learning Torah. In this way they "met" nearly every day.

Reb Haim the scholar would always dismissively sneer at Haim the porter, ignoring the deprivations faced by the other Haim. Haim the porter, in contrast, would look upon the scholar with yearning, feeling sad and unworthy that he couldn't spend his life studying the holy Torah.

Many years later, both Haims died on the same day, and went to face judgment in the Heavenly Court. Haim the scholar was judged first. All of his good deeds, years of long study, and righteous acts were placed on one side of the scale, and on the other side his daily sneer of self-satisfaction. The sneer outweighed all the good deeds. Haim the porter then submitted for judgment. On one side of the scale were placed his sins, and on the other side of the scale his daily sigh of yearning. When the scales finally settled, the sigh outweighed the sins and the sneer outweighed the merits.

Ultimately, in our worship of God, humility triumphs over all.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

The Maternal Influence

When I was young I was an avid reader of novels. As I've grown older, I have found myself more interested in good biographies. I especially appreciate those biographies of great men that try to focus on what exactly made them great. Particularly, I try to discover the roles played by father and mother in the formation of these personalities.

Until relatively recently, Jewish tradition did not have many biographies of our heroes and heroines. Bible and Talmud contain much material about the lives of prophets, kings, and sages, but only occasionally give us a glimpse of the role that parental influences played in making them great.

I recently came across a passage in a book by a man I admire. His name was Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines (1839-1915). He was the head of a very innovative yeshiva in Lida, Lithuania, and was one of the founders of the Mizrachi Religious Zionist movement. He was a prolific writer, and one of his works is entitled Nod Shel Demaot, which translates as "A Flask of Tears."

In this book, Rav Reines writes about the important role that mothers play in the development of their children—sons and daughters alike. He emphasizes the role of the mother in the development of the Torah scholar. He claims that it is not only the father's teaching that motivates and informs the budding Jewish leader. Rather, it is the mother's feminine intuition and maternal compassion that are, at the very least, equally formative.

The sources of his thesis include a verse from this week's Torah portion, Parshat Yitro (Exodus 18:1-20:23), in which we read that the Lord called to Moses from the mountain and said, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel…you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation…" (ibid 19:3-6).

The Midrash explains that "the house of Jacob" refers to women and "the children of Israel" to men. Both men and women must be involved if we are to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." "Why the women?" asks the Midrash, and answers, "Because they are the ones who can inspire their children to walk in the ways of Torah."

Rav Reines adduces another biblical verse to make his point. He refers to the words in the very first chapter of the Book of Proverbs, in which King Solomon offers this good counsel: "My son, heed the discipline (mussar) of your father, and do not forsake the instruction (Torah) of your mother" (Proverbs 1:8). From this verse, it seems that the mother's message may be even more important for the child's guidance than that of his father. After all, father merely admonishes the child with words of "discipline," whereas mother imparts nothing less than the "instruction" of the Torah itself.

Then comes the tour de force of Rav Reines' essay: the biographical analysis of a great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya. The student of Ethics of the Fathers (Pirkei Avot) will recognize his name from a passage in Chapter Two of that work. There we read of the five disciples of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. They are enumerated, and the praises of each of them are recounted. Of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, we learn, "Ashrei yoladeto, happy is she who gave birth to him." Of all the outstanding disciples, only Rabbi Yehoshua's mother is brought into the picture. What special role did she play in his life that earned her honorable mention?

Rav Reines responds by relating an important story of which most of us are sadly ignorant. The story is recorded in Bereshit Rabba 64:10. It tells of a time, not long after the destruction of the Second Temple by Rome, when the Roman rulers decided to allow the Jewish people to rebuild the Temple. Preliminary preparations were already under way for that glorious opportunity when the Kutim, usually identified with the Samaritan sect, confounded those plans. They maligned the Jews to the Romans and accused them of disloyalty. The permission to rebuild was revoked.

Having come so close to realizing this impossible dream, the Jews gathered in the valley of Beit Rimon with violent rebellion in their hearts. They clamored to march forth and rebuild the Temple in defiance of the Roman's decree.

However, the more responsible leaders knew that such a provocation would meet with disastrous consequences. They sought for a respected figure, sufficiently wise and sufficiently persuasive, to calm the tempers of the masses and to quell the mutiny. They chose Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya for the task.

The Midrash quotes Rabbi Yehoshua's address in full detail. He used a fable as the basis of his argument: A lion had just devoured its prey, but a bone of his victim was stuck in his throat. The lion offered a reward to anyone who would volunteer to insert his hand into his mouth to remove the bone. The stork volunteered, and thrust its long neck into the lion's mouth and extracted the bone.

When the stork demanded his reward, the lion retorted, "Your reward is that you can forevermore boast that you had thrust your head into a lion's mouth and lived to tell the tale. Your survival is sufficient reward." So, too, argued Rabbi Yehoshua, our survival is our reward. We must surrender the hope of rebuilding our Temple in the interests of our national continuity. There are times when grandiose dreams must be foresworn so that survival can be assured.

Rav Reines argues that this combination of cleverness and insight into the minds of men was the result of his mother's upbringing. The ability to calm explosive tempers and sooth raging emotions is something that Rabbi Yehoshua learned from his mother.

He was chosen for this vital role in Jewish history because the other leaders knew of his talents, and perhaps even knew that their source was to be traced back to his mother, of whom none other than Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had exclaimed, "Happy is she who gave birth to him."

This wonderful insight of Rav Reines is important for all of us to remember, particularly those of us who are raising children. Psychologists have long stressed the vital roles that mothers play in child development. In our religion, we put much stress on the father's role in teaching Torah to his children. But we often underestimate, and indeed sometimes even forget, the role of the mother.

Our tradition urges us to embrace the role of the mother not just in the child's physical and emotional development, but in his or her spiritual and religious growth as well.

We would do well to remember that Rav Reines is simply expanding upon God's own edict to Moses at the very inception of our history: "Speak to the house of Jacob! Speak to the women as well as to the men."

Mothers, at least as much as fathers, are essential if we are to create a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Yisro Connected the Dots

There is a famous pasuk and a famous Rashi at the beginning of Parshas Yisro. The pasuk says, "And Priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moshe heard all that Elo-kim did for Moshe and for Israel His nation, for Hashem took

Israel out of Egypt." [Shemos 18:1] Rashi [based on Zevachim 116a] explains that Yisro heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the War with Amalek. When he heard about these great miracles, he thought to himself: "I need to check this out for myself and see what is going on with these miraculous people."

We have asked many times over the years: Why did only Yisro come? The Az Yashir song states "nations heard and they trembled; fear gripped those who dwell in Philistia." [Shemos 15:14]. The whole world heard about these events and shook in their collective boots. Why was there only one man who felt he had to show up and check this out for himself?

We can ask a second question: This man was known by seven names. (Rashi lists these seven names.) One of the seven names was Yeser (Yud-Taf-Reish). Rashi said they added a vov to his name (to make it Yisro) because a parsha was added to the Torah through him (i.e. – the section where he advised Moshe to set up a hierarchical system of courts, rather than to single-stream all disputes through himself). Question #2: Why was specifically the letter Vov added to his name? Why not yud? Why not another letter? Why the letter Vov?

We can ask a third question: Why is the letter Vov called the letter of truth? What does that mean? There is an interesting Zohar that says the letter Vov is what is called the "os emes" (the letter of truth). What does that mean? We read in the Book of Yehoshua that when the spies came into Yericho, they went into the house of Rachav haZonah, who helped them out and hid them. She asked for something in return as a reward. She asked that when the Jews come into Canaan to conquer Eretz Yisrael, they should spare her and her family. The pasuk states, "And now swear to me in the Name of Hashem, for I have done a kindness for you. You should do a kindness for my family like I did for you, and you should give me an 'os emes' (true sign)." The Zohar says that the letter Vov is called the "os emes."

Ironically, we see an application of this principle, that the letter Vov is an "os emes," in a very incongruous location in Tanach. There is a chapter (#34) in Tehillim that is quite familiar to us because we say it Shabbos morning. "When David changed his behavior before Avimelech…" Dovid HaMelech feigned insanity when he was caught by the soldiers of Gath and brought before their king. He acted like a deranged person, so that the king would not believe that this was really Dovid Melech Yisroel, and would let him go. Dovid's plan worked. "Achish [Avimelech is the generic title given to the kings of Gath] said to his servants, 'Behold – you see the man is mad; why do you bring him to me? Do I lack madmen that you have brought this one to carry on madly before me? Should this person enter my house?'" [Shmuel I 21:15-16]. Achish-Avimelech let Dovid go free. This chapter in Tehillim is written as an alphabetic acrostic. Each of the pesukim of the Psalm begin with ascending letters of the Aleph-Beis. However, there is one letter of the Hebrew alphabet that does not begin a pasuk in that chapter – the letter Vov! The reason is that the letter Vov represents truth (it is the os emes). Since the whole chapter deals with Dovid HaMelech deceiving Avimelech by feigning insanity, the letter of truth does not begin any of those pesukim!

But still, we must analyze – what does the Zohar mean by saying that the letter Vov is the letter of truth?

To review, we have stated three questions: 1) Why did only Yisro show up? 2) Why was the letter Vov added to the name of Yeser. 3) We see in Chazal that Vov is called the letter of truth – why is that the case?

I saw in the sefer Darash Mordechai from Rav Mordechai Druk what I think is a very beautiful explanation. When the Ribono shel Olam came to Klal Yisrael to give them the Torah, something happened in the world that never happened before, and has not happened since: The world stopped…to the extent that there was not a peep heard in the world. No bird chirped. No dog barked. The world was silent. Something was happening. The Gemara states [Zevachim 116a] that the world's population was amazed at this phenomenon and could not figure out what was happening. They all gathered around the wicked Bilaam and asked him: "What is going on? Is this the beginning of another Flood?" It was like right before a Tsunami – all the animals were quiet. Everyone wanted to know what was about to occur.

Bilaam (citing another pasuk in Tehillim [29:10] "Hashem L'Mabul Yashav…") assured them that Hashem promised He would never bring another Flood to the world. The nations were afraid and they asked Bilaam "Perhaps Hashem's oath was not to destroy the world by water, but He might yet destroy the world again by fire or earthquake." Bilaam again reassured them that the Divine Oath was a guarantee that the entire civilization of the world would never again be destroyed. They persisted: "What then is this great sound that we are hearing?" Bilaam told them "The Ribono shel Olam has this great treasure which He has kept hidden in His safe for 974 generations before the world was created. He now is preparing to give this great treasure to His People. That is what is happening! This is a momentous event, as it is written "Hashem gives power to His people…" [Tehillim 29:11].

What was the reaction of all the Nations of the World? They immediately responded "… Hashem should bless His people with Peace." [ibid.]. In other words, "Gezunte Heit!" – Fine and dandy, let Hashem give His people the Torah, He should just let us alone and we will be fine. As long as it is not going to affect us, we will go back along our merry way, doing what we were doing and not be concerned about this Torah.

In that reaction we find the difference between Yisro and the Nations of the World. They saw things happening, but as long as these events – as miraculous as they might have all been – didn't affect them, their reaction was "I don't want to know about it. It's none of my business!" No reaction.

Yisro's strength was that (in today's parlance we would say) he connected the dots. After 9/11 when everybody wondered: "Where was the CIA? Where was the FBI? Where was the Defense Intelligence Agency? Why didn't they see this coming? Everybody said, "Well they knew there was something called Al-Qaeda, they knew there was someone call Osama bin Laden, they knew there was this, they knew there was that… but they didn't connect the dots!" If you don't connect the dots you don't see the connection.

Yisro was a person who connected the dots. He saw the pattern. He saw an event and he saw another event and another event. He noticed something dramatic was happening. "The Ribono shel Olam is trying to tell us something here." That is why, out of all the letters of the alphabet, they gave him the Vov, because Vov (which is a prefix meaning AND) is the "Vov haChibur" – the letter that connects. Yisro's power was to look at things not in isolation, but to see the pattern and put all the pieces together to see and understand the big picture. That is why it was the Vov they added to his name.

That is also why Vov is the "letter of truth" (os haEmes). If one wants to find the truth, one must connect the dots. The way to find out the truth is not to look at incidents in isolation, but to see the pattern and put all kind of isolated incidents together into a big picture.

We are not that far away from Purim. The end of the Megilla states that Achashverosh placed a tax on the islands at sea. It is interesting to note that the name of the king in this verse is spelled differently than every other place in Megillas Esther. It is spelled without a Vov separating the last two letters! One would think that after the entire Megilla and all that happened and the irony of the whole story – Achashverosh would wake up and say "You know what? This was the Hand of G-d!"

Achashverosh doesn't do that. He is interested in one thing: Taxes! Things can happen. The world can be turning upside down. "Let me go back to my life. Business as usual!" Achashverosh followed in the footsteps of the Nations of the World. Earth shattering events made no impression on them or on him!

It struck me to connect this thought with an incident in the life of Rav Gifter, zt"l, about which I was not 100% clear. I called Rebbetzin

Eisenberg, Rav Gifter's daughter, and she was a bit fuzzy on the details as well, so she called a couple of her brothers. They also could not swear to exactly what happened.

However, this is my recollection of the story: When Rav Gifter [1915-2001] went in the 1930s from the United States of America to Telshe in Lithuania to study in the famous European Yeshiva, he went by boat. He did not travel first class. He went steerage. Above him on one of the nights of the trip they were having a big dance, and everyone was having a good time. People were dancing, drinking, and enjoying themselves immensely. All of a sudden, the boat hit a storm. "And the boat was about to break apart." [Yonah 1:4]. You have to realize this is not all that many years after the sinking of the Titanic. People had that tragedy fresh in their minds. People were scared and frightened. But then the storm passed. The people went back to dancing.

This incident made a great impression on the young Mordechai Gifter. He said it was a moment when one's life flashes in front of him. One inevitably thinks "I could drown in the North Atlantic." And then in a moment, the danger passes and you are saved! What do people do? They go back to dancing!

This is a rerun of the story of the frightened Nations of the World who anxiously asked Bilaam to explain to them what was happening. Is it a Flood? Is it a Fire? Is the world coming to an end? "No! The Jews are being given the Torah!" "Fine. Let it be like that. I am going right back to doing my own thing!"

This is what separated Yisro from the rest of the Nations of the World, and that is what separates thinking people from people who just go on with their life after experiencing earth-shattering events as if nothing happened. There are such events that occur in everybody's life. The trick is to utilize the "Vov haChibur" – to connect the dots and try to figure out "What is G-d telling us" (Vos zogt der Ribono shel Olam?)

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is the antidote to jealousy? In Parshat Yitro the Torah tells us how Moshe's father in law Yitro arrived at the Israelite camp in the wilderness. He immediately noticed how exhausted Moshe was. This was because the nation's great leader had taken all authority into his own hands.

So Yitro gave Moshe some advice. He told him to establish a system of legislature through which he would share the governance of the nation with appointed judges. They would be officers of thousands, officers of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and of course the most serious and difficult cases would come before Moshe himself. Moshe heeded this advice and the new system was commenced.

The Kotzker Rebbe asks a great question: surely this system was a recipe for intense jealousy? After all, there were so many judges of the more minor courts dealing with petty issues, with small numbers of people - surely they would become jealous of those who had been chosen to more senior positions?

Yet according to the Kotsker Rebbe, that wasn't the case. He explained that when Yitro gave his advice to Moshe, he suggested that Moshe should look for four qualities in each appointed judge:
1. Anshei chayil - Men of valour,
2. Yirei Elokim - Believers in Hashem,
3. Anshei emet - People of truth, and
4. Sonei vatza - People who hate unjust gain.

The Kotsker Rebbe highlights the quality of 'anshei emet' - 'people of truth'. When it comes to dispensing honour, if we look around us, who are those who are given honour? Is it a just system? Is it a true system? Is it always fair? Not at all. Because it is not a system which comes from Hashem.

But the person of truth knows that honour is not important in this world. People of truth know that what is important in this world is your values, your attributes, what kind of person you are, how you deal with others, how truthful you are in this world and not how much honour you get from others.

So indeed the antidote to jealousy is truth. And from Parshat Yitro we learn that when it comes to honour, what counts is not how much honour I have but rather, as the Ethics of the Fathers teaches,
"Eizehu mechubad?" - "Who is truly honourable?"
"Hemechabed et habriot." - "It's the person who gives honour to others."

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Yitro – Jealousy – the Worst Sin

Although so much has been written about the Ten Commandments, little has been expounded why these specific ten, and how are these "Ten Pronouncements" are a logical structure and one unit. Nechama Leibowitz Z"l explained that the first five, Man to God, are actually a reverse of the second five, Man to Man commandments. When it comes to God, it is easy to think, believe. It is more difficult to speak to God and use one's lips. Most difficult is action regarding the Almighty. Therefore, the first five proceed in an order from easier to difficult, as the fist two involve one's heart, the third involves using one's mouth and finally, numbers 4 and 5 (Shabbat and Honoring One's Parents), involve actions, the most difficult Man to God commandments. On the other hand, with Man-to-Man commandments, actions are easy, speaking is more difficult, while controlling internal feelings are the most difficult. Therefore, the last five, too, proceed from easier to most difficult. Number 6-8 involve actions. Number 9 involves verbal testimony and the tenth, most difficult is a commandment, not to covet, not feel jealousy towards any other person. What exactly is this prohibition of jealousy, and why is it the most difficult?

Jealousy is defined as "feeling resentment against someone because of their success or advantages." We will define below the prohibition in Jewish terms. Indeed, the Vilna Gaon **(**Gaon of Vilna, Even Shlaima, third chapter**)** states that coveting is so severe, that every other sin in Judaism is derived from the sin of "Thou shall not covet." The Midrash (Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah 24:5) draws a parallel between the laws and ideas in Leviticus 19 (stated before the entire Jewish people) and the Ten Commandments. It then compares the prohibition of not coveting to the Mitzvah-Commandment of loving one's neighbor, which is then called the central principle of the Torah (Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 24:7). Thus, by implication, it seems that not coveting would be the central prohibition in the Torah. One later commentary (Pele Yoetz on "*Chemdah*"), in fact, says that since the prohibition of coveting is placed as the final commandment in the Ten Commandments, it encompasses them all.

Defining the Prohibition of Coveting
Some Jewish law authorities (Semag, Mitzvah 158) see both verbs as identical, and make no distinction between the laws in Exodus and in Deuteronomy. Rashi (Rashi commentary on Deuteronomy 5:18) agrees. However, the vast majority and normative Jewish approach is to divide this prohibition into two distinct categories (Zohar 3:261). One prohibition, merely desiring your neighbor's object, is prohibited under *Lo Titave*, without requiring any action to take place. Coveting, on the other hand, requires a distinct action to be taken, to be guilty of the sin. But how could a Jew be guilty of a sin for a mere emotion, which may beyond his control? Rambam **(**Maimonides, Hilchot Gezaila 1:10**)** indeed points out that merely desiring the object is not enough to be guilty of "Do not desire (*Lo Titave*). A person must actually plot and scheme how he will obtain the object (without doing any action) to be guilty of this prohibition. Thus, while this sin does not involve any actual action, it does require much more than a mere base emotion. The Code of Jewish Law, the Shulchan Aruch (Shulchan Aruch, Chosen Mishpat 359:10-11) agrees with Maimonides. One can sin without an action, but to be guilty, a person must do more than simply desire. He must also use his brain to devise a means to buy or obtain the object.

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The second prohibition of coveting is more clear-cut. The Midrash (Midrash Mechilta Hachodesh 8) states that to be guilty of sin, a person must act upon his desire to obtain his neighbor's wife, his house or any object belonging to him. What action renders one guilty of coveting? Tur (Tur, Choshen Mishpat 371) seems to say that merely talking about obtaining the object is enough to make a person guilty. Maimonides believes that a person must take a concrete action to obtain the object by approaching the neighbor and repeatedly annoying him or her to give or sell it when the neighbor is reluctant to do so. If the neighbor actually does give it or sell it, only then is the person guilty of the sin of coveting. Shulchan Aruch (Shulchan Aruch, Chosen Mishpat 359:10) reflects the view of Maimonides, which has become normative Jewish law: until the neighbor (reluctantly) gives or sells the object after badgering, a person is not guilty of "Thou shall not covet". Rabbi Eliezer Papo (Pele Yoetz on "*Chemdah*"), a later commentary (1785-1825), sums up the two prohibitions succinctly: "Anyone who desires and then attempts to obtain his neighbor's object as a gift or by purchasing it, violates 'Thou shall not covet'. And even if he does not attempt to buy it but merely thinks about ways to get the object into his possession, he has violated the prohibition of 'Thou shall not desire'."

How Jealousy Can Destroy a Person

A recent Jewish commentary (19th century), who organized a book describing Jewish concepts in detail (Pele Yoetz on "Jealousy"**)**, explained jealousy as a very poor character flaw that is driven by man's evil inclination. When a person strives to succeed in any field and sees another individual achieve the success that he or she craves, jealousy drives this person to anguish, and creates a desire to besmirch the successful individual. This feeling can remove any joy from the life of the person experiencing jealousy. Specific individuals in the Torah, some even great and righteous people, have demonstrated the enormous damage that jealousy can cause in the world. The very first and second sins in the history of man came about because of jealousy. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 59b) explains that the serpent became jealous of Adam and how God was treating man, and this led him to entice Eve to eat from the forbidden fruit. The very first murder in this world also came about because of jealousy, when Cain was jealous of his brother Abel, after God accepted Abel's offering and not his own. The jealousy caused an inner rage that led Cain to then kill Abel (Genesis 4:4-5, 8). The Torah also tells us that Jacob's sons were jealous of their brother Joseph (Genesis 37:11), which not only led to the sale of Joseph and his slavery in Egypt, but also, according to Rabbi Joshua (Midrash Mishlei 1:19) led to retribution of the famous Ten Rabbis who were tortured and then murdered by the Romans, much later in Jewish history. The Rabbis (Midrash Shir Hashirim Rabbah 8:7) discuss how painful and terrible were the results of jealousy among several personalities in the Bible. These included Esau and Jacob, Saul, and David.

Positive Jealousy

It would seem from all the above words that feelings of jealousy are to be avoided at all costs, as they inevitably lead to inner discontent and can destroy a person. Nevertheless, the Sages tell us (Pele Yoetz on "Jealousy") that sometimes jealousy can be something incredibly positive and useful. If an individual recognizes jealous feelings and uses them to build himself up, rather than direct the feeling toward the other person, this emotion can indeed be very positive. Thus, if a person sees the achievements of a friend, and analyzes why that person achieved what he or she did, and then uses that achievement as motivation to better himself or herself, this jealousy is turned outward, and becomes a motivator to help a person succeed more. Therefore, intellectual jealousy among Rabbis is permitted (Bava Batra 21a) to increase Jewish wisdom. The Midrash (Midrash Tehilim 37a) explains that if not for this kind of jealousy -- i.e., using others' achievements to motivate to accomplish more -- the world as we know it would fall apart. Fewer people would be motivated to build homes, marry, and achieve more in life. Proverbs (Proverbs 23:17) tells us not to envy sinners, but to be jealous of those that fear the Lord. The commentaries explain that a person should not be jealous of any success of evil doers. Rather, they should envy the accomplishments of the righteous and then try to emulate them.

When Rachel saw that her sister had given birth to many children while she remained barren, the Torah (Genesis 30:1) tells us that Rachel was jealous of her sister. But she used that jealousy to improve her own deeds and eventually merit to having children (Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 71:6). Based on this Biblical story, the Talmud (Megillah 13a) makes a general statement that childless women are usually jealous of friends who have children. How one uses this jealousy (positively or negatively) is up to each individual.

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

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 over-simplification, 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 Shaharit 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 tzimes 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 sagest 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 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 peirusha, 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 peirusha," 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.

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Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

How the Greatest Visionary Learned to Listen

Rabbi Avi Bossewitch

The first phase of Moshe's life is surrounded by sight and vision. This begins when we are first introduced to Moshe, upon his birth, when the Torah utilizes the verb for sight ר.א.ה multiple times. First the Torah informs us that that his mother saw him (Exodus 2:2). The subsequent scene depicts Bat Pharoah seeing him (Exodus 2:5) and seeing him again (Exodus 2:6). All of these sights support the idea that Moshe himself was sight worthy, radiant in some way, as suggested by the expression כִּי טוֹב הוּא, "good to see". While there are many interpretations as to what this "Tov" is, it is clear that the Torah is informing us that Moshe and his inherent goodness are seen.

In his early life, the few episodes that the Torah shares with us about Moshe are highlighted by Moshe's own signature sight and vision. Moshe sees the burdens of his fellow Jews, sees an Egyptian striking a fellow Jew, and sees that no one is around (Exodus 2:11-12) . Moshe's earliest actions are driven by vision and what he sees in the world around him.

Given his keen sense of sight, it is not surprising that the beginning of his rendezvous with Hashem was signaled by Moshe utilizing his distinct vision. In the span of two verses, the root for ר.א.ה appears no less than four times. The Torah informs us that Moshe sees a great sight consisting of the sight of an angel in a flame of fire, and the sight of a bush that was burning but not consumed (Exodus 3:2-3). The Torah is emphasizing again Moshe as a man of unique vision.

However, as strong as Moshe's vision has been until this point, it will need to be even stronger in order for him to fulfill his true mission. In Hashem's first conversation with Moshe, Hashem declares that He has seen the affliction of Bnei Yisrael. The verse employs a double usage of the term for seen, רָאֹה רָאִיתִי , "surely I have seen", to describe G-d's own vision. The Midrash explains that the usage of the double terminology is meant to contrast the vision that Hashem possesses relative to Moshe. In the words of the Midrash, Hashem says to Moshe, אתה רואה ראייה אחת ואני רואה שתי ראיות, which can be understood as Hashem saying you have singular and limited vision while I, Hashem, have dual vision. It seems that Hashem is critical of Moshe's perception of Bnei Yisrael, and in particular, their worthiness of being redeemed. This is referencing when Moshe said אכן נודע הדבר which Chazal understood to mean that Moshe accepted that the Jewish nation was not fit to be redeemed . Hashem here at the burning bush is teaching Moshe that his vision, although extraordinary, has been limited when it comes to seeing beneath the surface, and will need to be expanded to fully embrace the charge of leading Bnei Yisrael. Rabbi Soloveitchik Zt"l pointed out that the prophecy of the sneh (bush) that wouldn't be consumed was meant to convey to Moshe that although Moshe may have felt that the Jewish people were not worthy of being redeemed, just as the bush would not be consumed, the Knesset Yisrael, Jewish nation, would not succumb in Mitzrayim and are intact and ready for redemption.

After the experience at the burning bush, Moshe does become the quintessential human visionary, successfully leading Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim. Although this vision will continue to play a role throughout his life, it is in this week's Parsha that another vital development occurs. You see, as significant as vision is amongst the five senses, it is not the most important one.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Zt"l explains the following:

In Judaism the supreme religious act in Judaism is to listen… G-d, the sole object of worship, is invisible. He transcends nature. He created the universe and is therefore beyond the universe. He cannot be seen. He reveals Himself only in speech. That is why the keyword of Judaism is Shema. G-d is not something we see, but a voice we hear.

If listening is so central, where do we find Moshe exhibiting this trait? If you look at all of Moshe's early life and exchanges with Hashem, you will not find it!! We do repeatedly find that Moshe struggles that people do not listen to him, whether it be the elders, Bnei Yisrael, or Pharoah. I believe the Torah's answer is by providing an exemplar in Moshe's life who exemplifies what it means to truly listen, hear, internalize, and be moved. That is none other than his father-in-law Yitro. It is Yitro about whom the Torah testifies וַיִּשְׁמַע, it is Yitro that is the grand listener. Yitro is the one upon hearing of the great events of Yetziat Mitzrayim and Kriat Yam Suf, came to join the Jewish nation . I believe it is no coincidence that the first time we encounter the term ש.מ.ע associated with Moshe is when he listens to all that his father-in-law has to teach him . This helps us understand why Yitro occupies a unique place in Jewish History and a central part of this Parsha.

True active listening is also increasingly rare in our world. The world is so noisy both visually and auditorily that we tune out. The endless distractions in a digital world make it hard to truly pay attention with any of our senses. Especially in this landscape, we need to be inspired by the legacies of Moshe and Yitro, who developed extraordinary vision and the ability to hear and act upon what they heard. As we re-experience the giving of the Torah, may we continue to see, hear, and act upon the revelation at Har Sinai.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Complain All You Want

You shall neither prostrate yourself before them nor worship them, for I, HASHEM, your G-d, am a zealous God, Who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Me, and [I] perform loving kindness to thousands [of generations], to those who love Me and to those who keep My commandments. (Shemos 20:5-6)

Of those who hate Me: As the Targum [Onkelos paraphrases: when the sons continue to sin following their fathers, i.e.], when they cling to their fathers' deeds. — Rashi

Perform loving-kindness: that a person does, to pay the reward until the two-thousandth generation. It is thus found that the measure of reward [from God] exceeds the measure of [His] retribution by [the ratio of] one to five hundred, for this one is for four generations, and that one is for two thousand [generations] – Rashi

–

Rashi explains that we are being treated to an important mathematical ratio right in the introductory words of the Ten Commandments, HASHEM is visiting iniquity for 3 or 4 generations and rewarding 2000 generations. It seems there is not 2000 generations to speak of. History is not that long. The giving of the Torah was only 26 generation from Adam the first man and we are now 3333 years since that awesome day. Even if a generation is 30 years, then there have been slightly more than 100 till now. Rashi helps by spelling out the ratio of HASHEM's kindliness to strictness being 500 to 1. What are we to do with this formula? Of what practical import is it to us? Dare I ask?! Here are a few approaches.

A few years back I was driving daily to school in Queens from Monsey and back again to Monsey after a long day. One wintry evening I was approaching the toll at the Whitestone Bridge as I had done many times before. We had just passed through a strong winter storm and were still in the middle of a severe cold spell. As I was nearing the toll plaza I watched in horror as if it was unfolding in slow motion before my eyes.

On the top of a van traveling in front of me was a huge slab of ice like a giant tomb stone and hard like one too. It came flying off of the roof of the van and it was spinning horizontally in the air. Suddenly with great force it hit my windshield, across the entire windshield with full force.

If I was going 50 MPH and this projectile was flying at my car 30 miles an hour then this was a huge 80 MPH hit. I was temporarily blinded, unable to see out of my front window for 7 or 8 seconds and when the ice dispersed my windshield was a spiderweb of broken glass. I

called a mechanic friend who assured me that the glass would not shatter into the car at me because it was made of two layers. That comforted for the ride home. I was still pretty shaken up.

The next morning I came to school with my wife's car and I entered a class where the Rebbe was teaching about the Ten Commandments and he was up to this Rashi that explains the 500 to 1 ratio. He was explaining to them that HASHEM is always 500 times more benevolent. Then something occurred to me and I started to make a calculation: How long I had been working there, how many times I had made that trip back and forth.

I asked to speak to the class and I shared with them my harrowing experience heading home the night before. I was thinking and wondering why this terrible episode had happened to me and then it dawned on me that I had made that trip about 500 times with no incident and this may have been my 501st trip that I had taken. Now I felt that rather than complain and groan about what had happened and almost happened to me I needed to celebrate the 500 times nothing happened. THANK YOU HASHEM!

I was speaking with someone who had a lot to grumble about and after listening and validating his pain I told him the following based on the Rashi that explains this holy ratio; "Complain as much as you want and deservedly so but first you have to express gratitude about 500 things and then launch one complaint. Find another 500 things to celebrate and complain all you want!

Weekly Parsha YITRO 5782
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

A literal reading of the Parsha tells us that Yitro, who was the high priest of Midian and the father-in-law of Moshe, saw of the events of the Exodus from Egypt and, according to Rashi based on Midrash, saw the battle the Jewish people fought against Amalek.

The Torah implies, and Rashi states openly, that upon hearing of these events, Yitro was propelled to leave his home, and to come into the desert to accompany the Jewish people, at least initially, on their travels through the Sinai desert. The Torah does not tell us how he heard about these events, but, apparently, they were of such earth-shattering proportions, that the news spread rapidly throughout the Middle East.

From the verses in the song of Moshe and the Jewish people, at the splitting of the waters of Yam Suf, it is obvious that Yitro was not alone in hearing about these wonderous events. The verse says that all the nations of the area were also astounded to hear of these miracles, and to realize that a new nation had been born from the slavery of Egypt. Yet, the reaction of the people in those countries and especially that of Amalek certainly differed greatly from the response of Yitro to the very same news.

The nations of the world chose either to oppose the news by attacking the Jewish people, or, mostly, to simply ignore it as not being worthy of their concern. People are so confirmed in their inertia that even when there is an event that obviously is historic and earth-shattering, but which would, at the same time, cause a reassessment of their own lives, attitudes, and policies, they will, in the main, either deny the news, besmirch the miracle, or ignore the matter completely.

It is to the credit of Yitro that he chose to act positively upon hearing of the events that occurred to the Jewish people in their exodus from Egypt. Of course, being the father-in-law of Moshe, he also had a personal vested interest in visiting his family, but, nevertheless, it must be recorded to his credit, that he uprooted himself to join the Jewish people in their travels through the desert.

One of the great tests in life is how one responds to news that is momentous and unexpected, that makes it necessary to change one's habits and life direction. Jews often piously – and I do not doubt their sincerity when they say it – put off momentous decisions until the Messiah arrives. But the little I know of human nature teaches me that even when the Messiah arrives, there will be many who will not be willing to change their life pattern, sell everything to join the Jewish people in the land of Israel, with all the accompanying hardships that inevitably will be involved. People hear many things, many times very important things, but this knowledge does not necessarily imply that they are willing to act upon them in a positive and productive manner. Yitro is eternally privileged to have a portion of the Torah on his name because he heard and shortly thereafter, he acted.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Structure of the Good Society (Yitro)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

In the House of Lords there is a special chamber used as, among other things, the place where new Peers are robed before their introduction into the House. When my predecessor Lord Jakobovits was introduced, the official robing him commented that he was the first Rabbi to be honoured in the Upper House. Lord Jakobovits replied, "No, I am the second." "Who was the first?" asked the surprised official. The chamber is known as the Moses Room because of the large painting that dominates the room. It shows Moses bringing the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai. Lord Jakobovits pointed to this mural, indicating that Moses was the first Rabbi to ever be honoured in the House of Lords.

The Ten Commandments that appear in this week's parsha have long held a special place not only in Judaism but also within the broader configuration of values we call the Judeo-Christian ethic. In the United States they were often to be found adorning American law courts, though their presence has been challenged, in some states successfully, on the grounds that they breach the First Amendment and the separation of church and state. They remain the supreme expression of the higher law to which all human law is bound.

Within Judaism, too, they have always held a special place. In Second Temple times they were recited in the daily prayers as part of the Shema, which then had four paragraphs rather than three.[1] It was only when sectarians began to claim that only these and not the other 603 commands came directly from God that the recitation was brought to an end.[2]

The text retained its hold on the Jewish mind none the less. Even though it was removed from daily communal prayers, it was preserved in the prayer book as a private meditation to be said after the formal service has been concluded. In most congregations, people stand when they are read as part of the Torah reading, despite the fact that Maimonides explicitly ruled against it.[3]

Yet their uniqueness is not straightforward. As moral principles, they were mostly not new. Almost all societies have had laws against murder, robbery and false testimony. There is some originality in the fact that they are apodictic, that is, simple statements of "You shall not," as opposed to the casuistic form, "If … then." But they are only ten among a much larger body of 613 commandments. Nor are they even described by the Torah itself as "Ten Commandments." The Torah calls them the asseret ha-devarim, that is, "ten utterances." Hence the Greek translation, Decalogue, meaning, "ten words."

What makes them special is that they are simple and easy to memorise. That is because in Judaism, law is not intended for judges alone. The covenant at Sinai, in keeping with the profound egalitarianism at the heart of Torah, was made not as other covenants were in the ancient world, between kings. The Sinai covenant was made by God with the entire people. Hence the need for a simple statement of basic principles that everyone can remember and recite.

More than this, they establish for all time the parameters – the corporate culture, we could almost call it – of Jewish existence. To understand how, it is worth reflecting on their basic structure. There was a fundamental disagreement between Maimonides and Nahmanides on the status of the first sentence: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Maimonides, in line with the Talmud, held that this is in itself a command: to believe in God. Nahmanides held that it was not a command at all. It was a prologue or preamble to the commands.[4] Modern research on ancient Near Eastern covenant formulae tends to support Nahmanides.

The other fundamental question is how to divide them. Most depictions of the Ten Commandments divide them into two, because of the "two tablets of stone" (Deut 4:13) on which they were engraved. Roughly speaking, the first five are about the relationship between humans and God, the second five about the relationship between humans themselves. There is, however, another way of thinking about numerical structures in the Torah.

The seven days of creation, for example, are structures as two sets of three followed by an all-embracing seventh. During the first three days God separated domains: light and dark, upper and lower waters, and sea and dry land. During the second three days He filled each with the appropriate objects and life forms: sun and moon, birds and fish, animals and man. The seventh day was set apart from the others as holy.

Likewise the ten plagues consist of three cycles of three followed by a stand-alone tenth. In each cycle of three, the first two were forewarned while the third struck without warning. In the first of each series, Pharaoh was warned in the morning (Ex. 7:16; 8:17; 9:13), in the second Moses was told to "come in before Pharaoh" (Ex. 7:26; 9:1; 10:1) in the palace, and so on. The tenth plague, unlike the rest, was announced at the very outset (Ex. 4:23). It was less a plague than a punishment.

Similarly, it seems to me that the Ten Commandments are structured in three groups of three, with a tenth that is set apart from the rest. Thus

understood, we can see how they form the basic structure, the depth grammar, of Israel as a society bound by covenant to God as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:6)

The first three – no other gods besides Me, no graven images, and no taking of God's name in vain – define the Jewish people as "one nation under God." God is our ultimate sovereign. Therefore all other earthly rule is subject to the overarching imperatives linking Israel to God. Divine sovereignty transcends all other loyalties (no other gods besides Me). God is a living force, not an abstract power (no graven images). And sovereignty presupposes reverence (Do not take My name in vain).

The first three commands, through which the people declare their obedience and loyalty to God above all else, establish the single most important principle of a free society, namely the moral limits of power. Without this, the danger even in democracy is the tyranny of the majority, against which the best defence against it is the sovereignty of God.

The second three commands – the Sabbath, honouring parents, and the prohibition of murder – are all about the principle of the createdness of life. They establish limits to the idea of autonomy, namely that we are free to do whatever we like so long as it does not harm others. Shabbat is the day dedicated to seeing God as creator and the universe as His creation. Hence, one day in seven, all human hierarchies are suspended and everyone, master, slave, employer, employee, even domestic animals, are free.

Honouring parents acknowledges our human createdness. It tells us that not everything that matters is the result of our choice, chief of which is the fact that we exist at all. Other people's choices matter, not just our own. "Thou shall not murder" restates the central principle of the universal Noahide covenant that murder is not just a crime against man but a sin against God in whose image we are. So commands 4 to 7 form the basic jurisprudential principles of Jewish life. They tell us to remember where we came from if we are to be mindful of how to live.

The third three – against adultery, theft and bearing false witness – establish the basic institutions on which society depends. Marriage is sacred because it is the human bond closest in approximation to the covenant between us and God. Not only is marriage the human institution par excellence that depends on loyalty and fidelity. It is also the matrix of a free society. Alexis de Tocqueville put it best: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone."[5]

The prohibition against theft establishes the integrity of property. Whereas Jefferson defined as inalienable rights those of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," John Locke, closer in spirit to the Hebrew Bible, saw them as "life, liberty or possession."[6] Tyrants abuse the property rights of the people, and the assault of slavery against human dignity is that it deprives me of the ownership of the wealth I create.

The prohibition of false testimony is the precondition of justice. A just society needs more than a structure of laws, courts and enforcement agencies. As Judge Learned Hand said, "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it."[7] There is no freedom without justice, but there is no justice without each of us accepting individual and collective responsibility for "telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Finally comes the stand-alone prohibition against envying your neighbour's house, wife, slave, maid, ox, donkey, or anything else belonging to him or her. This seems odd if we think of the "ten words" as commands, but not if we think of them as the basic principles of a free society. The greatest challenge of any society is how to contain the universal, inevitable phenomenon of envy: the desire to have what belongs to someone else. Envy lies at the heart of violence.[8] It was envy that led Cain to murder Abel, made Abraham and Isaac fear for their life because they were married to beautiful women, led Joseph's brothers to hate him and sell him into slavery. It is envy that leads to adultery, theft and false testimony, and it was envy of their neighbours that led the Israelites time and again to abandon God in favour of the pagan practices of the time.

Envy is the failure to understand the principle of creation as set out in Genesis 1, that everything has its place in the scheme of things. Each of us has our own task and our own blessings, and we are each loved and cherished by God. Live by these truths and there is order. Abandon them and there is chaos. Nothing is more pointless and destructive than to let someone else's happiness diminish your own, which is what envy is and does. The antidote to envy is, as Ben Zoma famously said, "to rejoice in what we have" (Mishnah Avot 4:1) and not to worry about what we don't yet have. Consumer societies are built on the creation and intensification of envy, which is why they lead to people having more and enjoying it less.

Thirty-three centuries after they were first given, the Ten Commandments remain the simplest, shortest guide to creation and maintenance of a good society. Many alternatives have been tried, and most have ended in tears. The wise aphorism remains true: When all else fails, read the instructions.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Yitro (Exodus 18:1-20:23)
Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel –"You shall not climb up My altar with steps, so that your nakedness will not be revealed on it." (Exodus 20:22)

In the time when the Torah was given, all religions were intimately connected with sexuality, temple prostitutes, and orgiastic rites. One of the great moral revolutions that Judaism brought to the world is the notion that holiness requires modesty in the realm of sexual matters and, by extension, all areas of life.

The Torah forbids the use of steps in ascending the altar, instead mandating the more gradually ascending ramp, in order that the priest's nakedness not be revealed. This underscores the lesson that worship of God and sexual immorality are incompatible.

The significance of the ramp leading up to the altar can also be understood in another way. One of my mentors, Rabbi Moshe Besdin, z"l, explained to me that with a ramp you can either go up or go down, progress or regress. However, with steps, you can rest. The Torah may well be teaching us that, when ascending God's altar, you cannot stop to rest; you dare not fall into the trap of self-satisfaction and complacency. Judaism asks for constant examination, self-criticism and growth.

The Tzemach Tzedek, one of the great Chabad rabbis, once asked his students: Who stands higher on the ladder, the individual on the third rung or the individual on the tenth rung? The individual on the tenth rung, they all responded. Not necessarily, he qualified. If the individual on the tenth rung is going down or standing still, and the individual on the third rung is going up, the individual on the third rung stands higher than the individual on the tenth rung!

I would like to add an additional interpretation to this verse. The Torah uses the word ma'alot, usually translated as steps, but which can also be translated as "good character qualities." So now the verse reads, "Do not climb up to My altar with your good character qualities; so that your nakedness will not be revealed on it."

According to this reading, God warns us that if we ascend to the altar of God flashing our good qualities, proud of our achievements and self-satisfied about all that we know, then the danger is that our nakedness—our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities, our flaws—will be revealed. The altar cannot be a center for self-aggrandizement, a stage of religious worship from which we let others know how great we are; if we fall into this trap, God tells us that ultimately our nakedness—not our greatness—will be revealed.

The altar of God must be approached with a sense of humility, with full awareness of our inadequacies; it dare not become a center of self-satisfaction, religious one-upmanship, and arrogance.

The following Hassidic tale illustrates this point. In a town in pre-war Europe, there lived two Jews: One, named Reb Haim, a great scholar, and the other, also called Haim, an indigent porter who could barely read the Hebrew letters. The scholar married well: the richest man in town came looking for the most brilliant mind in the yeshiva as his son-in-law, and gladly supported him generously.

The two Haims, such very different people, crossed paths frequently. Haim the porter would pray early in the morning so that he could start working as soon as possible in order to earn his meager living. Rushing out after the service, he would invariably run into the great Reb Haim arriving early for another minyan, since he stayed up until the early hours of the morning learning Torah. In this way they "met" nearly every day.

Reb Haim the scholar would always dismissively sneer at Haim the porter, ignoring the deprivations faced by the other Haim. Haim the porter, in contrast, would look upon the scholar with yearning, feeling sad and unworthy that he couldn't spend his life studying the holy Torah.

Many years later, both Haims died on the same day, and went to face judgment in the Heavenly Court. Haim the scholar was judged first. All of his good deeds, years of long study, and righteous acts were placed on one side of the scale, and on the other side his daily sneer of self-satisfaction. The sneer outweighed all the good deeds. Haim the porter then submitted for judgment. On one side of the scale were placed his sins, and on the other side of the scale his daily sigh of yearning. When the scales finally settled, the sigh outweighed the sins and the sneer outweighed the merits.

Ultimately, in our worship of God, humility triumphs over all.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi David Fohrman

Aleph Beta Founder and Lead Scholar

Why Are the Ten Commandments Important To Judaism?

Do you ever wonder what's so special about the Ten Commandments? Why were they singled out to be part of God's momentous speech at Mount Sinai? Why do we make such a big deal about reading them on Shavuot, or putting them up in our shuls and on our courthouses? Why do we treat them as if they are somehow more special, or more fundamental, than all of the other parts of the Torah?

The answer that's often given is that they are more fundamental than the other parts of the Torah because they somehow represent the core ideas of the Torah. That every law in the Torah can be somehow reduced to one of these Ten Commandments. It's as if these are the ten most essential concepts that God is trying to convey to us.

So go with that theory for a second, and now ask yourself this: What if we told you that the Ten Commandments, these ten essential concepts, do express a fundamental Torah truth, but they aren't actually ten? That the "ten commandments" are actually one single idea – the idea, the big, central message that God wanted the Israelites to hear, the one message that the whole Torah boils down to? The most core truth at the heart of all of Judaism, as it were?

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Malka ben Rav Kalman z"l. Sponsored by Kalman & Channah Finkel.

In-laws and Outlaws

And her two sons: whom the name of one was Gershom, for he had said, 'I was a stranger in a strange land'; and the name of the other was Eliezer, for 'the God of my father came to my aid and he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh' (18:4-5).

Moshe named his two sons after experiences in his life. Presumably, his son Gershom was named for the events of his life in Midian; having arrived as an Egyptian immigrant and settling there to marry Tziporah the daughter of Yisro – one of the chieftains of Midian. His second son, Eliezer, was named after the miraculous event sparing him from Pharaoh's decree and the resulting executioner's sword (see Rashi ad loc).

Many of the commentators are bothered by the fact that according to the chronological order of events in Moshe's life, he should have named his first child Eliezer because he was saved from Pharaoh's sword many years prior to his arrival as an immigrant to Midian. So why did he choose to name his first son after events that took place later in his life?

In addition, the name Gershom itself is rather perplexing; it definitely seems to slant toward the negative. Why should he express that he felt as a stranger in a strange land after being so warmly welcomed (albeit years later) by Yisro and his family? What kind of appreciation is this to his wife, father-in-law, and extended family who gave him a home and family in Midian?

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel (18:4) translates the verse similarly, but with a subtle addition; "I was a stranger in a strange land, that was not mine." Why does the Targum add those words to the end of this verse? Remarkably, with those few words, Targum Yonasan ben Uziel refocuses our attention and tells us what Moshe Rabbeinu is really saying.

In the Bris Bein Habesarim, the covenant that Hashem made with Avraham Avinu, Hashem decrees that Bnei Yisroel will have to go down and be "strangers in a land that is not theirs" (Bereshis 15:13). Of course, we later learn that this land is Egypt. According to the Targum, Moshe, in naming his first Gershom, is not referring to Midian but rather to how he felt growing up in Egypt! Even though he grew up as a prince in Pharaoh's house, knowing who he really was caused him to feel like an undocumented Mexican living next door to the Trumps.

With this understanding, the questions raised by the commentators fade away. Moshe named his children specifically in chronological order: his first child describes his life growing up in Egypt, and his second child describes his exit from Egypt. Moreover, he was letting his new adopted family know that he didn't pine for the land or home in which he grew up.

Perhaps most significantly, we learn from Moshe Rabbeinu that growing up in a place with many privileges and comforts shouldn't obscure the vision of living in our own land and on our own terms. If history has taught us anything, it has taught us this: We can never confuse being comfortable in a country with actually being in our own country.

Seeing is Believing

Hashem shall descend before the eyes of all the people on Mount Sinai (19:11).

Rashi (ad loc) tells us a fascinating occurrence that took place prior to the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai: Everyone was miraculously healed. In other words, all the sick, infirm, and handicapped were cured at Mount Sinai. Obviously, this explains why almost every Jewish community with a hospital names it "Mount Sinai."

Yet, we must wonder why Hashem saw it necessary to perform such an incredible miracle. What was the purpose of healing everyone? What was the message that we were meant to take away from this incredible revelation of Hashem's power and the departure from the physical norm?

In a famous paraphrasing of Karl Marx, critics have called religion "the opiate of the masses." Marx believed that religion had certain practical functions in society that were similar to the function of opium in a sick or injured person. Opiates reduce people's immediate suffering and provides them with pleasant illusions, but with no meaningful long term benefits. (As a side note, Marx was actually referring to religion as an opiate for the sickness and suffering brought on by the soulless and heartless suffering caused by rampant capitalism.)

We all know how well his philosophy worked out for the communists; and yet, Marx's criticism of religion persists even after his ideas for a new world order have been shown to be abject failures.

This is the message that Hashem wanted us to learn at Mount Sinai: Everyone was cured to teach us that the optimal way to receive the Torah is when we are in perfect health, both physically and emotionally. Of course the Torah also has the answers when we are suffering and/or not operating at our ideal level, but we can only fully appreciate all that the Torah has to offer on a personal and communal level when we are completely healthy.

When a person is ill or otherwise distracted by pain for physical or emotional issues, one's focus becomes distracted by the personal issues at hand. Of course the Torah can be helpful in addressing those issues, but at that moment all that one can see is a very limited perspective of what the truths of Torah contain. This is because a person in a state of pain sees everything through the lens of that suffering.

But when one is at 100% strength, both physically and emotionally, the Torah can be seen for what it is really meant to be; a blueprint of Hashem's wisdom for the world and a guide for having the most fulfilling life that Hashem has bestowed upon us. Hashem cured everyone at Mount Sinai so that each person could fully appreciate the infinite wisdom that the Torah offers and connect to Hashem's truths contained therein without the slightest distraction.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 22 January 2022 / 20 Shvat 5782
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parshat Yitro - Does Shabbat Like You?

"Remember the day of Shabbat to make it holy."

May I ask you a personal question? How's your Shabbat? Does every Shabbat make you feel suffused with holiness? Does every rock and building and tree whisper to you "Shabbat!" Do you feel so much closer to G-d than on the rest of the week?

If the answer to one or more of these questions is no, then you should know you are part of a very large majority.

Many people find Shabbat a burden: You cannot watch the TV. You cannot go to the ball game. You cannot go shopping. You cannot do this. You cannot do that. When is it going to be dark already?

And even if Shabbat is not a burden, and we enjoy the food, the company, the Shabbat nap — do we feel that we have left one reality and entered another world?

Why don't we feel that kedusha, that holiness? Why don't we feel Shabbat?

Many years ago I remember a magic Shabbat. I prayed at the Western Wall in Jerusalem and had the Friday night meal at some friends' in the Old City. After the meal, as I was walking back to my apartment, I don't know why, but I stopped for a moment, closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and said very quietly to myself, "Ahh, Shabbat!" And then I said it again and again and again. I walked through the magical streets of Meah Shearim. I came upon a small synagogue. I went in and opened up a Talmudic tractate and started to learn. I had never been in that synagogue before, and I am pretty sure that I could not find it again. Maybe it only existed for that one night. Who knows?

I learned for a while. It could have been a few minutes or an hour. Then I got up and walked home. I got into bed and my last words before sleep overtook me were "Shabbat, Shabbat!"

You might think that Shabbat is a day in the week. You might think that Shabbat is a 24-hour period of time between Friday afternoon and Saturday night.

But you would be wrong. It is not.

Shabbat is a being. Shabbat is an existence with feelings and likes and dislikes. Shabbat can choose to come to you once in your life, or every week or never. Because if you never felt Shabbat, that is because it never came to you.

It did not feel comfortable with you. Because you do not feel comfortable with it.

Shabbat is very sensitive and very picky. If it senses that your commitment to it is shaky, then it will not come to you. You can light your Shabbat lights and make Kiddush and eat your cholent to your heart's content, but if you are not really there for it, Shabbat knows that, it senses that, and passes on down the block.

"Remember the day of Shabbat to make it holy."

Every week we have to remember to make Shabbat holy, to exert ourselves and infuse those precious hours with Torah, with spirituality, enthusiasm and kedusha, for if we make it holy, then the Shabbatqueen will arrive with all her retinue of blessings to crown our week.

Sources: Based on Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz in Daat Chochma Umussar

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chiefrabbi.org
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Dvar Torah Yitro: The best entry points to greater Jewish engagement
19 January 2022

What is the best entry point through which more people can engage better with their Judaism?

Parshat Yitro commences with the words, "Vayishma Yitro," – "Yitro heard." (Shemot 18:1).

But the Torah doesn't tell us what exactly it was that Yitro heard. What prompted this priest of Midyan to join the Israelite camp in the wilderness and to embrace a life of commitment to Torah? Three answers are given in the Talmud, Masechet Pesachim.

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

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

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

These three reasons are fascinating. According to the first, what changed Yitro's life was when he heard about an attempt to annihilate the Jewish people. Today we are all too aware of the tragic phenomemnon of antisemitism and while it's true that antisemitism can sometimes strengthen Jewish identity, that's not our raison d'etre. We're not here just to survive as a people. We have something to live for.

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom.

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

Drasha Parshas Yisro - Man over Moses
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Yisro begins by relating how impressed its namesake, Yisro, (Jethro) is upon hearing the amazing events that transpired to the nation led by his son-in-law, Moshe. He decides to convert to Judaism. Yisro sends word to Moshe that he will soon be arriving at the Israelite camp. Yisro wants Moshe to leave his post and greet him in the desert before he arrives at the Israelite camp. The Torah tells us that Moshe did go out to greet Yisro: "the man bowed and kissed him and asked the peace of his dear one." (Exodus 18:8)

Rashi is bothered by the ambiguity. "Who bowed to whom? Who kissed whom? Who was the one to make the gesture? Was it Yisro, the father-in-law, who kissed Moshe, or did Moshe, the son-in-law, leader of millions of people, run to greet his father in-law a Midianite priest, and bow and kiss him?

Rashi quotes the Mechilta which refers us to Bamidbar (Numbers 12:3) where Moshe is called "the man Moshe" obviously the words, "the man bowed and kissed him" in our portion must mean that same man – Moshe.

Why, however, did the Torah choose a seemingly convoluted way to tell us that Moshe prostrated himself before his father-in-law? Would it not have been easier to tell us that "Moshe man bowed and kissed him and asked the peace of his dear one"? Why did the Torah use the words "the man" and send us to the Book of Numbers to learn who "the man" was?

Last year my brother, Rabbi Zvi Kamenetzky of Chicago, tried to contact a friend who was vacationing at Schechter's Caribbean Hotel in Miami Beach, Florida. After about 15 rings, the hotel operator, an elderly, southern black woman, who worked at the hotel for three decades politely informed my brother that the man was not in the room. "Would you like to leave a message?" she inquired.

"Sure," responded Reb Zvi, "tell him that Rabbi Kamenetzky, called."

The woman at the other end gasped. "Raabbi Kaamenetzky?" she drawled. "Did you say you were Raabbi Kaamenetzky?" She knew the name! It sounded as if she was about to follow up with a weighty question, and my brother responded in kind. "Yes." He did not know what would follow. "Why do you ask?"

"Are you," asked the operator, "by any chance, related to the famous Rabbi Kamenetzky?"

There was silence in Chicago. My brother could not imagine that this woman had an inkling of who his grandfather, the great sage. Dean of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath to whom thousands had flocked for advice and counsel, was. She continued. "You know, he passed away about ten years ago at the end the wintah?" She definitely had her man, thought Reb Zvi. Still in shock, he offered a subdued, "Yes, I'm a grandson."

"YOOOU ARE?" she exclaimed, "well I'm sure glad to talk to ya! Cause your grandpa — he was a real good friend of mine!"

My brother pulled the receiver from his ear and stared at the mouthpiece. He composed himself and slowly began to repeat her words, quizzically. "You say that Rabbi Kamenetzky was a good friend of yours?"

"Sure! Every mornin' Raabbi Kaaamenetzky would come to this here hotel to teach some sorta Bible class (It was the Daf-Yomi.) Now my desk is about ten yards from the main entrance of the hotel. But every mornin' he made sure to come my way, nod his head, and say good mornin' to me. On his way out, he would always stop by my desk and say good-bye. Oh! Yes! He was a great Rabbi but he was even a greater man. He was a wonderful man. He was a real good friend of mine!"

The Torah could have told us the narrative an easier way. It could have told us that Moshe bowed before, and kissed Yisro. It does more. It tells us that it was a man who kissed Yisro. True, it was Moshe that performed those actions. But they were not the actions of a Moses, they were the actions of a mentch!

Often we attribute acts of kindness, compassion, and extra care to super-human attributes of our sages and leaders. The Torah tells us that it is the simple mentch that performs them. Inside every great leader lies "the man." Little wonder that the words "and the man Moses" that Rashi quotes from the Book of Numbers begin a verse that fits our explanation quite well. The verse reads "and the man Moses was the exceedingly humble, more than any one on the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3) It was the man Moses, who was exceedingly humble, more than any one on the face of the earth.

Dedicated in Memory of Ephraim Spinner by Michael & Rikki Charnowitz
Dedicated in Memory of Rose Horn Felig by Dr.& Mrs. Philip Felig
Good Shabbos!

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

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Yisro
Midah K'neged Midah Punishment is a Big Chesed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz once told a story in a shmooze about a match that was proposed for a young lady with a tremendous bochur, but the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Torah Unfettered

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz
Parashat Yitro 5782 - The Peasant And The Princess

In Parashat Yitro, we read the description of the most awesome event in human history: the giving of the Torah by G-d Himself. Fifty days after the children of Israel left Egypt, this incredible revelation of G-d's presence took place. The Torah and commandments given at Mount Sinai reveal the deepest secret to us: how to live a complete life.

The Ten Commandments were given at Mount Sinai; ten commandments that are the core of the Jewish nation's covenant with G-d. At the end of this event, for forty days and nights, G-d began to teach Moses all the commandments, laws, rules and lifestyle directives included in this covenant between G-d and His nation.

The tenth and final of the ten commandments is perhaps the hardest to implement:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or whatever belongs to your neighbor.

(Exodus 20, 14)

Following a series of commandments dealing with recognizing G-d's presence and the proper behavior between people comes a commandment that delves into man's most hidden desires and wishes: "You shall not covet!" Man is commanded not to feel the feeling of desiring something that isn't his, even if it is something very desirable.

This commandment sounds like one that only a select few would be able to apply. Even those who believe in free will and in man's ability to control himself and his behavior still conceive of hidden urges and desires as instinctive, and therefore not subject to restraint.

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra was a poet, philosopher, scientist and great biblical commentator in Spain of the 12th century. In explaining the tremendous significance of this commandment, he offered a wonderful parable:

Many people are amazed at this commandment. They ask, how is it possible for a person not to covet in his heart all beautiful things that appear desirable to him? I will now give you a parable. Note, a peasant of sound mind who sees a beautiful princess will not entertain any covetous thoughts…for he knows that this is an impossibility. This peasant will not think like the insane who desire to sprout wings and fly to the sky, for it is impossible to do so…So must every intelligent person know that a person does not acquire a beautiful woman or money because of his intelligence or wisdom, but only in accordance with what God has apportioned to him…The intelligent person will therefore neither desire nor covet. Once he knows that God has prohibited his neighbor's wife to him she will be more exalted in his eyes than the princess is in the eyes of the peasant. He will therefore be happy with his lot and will not allow his heart to covet and desire anything which is not his. For he knows that that which God did not want to give him… He will therefore trust in his creator, that is, that his creator will sustain him and do what is right in His sight.

(Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra Exodus 20, 14)

The Ibn Ezra describes a parable drawn from the world of class distinctions. A peasant meets a beautiful princess. Assuming he is of sound mind, he will not develop any desire for her since he knows there is no chance for someone of his status to marry the princess. He does not desire the princess just as he does not desire to have wings so he can fly in the sky.

The moral is just as wonderful as the parable and is relevant today as well. Our property and assets, our partners and the people we are privileged to have present in our lives, are all gifts from G-d. No matter how much we strive to attain something that G-d did not intend for us to have we will not succeed, just as we will never grow wings. In the commandment of "You shall not covet," G-d is asking us to adopt this world view that sees everything we have as G-d given. This will lead us to not coveting something that isn't ours.

The Torah given to us at Mount Sinai teaches us that man's desires and urges are not disconnected from his thoughts and way of life and are the direct result of how he sees the world.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Yitro: Blessings on Miracles

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

Moses' father-in-law Jethro rejoiced when he heard of all that God had done for the Israelites:

"Blessed be God Who rescued you from hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, Who liberated the people from Egypt's power. Now I know that God is the greatest of all deities: the very thing they plotted came on them!" (Exod. 18:10-11)

The Sages learned from Jethro's blessing that when one sees a place where a miracle occurred for the Jewish people, one should recite the blessing שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה - "Who made miracles for our fathers in this place" (Berachot 54a).

This statement, however, is difficult to understand in light of the fact that Jethro did not say this blessing when visiting the Red Sea, but when he met Moses and the Israelites in the Sinai desert. How could Jethro serve as an example for this brachah, which is only recited when seeing the location where a miracle took place?

Appreciating all Aspects

We need to examine the concept of reciting a blessing over a miracle. Consider two different situations. In case A, a person was headed for the hospital and allowed a neighbor who was not feeling well to come along. The sick neighbor will be thankful for the assistance, but his gratefulness will be tempered by the fact that his benefactor was planning to go there anyway.

In case B, the benefactor, realizing that his neighbor was ill and needed to see a doctor, made a special trip to take him to the hospital. Clearly, the sick neighbor will feel much more thankful in this situation, where the assistance was rendered expressly for him.

If we consider the nature of a miracle, we will realize that it is similar to case B. When we bless God over a miraculous deliverance, we feel completely indebted and thankful to God, as this Divine intervention took place explicitly to help us.

But there is an additional aspect of Divine deliverance which should heighten our sense of gratitude. When an act comes directly from God, not only is the overall goal for the ultimate good, but also all the ramifications and side effects that result from the miracle. We should be appreciative not only for the actual deliverance, but also for any accompanying details. This even includes the location of the miracle, which at some point in time benefited (or will benefit) from the miracle.1

The Sages learned this from Jethro: a blessing over a miracle should include recognition of the benefits gained from the miracle's accompanying details.

Besides thanking God for the overall rescue ("Who liberated the people from Egypt's power"), Jethro also mentioned the details of that rescue: that they were saved from the hands of the Egyptian people and from the hands of Pharaoh.2

Furthermore, Jethro called attention to the poetic justice - middah kneged middah - in the way that the Egyptians were punished. "The very thing they plotted came upon them." The Egyptians drowned Jewish babies, so they were punished by drowning in the Red Sea. Here was an additional detail that reflected the ultimate justice of the miracle in all of its aspects.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 243-244)

1 Cf. the explanation given by Rabbi Nissim of Gerona (1320-1376) for the ancient custom of praying at the graves of great scholars and prophets. "Prayer at these locations is more desirable, since bodies that once experienced the Divine shefa [prophetic influence] are buried there." Sparks of holiness can still be found at their gravesites, "since their bones served as vessels for the Divine shefa " (Drashot HaRan, Drush 8).

2 For one can suffer at the hands of a cruel people, even if the king is kind; and one can suffer at the hands of an evil king, even if the people are sympathetic. In Egypt, the Israelites were the victims of cruelty on the part of the people and the king.

Curious Kiddush Shaylos

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The Torah commands us to declare the sanctity of Shabbos, a mitzvah we fulfill when we recite Kiddush before beginning the meal. Notwithstanding that this mitzvah appears very clear cut, it sometimes involves interesting shaylos.

We recite Kiddush before the seudah at night and also Shabbos morning. The Torah mitzvah of Kiddush is fulfilled at night and has two brachos, one is on the wine and the other is the special Kiddush bracha. The daytime Kiddush was instituted by Chazal to demonstrate the specialness of Shabbos meals – therefore, we drink a cup of wine immediately before the meals begin. (The pesukim that we recite before

this Kiddush are a later minhag, presumably to emphasize that we are reciting Kiddush.)

One is forbidden to eat or drink before reciting Kiddush. The poskim dispute whether an ill or weak person who eats before davening should make Kiddush before doing so. There is also a dispute whether a woman makes Kiddush before eating breakfast on Shabbos morning, or whether she does not need to make Kiddush until she eats later with her husband.

Someone who failed to recite the full Kiddush at night, for whatever reason, must recite it before or during one of the Shabbos day meals (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 271:8). We will discuss later an interesting application of this rule.

You can fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush either by reciting it yourself or hearing it from someone who is reciting it. When the head of household recites Kiddush, he does so for everyone at the table. Everyone is yotzei Kiddush, he by reciting it and, everyone else, by hearing it. This is referred to as the baal habayis being "motzi" the others in their mitzvah.

Several requirements must be met in order to fulfill the mitzvah through hearing someone else's Kiddush. One of the requirements is that the person reciting Kiddush must be obligated in the mitzvah. For this reason, only an adult can be motzi other adults.

When I was twelve years old, I once spent Shabbos with my widowed grandmother, a"h. She wanted me, as the "man" of the house, to recite Kiddush, and I was happy to oblige. Years later, it occurred to me that my recital did not fulfill her obligation to fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush, since I was under bar mitzvah at the time.

HEARING KIDDUSH

The people fulfilling the mitzvah must hear the Kiddush. Therefore, if the baal habayis mumbles inaudibly, they do not fulfill the mitzvah. Trying to solve this problem can sometimes create shalom bayis issues or hurt someone's feelings. A rav's direction may be very helpful.

Someone once asked me the following shaylah. His father-in-law recited Kiddush in a very garbled manner. Even if his father-in-law, indeed, recited a full Kiddush, he (the son-in-law) did not hear enough to be yotzei. How could he fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush without hurting anyone's feelings?

I proposed two possible suggestions. One was to find some practical excuse why he (the son-in-law) should recite his own Kiddush after his father-in-law (such as, this is his personal custom). Alternatively, if this is not a practical solution, he and his wife could discreetly make Kiddush in their own room, beforehand. (Of course, this solution will not help when their children get older.) Later in this article, we will discuss whether one can recite Kiddush in one room and eat in another.

KEEP THEM IN MIND

It is necessary that the person making Kiddush intend to be motzi those who want to fulfill the mitzvah, and they must have intent to fulfill the mitzvah with his recital. This leads us to a curious situation that once happened to me.

The hosts where we were eating honored me to recite Kiddush first – or so I thought. I assumed that I was reciting Kiddush for myself, and that the baal habayis would then recite Kiddush for his family. However, upon completing my Kiddush, it became clear that the family had assumed that I had made Kiddush for them, as well. But since this was not my intention, they were not yotzei.

It turned out that the head of household was embarrassed to recite Kiddush in my presence. Under the unusual circumstances, I may well have ended up reciting Kiddush twice, one right after the other, because the family still needed someone to be motzi them in Kiddush. Thus, if the baal habayis was still reluctant to recite Kiddush, I could have recited it a second time for them, because of the concept "Yatza motzi," "someone who has already fulfilled the mitzvah may recite Kiddush, another time, for someone who has not yet fulfilled it."

HOW CAN I RECITE KIDDUSH WHEN I HAVE ALREADY PERFORMED THE MITZVAH?

One may recite a birkas hamitzvah (a bracha on a mitzvah) on behalf of another person (presuming that we are both obligated to fulfill this mitzvah), even if one is not presently fulfilling this mitzvah, because of the principle "kol Yisroel areivim zeh lazeh," "all Jews are responsible for one another," (Rosh Hashanah 29a). This concept of "areivus" means that, since I am responsible to help another Jew observe mitzvos, his responsibility to fulfill a particular mitzvah is also my mitzvah. Since I am responsible to see that my fellow Jew makes Kiddush, I can recite the Kiddush bracha on his behalf. For this same reason, I may blow shofar in a shul and recite the brachos for other people, even if I fulfilled the mitzvah of shofar earlier.

MAKING KIDDUSH WHEN I WILL FULFILL THE MITZVAH LATER

I was once asked the following shaylah. Mr. Hirsch was hospitalized, and his wife was unable to make Kiddush for her family. Mr. Goldberg, one of the Hirsch's neighbors, asked whether he could make Kiddush for the Hirsch family on his way home from shul, and then go home and make Kiddush for his own family. I told him that this was perfectly acceptable. However, if he was not planning to eat anything at the Hirsch residence, he should not drink the Kiddush wine but, instead, ask one of the Hirsch adults to drink most of a revi'is (about one-and-a-half ounces) from the cup (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 273:4; 271:13). I will explain, shortly, why Mr. Goldberg should not drink from the Hirsch goblet.

This seems strange. How can Mr. Goldberg recite "borei pri hagafen" and not drink any wine?

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BRACHOS

The answer to this question needs an introduction. It is true that one cannot recite a bracha on food or fragrance (birkas ha'ne'henin) for someone else's benefit, unless he is anyway making that bracha for himself. This is because the other person is not fulfilling any obligatory mitzvah by reciting these brachos. He needs to recite a bracha because he is gaining benefit, not because he is obligated to perform a mitzvah. Therefore, the rule of areivus does not apply in this case. Because the other person has no obligation to recite a bracha, someone else does not share in his mitzvah and cannot make the bracha on his behalf.

However, the bracha on Kiddush wine is different, because it is considered part of the obligatory mitzvah of Kiddush (Rosh Hashanah 29a). Therefore, Mr. Goldberg can make borei pri hagafen for the Hirsches, even though he is not drinking any wine. (It should be noted that it is disputed whether this halacha is true for the daytime Kiddush.)

AN INTERESTING APPLICATION

Sometimes one has guests for a Shabbos daytime meal who have not yet fulfilled the mitzvah of Kiddush this Shabbos. (A common application is when a guest is not yet observant.) This provides one with an opportunity to perform the additional mitzvah (in addition to exposing one's guests to Shabbos) of Kiddush. As explained above, the normal daytime Kiddush is not a replacement for the night Kiddush. Therefore, reciting the daytime Kiddush will not help our not-yet-observant lunch guests fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush this Shabbos. How can one alleviate the situation?

Since Kiddush can be recited the entire Shabbos day, one should recite both brachos of the Friday night Kiddush before the daytime meal, on behalf of his guests. Although he has already fulfilled the mitzvah, he can still be motzi his guests. However, in order to do so, he must explain to them that hearing Kiddush is a mitzvah, and that they should listen to him with the intent to fulfill the mitzvah. (It is always a good idea to do this, so that one's guests know to fulfill the mitzvah.)

WHY COULDN'T MR. GOLDBERG DRINK THE CUP OF WINE?

Before answering this question, we need to explain the concept of Ein Kiddush ela bimkom seudah, "Kiddush must be recited in the place that one will be eating a meal" (Pesachim 101a).

The Gemara relates the following story. One Friday evening, Rabba made Kiddush. Although his disciple Abaye was present, Abaye planned to eat his Shabbos meal in his own lodgings. Rabba urged Abaye to "taste something" before he left, voicing concern that the light in Abaye's lodging might extinguish before his arrival, making it impossible to make Kiddush there. (I presume that Abaye was unable to locate his wine in the dark.) Rabba pointed out that Abaye would not be

yotzei with the Kiddush he just heard unless he ate something at Rabba's house because of Ein Kiddush ela bimakom seudah (Pesachim 101a).

This halacha is derived from the pasuk, Vekarasa laShabbos oneg (Yeshayahu 58:13), which Chazal midrashically interpret to mean, "In the place where you declare the Kiddush of Shabbos, you should also celebrate your Shabbos meal" (Rashbam and Tosafos ad loc.). From this we derive that one must eat a meal in the place that one recites Kiddush.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED THE SAME PLACE?

The Gemara rules that someone fulfills the mitzvah of Kiddush if he recited (or heard) Kiddush in one part of a large room and ate in a different part of the room, since the entire room is considered the same place. Some poskim contend that one should not move to a different part of the house between making Kiddush and eating, unless he knew at the time of Kiddush that he might do this (Magen Avraham 273:1; Mishnah Berurah 273:3). Even this should be done only under extenuating circumstances (see Biur Halacha 273:1). However, if one recited Kiddush in one building and then went to a different building without eating, one certainly did not fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush and must recite (or hear) it again. This is why Mr. Goldberg could not drink the Hirsch's wine. Since he had no intent to eat at the Hirsch's house, he could not fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush there. Therefore, he also couldn't drink the wine, since one cannot drink before fulfilling the mitzvah of Kiddush. (According to most, but not all, poskim, Mr. Goldberg has another option: he could drink the Kiddush and then another cup of wine. This would be considered Kiddush bimkom seudah.)

KIDDUSH IN SHUL

These two concepts (areivus and ein Kiddush ela bimkom seudah) are the basis of the custom that the chazzan recites Kiddush in shul Friday evening, without drinking the cup of wine.

Why is Kiddush recited in shul at the end of Friday evening davening?

The Gemara mentions that, in its time, guests often stayed and ate their Shabbos meals in rooms attached to the shul, and someone recited Kiddush in shul on their behalf. Since the guests were eating in the same building, it was considered Kiddush bimkom seudah and they fulfilled their mitzvah.

However, the chazzan who makes Kiddush does not fulfill his mitzvah, since he is eating his meal at his house, which is in a different building. Therefore, he should not drink the Kiddush wine. Instead, it should be drunk by a guest eating in the building, and, if there are no guests, the cup is drunk by children who are permitted to drink or eat before Kiddush. (Although, in general, children should be taught to keep mitzvos like adults, there is no requirement of chinuch in this case, a topic to discuss in a different article.)

ANOTHER INTERESTING SHAYLAH

I was once asked the following question by someone who was a guest at a Shabbos bar mitzvah:

"The baal simcha made Kiddush in the shul immediately after davening, but the reception was conducted in the shul's social hall. Is this an acceptable way to fulfill the mitzvah?"

Based on the above discussion, we can answer this question. If the social hall was in a different building, they would need to recite Kiddush again in the social hall. Assuming the social hall where they would be eating was in the same building as the Kiddush, this was acceptable, under extenuating circumstances. It would be preferable that they follow a different procedure, such as having Kiddush made in the social hall.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED A MEAL?

Rabba's words ("taste something") imply that one fulfills Kiddush without necessarily eating a full meal, notwithstanding the Gemara's statement that one must eat a meal where he recites Kiddush. The Geonim explain that one must begin his meal where he said Kiddush, either by eating some bread or drinking wine, and this is quoted in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 273:5). The Geonim explicitly state that one does not fulfill Kiddush bimkom seudah by eating only fruit. Although some poskim disagree, arguing that one fulfills Kiddush bimkom seudah by eating fruit (Shiltei Hagiborim, Pesachim 20a:1, quoting Riaz, as explained by Magen Avraham 273:11), the accepted practice does not follow this opinion (Magen Avraham 273:11; Shu"t Ein Yitzchak #12).

Magen Avraham rules that one fulfills Kiddush bimkom seudah by eating a kezayis-sized piece of mezonos (the same size piece that requires an "al hamichyah" blessing afterwards), and this is the prevalent practice followed on Shabbos morning, when people often make Kiddush and then eat pastry or crackers. The poskim dispute whether drinking wine fulfills Kiddush bimkom seudah (see Rabbi Akiva Eiger to 273:5 and Mishnah Berurah 273:26).

Some people follow the practice of the Vilna Gaon to recite Kiddush only immediately before the meal they are eating for the Shabbos seudah (see Biur Halacha and Rabbi Akiva Eiger to 273:5). In his opinion, the concept of Vekarasa laShabbos oneg means that one should declare the Kiddush of Shabbos, specifically, at the time that one celebrates the Shabbos meal.

Conclusion

Kiddush sets the tone of the whole Shabbos meal. In the midst of remembering the details and requirements of this mitzvah, we should never forget to focus, also, on the beauty of Shabbos and the wonderful opportunity we are given to sanctify it verbally, day and night!

לע"נ

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

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

MOSHE'S "JOB":

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

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

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

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

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

but "E-lohim" quickly becomes predominant. So there is reason to think that "E-lohim" in Moshe's sentence means "Hashem" as well.

2) A stronger indication: Moshe finishes this very sentence by using the word "E-lohim" in a way that can only mean "Hashem" -- "I teach the laws of 'E-lohim' and His instructions." It is possible that Moshe is playing a little word game, using "Elohim" in different ways in the same sentence, but I think the stronger possibility is that both mentions of "E-lohim" refer to Hashem.
After telling Yitro that the people come to him to seek Hashem, Moshe goes on to explain that when people have a dispute, they come to him and he does two things: he judges them and he teaches them Hashem's laws (the Torah).

MOSHE: DIVINE CONDUIT:

Yitro had asked Moshe why he felt compelled to sit alone to judge the people. Moshe's response tells Yitro that Moshe does not see himself as just a functionary of a judicial system; he does not see himself as just a judge. Moshe sees himself as the intermediary between the people and Hashem. The way he sees it, the people come to him seeking not just justice, not just a judge -- they come seeking "E-lohim" -- seeking Hashem! The reason no one else can do this job is because Moshe does not want to turn the people's encounter with Hashem into an encounter with a judicial system. The current system is a religious one: people bring their problems and questions to Hashem's closest representative. Yitro is suggesting that Moshe turn the system into a judicial one. Instead of walking into the presence of God -- into shul, so to speak -- the people will now walk into a courtroom. Instead of meeting an intermediary to Hashem, people will bring their troubles to legal scholars who have studied law codes. This is what Moshe wants to avoid, why he feels he is the only one who can do the job, for Moshe is Hashem's right-hand man.

Yitro does not try to argue with Moshe. He agrees that the legal system should be a bridge to Hashem rather than a set of static statutes. And he does not tell Moshe to stop his work -- "You should represent the people before Hashem and bring matters to Hashem." All he says is that Moshe is being too religiously ambitious. It is simply impossible to try to turn every legal question and dispute into an encounter with Hashem's chief representative: "You will tire yourself out . . . it is too much for you!" Moshe must relinquish this goal of continuous Matan Torah, this continuous Mosaic revelation. He must appoint others to judge along with him.

It would be great if the CEO himself (or herself) would answer the customer relations phones at IBM or Microsoft or GM or Merck to help you figure out why your modem or your word processor or your mini-van or your hypertension pills weren't doing what you needed. You'd be very impressed! In seconds, the CEO would cut through all the red tape and solve your problems with no delay. But the reason no CEO answers the public relations phones is that "navol ti-bol, gam ata, gam ha-am ha-zeh": he would sit from morning till night answering customer calls, ignoring larger and more important responsibilities, like deciding where the company is headed in the future and what its role is in the global market . . . and how to make money from the Internet. Also, customers would have to wait for weeks on "hold." No one would be happy.

The same is true here: Moshe wants to give everyone his attention and provide a direct line to Hashem. But he can't handle the sheer volume himself, and even if he could, he would have to ignore the more important duties of leading the nation. Meanwhile, the people would wait in lines winding around the block ten times.

HASHEM SHOWS UP IN COURT:

Ultimately, Moshe remains the source of revelation: Yitro encourages him to continue to be the one to teach the people the laws of the Torah; he remains "Moshe Rabbeinu," "Moshe, our Teacher," but he gives up most of the day-to-day functions of "Moshe, our Judge." This does not mean that from this point on, the Jewish legal system has nothing to do with approaching Hashem. Since Torah law is divinely given, one who submits to Torah law and the Torah's courts submits to Hashem. But more immediately, Hashem Himself maintain a presence in court. One manifestation of Hashem's presence in a Jewish court is that the Supreme Court -- the Sanhedrin He-Gedola -- meets in the Beit HaMikdash (Temple) itself. We all know that Hashem is present in the Mikdash as a focus for worship, but the fact that the Supreme Court meets there means that Hashem is also there in order to meet the people who come to seek His instructions.

In addition, the Midrash understands the pasuk, "E-lohim nitzav ba-adat e-l," "E-lohim stands among the congregation of God," to mean that Hashem is present in Beit Din (Jewish court). Rashi and Ramban also develop this idea in several places (see Rashi Bereshit 18:1 and Tehillim 82:1, Ramban Shemot 21:6 and BeMidbar 11:16).

Nowadays, many of us think of court as the domain of slick lawyers, biased juries, and crooked or inobjective judges. Maybe we think of it as Judge Wapner's territory, or material for a nighttime soap opera, or the forum for a celebrity murder trial, or the stage for a tawdry Presidential scandal. But ideally, Jewish court is something like shul -- it is a place to meet Hashem and bring our problems to Him. (When I say "shul," I mean what shul *should* be, not the place some people go to yak with their friends and see what everyone is wearing.)

SAME OLD SAME OLD:

Often, the Torah reports several different versions of an event. The most common location for repeated stories is Sefer Devarim, "Deuteronomy," the "Repeated Torah," called "Mishneh Torah" by Hazal (the rabbis of the Talmud). Our story -- the story of Moshe's appointment of judges to serve under him -- appears just nine pesukim (verses) from the beginning of Sefer Devarim. Moshe narrates the story to Bnei Yisrael, who are assembled to hear their leader's final speech before his death and their entry, without him, to Eretz Cana'an:

DEVARIM 1:9-18 --

At that time I said to you, "I cannot carry you alone -- Hashem, your Lord, has increased you, and you are today numerous as the stars of the sky. May Hashem, Lord of your fathers, add to you a thousand times your number, and bless you, as He said [He would]. But how can I alone carry your troubles, burdens, and disputes? Select for yourselves wise and understanding men, known to your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads." You answered me and said, "What you have said to do is a good idea." I took the heads of your tribes, wise and well-known men, and made them heads over you: officers of a thousand, a hundred, fifty, and ten, and police for your tribes. I commanded your judges at that time, "Hear [disputes] between your brothers and judge justly between each man and his brother, and between the stranger. Do not 'recognize faces' in judging: listen to the small as to the great. Do not fear any man, for justice is Hashem's.

Whatever is too hard for you, bring to me and I will hear it." I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.

How is this story different than the story in Parashat Yitro?

1) In Parashat Yitro, the idea for the new judicial system comes from Yitro; in Parashat Devarim, it seems to be Moshe's idea. Yitro does not even merit an honorable mention in Devarim. Whose idea was it really?

2) In Parashat Yitro, it is Moshe who approves the idea for the new system; in Parashat Devarim, Bnei Yisrael approve the idea. Who really approved the idea?

3) In Parashat Yitro, Moshe selects leaders and appoints them; in Parashat Devarim, the people select leaders and Moshe appoints them. Who really made the selection?

4) In Parashat Yitro, the judges to be selected must be "men of valor" who "fear of Hashem," "men of truth," "haters of ill-gotten gains"; in Parashat Devarim, the judges to be selected must meet a decidedly different set of criteria: men who are "wise" and "understanding," "well-known to the tribes." The actual selection as described in Yitro and Devarim follows the specific criteria for each account: in Yitro, those selected are indeed "men of valor from all of Yisrael," while in Devarim, those selected are "heads of tribes" who are "wise" and "well-known." Put slightly differently, Parashat Yitro projects a judicial meritocracy, in which even non-leaders may be selected if they bear the qualities of impartiality and incorruptibility specified by the Torah; Parashat Devarim projects a judicial "old boy network," in which those who are already leaders -- wise leaders, to be sure -- will be appointed as judges.

[By the way, "anshei hayyil," literally, "men of valor, does not mean "brave warriors" or "fearless heroes," it means "judges who will be strong and brave enough to remain honest [=valor] even when it is difficult to do so" -- like when they are threatened or bribed by the litigants, or when they feel emotionally inclined to sympathize with one side. Perhaps some judges currently on the bench might be described as "cowboys," but it seems to me that the Torah is not advocating swashbuckling jurisprudence.]

The above discrepancies between the two versions leave us with two questions:

A) WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

1) Who initiates the new judicial system? Does Yitro tell Moshe that his task is too much for him (Parashat Yitro), or does Moshe realize on his own that his burden is too great (Parashat Devarim)? Both can be true without contradiction: Yitro notices the problem and takes the initiative in alerting Moshe. But when reviewing the event in Parashat Devarim for the benefit of the assembled, Moshe leaves out Yitro's role. In a moment we will speculate about Moshe's rationale.

2) Who approves the system? Does Moshe approve it (Parashat Yitro), or do Bnei Yisrael agree to the plan (Parashat Devarim)? Both can be true without contradiction: Moshe approves Yitro's suggestion, and when Moshe presents the plan to the people, they approve as well.

3) Who selects the leaders, Moshe (Parashat Yitro) or Bnei Yisrael (Parashat Devarim)? Both can be true without contradiction: Moshe does indeed do the choosing, in a sense, since he approves or rejects the candidates nominated by the people. On the other hand, the people do the choosing, since they nominate leaders for appointment by Moshe.

4) What are the criteria for the judges, honesty/impartiality/incorruptibility (Parashat Yitro) or wisdom/wide reputation/current leaders (Parashat Devarim)? Both can be true without contradiction (or without much!): Parashat Yitro tells us that those chosen are honest, while Parashat Devarim tells us that they were also wise, well-known, and already occupied leadership positions. Each story emphasizes a different aspect of the judges for a particular reason. [Alternatively, perhaps, by "from all of Yisrael," Yitro means to advocate a complete meritocracy, which would select judges just on the basis of their qualifications -- men of valor, truth, honesty -- but Moshe realizes that the nation and its leaders would be completely destabilized by replacing the current leadership with new people. He takes Yitro's suggestion, but perhaps he understands the words "from all of Yisrael" to mean that the leaders should come from all of the tribes, not just those currently ascendant in leading the nation. In choosing local political and judicial leaders, Moshe realizes that only leaders chosen from each tribe will be accepted as leaders by that tribe. So in Devarim, he accepts the leaders of the tribes as judges; they are the leaders chosen "from all of Israel."]

B) WHY DOES THE TORAH REPORT DIFFERENT VERSIONS IN DIFFERENT PLACES?

Now we come to our second question: granted that we can reconstruct what actually happened [either my version above, or one you might propose] -- but why does the Torah give us two different versions? Perhaps another way to ask this question is, what is the focus of Sefer Shemot and what is the focus of Sefer Devarim?

Sefer Shemot traces the development of Bnei Yisrael into a nation and Moshe Rabbeinu into a leader. Sefer Devarim's narrative section reviews the trip through the desert and makes explicit the lessons to be learned from the journey. Since Moshe knows he is to die soon, he must prepare the people to 1) keep the Torah without his guidance and 2) function as a nation without his guidance.

Since Shemot is partly about Moshe's development, the focus of the visit with Yitro is how *Moshe* reacts, not how the people react. The Torah tells us nothing about the people's role in selecting the judges and nothing about their approval of the whole process because the focus is on Moshe and his developing role as leader of the nation. But since Devarim is about Moshe's attempt to strengthen the people's commitment to the Torah and the authority structure so they can "make it" religiously and politically without him, the Torah focuses in Devarim on Moshe's interaction with the people in putting the new system into play:

1) Yitro is left out of the story because he is external to the relationship between Moshe and the people, and certainly external to perpetuating the authority structure beyond Moshe's demise. Moreover, the reminder that an outsider invented this system might make the people feel it had been imposed on them from the outside, while Moshe aims in Sefer Devarim to emphasize to the people the role they themselves played in creating the system and appointing its authorities.

2) Moshe mentions only that the people approve the plan, leaving out his own approval, for the same reason: if he wants to give the

authority structure the best chance of surviving his death, it is best to minimize his own role in imposing the system on the people. The more they perceive it as their own creation, the more they will be inclined to accept its authority.

3) Moshe stresses that the people suggested candidates: again, Moshe emphasizes that the authority structure is not something imposed by him, but something in which the people participated.
4) The judges chosen are "wise" and "known to your tribes": as mentioned above, Moshe knows that the traditional tribal leadership cannot simply be rejected and replaced by a complete meritocracy. This would destabilize the nation and encourage it to reject the whole system (besides creating a disgruntled class of former leaders who would eagerly aid efforts at a rebellion which would return them to their former positions of authority). Instead, the people nominate those leaders they feel fit the bill, and Moshe approves them and appoints them officially. Once these leaders are nominated, Moshe makes sure -- as Parashat Devarim reports -- to deliver to them detailed instructions about maintaining impartiality and honesty in the face of obstacles (echoing the description in Parashat Yitro of "haters of ill-gotten gains," "men of truth," etc.).

The comparison between the two versions, then, reveals the purpose and character of Sefer Shemot and Sefer Devarim, as well as teaching sophisticated strategies for leadership and diplomacy.

Shabbat Shalom

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PARSHAT YITRO - Ma'amad Har Sinai

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

THE 'PROPOSAL'

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOMETHING 'OLD' or SOMETHING 'NEW'

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

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

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

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

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

MAKING PLANS (and changing them)

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

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

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

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

BE PREPARED!

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

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

What allows Rashi to offer such a bold interpretation?

Rashi's interpretation is based on an apparent contradiction between God's original plan in 19:9 and what appears to be His new plan, as described in the next two psukim:

"And God told Moshe, 'Go to the people and get them ready... for on the third day God will reveal Himself IN VIEW OF ALL THE PEOPLE on Har Sinai." (see 19:10-11)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RUNAWAY BRIDE

According to the new plan, on 'day three' God should reveal Himself on Mount Sinai and speak the DIBROT directly to the entire nation. Let's continue now in chapter 19 and see what happens:

"And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, and there were loud sounds and lightening, and a THICK CLOUD on the mountain, and the SHOFAR sounded very strong, and the people in the CAMP all became frightened." (19:16)

If you read this pasuk carefully, you will most probably be startled by the fact that Bnei Yisrael never came to Har Sinai that morning! Instead, they were so frightened of God's "hitgalut" [revelation] that they remained in the CAMP.

[Our minhag to stay up (and learn Torah) the entire night of Shavuot is based on the Midrash that Bnei Yisrael 'slept in' on that morning. Note how that Midrash is based on this pasuk.]

This background explains the next pasuk, where Moshe goes back to the camp, and brings everyone back to the foot of the mountain (see 19:17). Now it's time to 'try it again'. Let's see what happens:

"And Har Sinai was full of smoke, for God had DESCENDED upon it in FIRE, and its smoke was like a furnace, and the entire mountain shook violently..." (see 19:18)

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

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

Let's examine that pasuk (19:19) carefully:

"The sound of the shofar grew louder and louder; as Moshe would speak, God would answer him with a KOL." (19:19)

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

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

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

PLAN 'B' - MYSTERIOUSLY MISSING!

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

[See also Rambam in Moreh N'vuchim II, chapter 33.]

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

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

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

Ramban rejects Rashi's interpretation of 19:19 (as do many other commentators), arguing that 19:19 does NOT describe how the Dibrot were given. Instead, Ramban explains that "Moshe y'daber..." describes the conversation between God and Moshe that immediately follows in 19:20-25.

[As usual, Ramban prefers to keep the sequence of events according to the order of the psukim, while Rashi is willing to 'change' the order for thematic considerations.]

LIMITATION/ A FINAL WARNING

To better appreciate this "machloket" between Rashi and Ramban, we must examine the last set of psukim in chapter 19 (i.e. 19:20-25).

"God descended upon Mount Sinai to the TOP of the Mountain and summoned Moshe to the TOP of the Mountain, and Moshe ascended... Then God told Moshe: Go down and WARN the people lest they break through toward God to SEE, and many of them will perish. And even the KOHANIM who are permitted to come closer must prepare themselves..." (19:20-22)

[Btw, note that 20:25 refers to Moshe's conveying this warning to the people, NOT to his conveying the "DIBROT," as is commonly misunderstood. See Rashi!]

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

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

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

Note how chapter 19 now divides into four distinct sections:

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

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

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

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

TREPIDATION [or 'FEAR' STORY ONE']

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS - FIRST OR THIRD PERSON

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

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

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

A PROOF FROM SEFER DEVARIM

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

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

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

AHAVA and YIRAH

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

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

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

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

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

GOD KNOWS BEST

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND SOURCES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. PLAN A & PLAN B

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

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

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

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

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

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

D. What Did Bnei Yisrael Hear?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PARSHAT YITRO - Intro to 2nd half of Sefer Shmot

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

INTRODUCTION - STRUCTURE AND THEME IN CHUMASH

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. NARRATIVE

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

II. MITZVOT

ALL of the mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael receive at Sinai.

III. NARRATIVE

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

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

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

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

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

CHRONOLOGY IN CHUMASH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEN DID YITRO COME (AND GO)?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MA'AMAD HAR SINAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parshas Yitro: Aseret Hadibrot: The Ten Commandments

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. ASERET HAD'VARIM

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

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

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

II. COUNTING UP TO "TEN"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. 10 –> 613?

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

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

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

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

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

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

V. PREMISE B: THE DIBROT WERE "INTERRUPTED"

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

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

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

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

VI. PREMISE C: TWO VERSIONS MUST BE INTEGRATED

As we all know, there are two versions of the 'Aseret haDibrot in the Torah. Besides those appearing in our Parashah (20:2-14), they are "repeated" by Mosheh to the new generation in D'varim (5:6-18). Although the two versions are structurally alike, there are some significant differences between them – especially in the Dibber about Shabbat. Rabbinic tradition – and a simple reading of the text – mandates that both versions were given at Sinai. For example, the notion that Shamor (D'varim) and Zakhor (Sh'mot) were said in one voice is not only p'shat – it is also Halakhically meaningful (see BT Berakhot 20b). In order to fully understand the impact of the 'Aseret haDibrot, we have to integrate both versions. [A modern-day analogy to this would be taking a stereo recording and isolating each channel – first listening to the left channel with the strings and horns, then listening to the right channel with the percussion and vocals; God gave us "stereo" at Sinai (at least), and each "channel" was written separately. The harmonic "reality" can only be understood when integrated.]

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

VII. THE FIRST DIBROT: INTRODUCTION TO GOD

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

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

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

VIII. TWO ASPECTS OF SHABBAT

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

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

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

* Difference #1: Zakhor – "remember" (Sh'mot) / Shamor – "observe" (D'varim);

* Difference #2: "…as Hashem your God commanded you." (D'varim only)

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

* Difference #4: Commemoration of Creation (Sh'mot)/Commemoration of Exodus (D'varim)

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

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

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

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

(dating back two to three weeks to the first week of the Mahn) is being reinforced while another aspect, one which is also part of our most recent experience of the Exodus, is being integrated into that same day of cessation/commemoration.

IX. TWO ASPECTS OF KIBBUD AV VA'EM

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

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

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

X. MURDER-ADULTERY – KIDNAPPING/STEALING

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

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

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

XI. THE NEW SOCIAL CIRCLE: RE'AKHA'

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

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

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

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