



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY

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וְכָל הָעַם רֹאִים אֶת
הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת הַלְפִידִם...









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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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The Servant Leader

Do we exist to serve others or for others to serve us?



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

Rav Kook - The Holy Servant

One of the many things that attracted me to the personality and writings of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook z"l, the founding Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, was the way in which he signed many of his letters. After signing his name, he would state the following – עבד לעם קדוש על אדמת קודש – a servant of the holy People in the holy land.

Rav Kook saw himself first and foremost as a servant of his people. In fact, arguably more than any other modern-day Jewish thinker, Rav Kook highlighted the paramount importance of the כלל – the collective. As important as personal growth and striving for self-perfection is, and indeed it is, the primary purpose of the individual is to serve the כלל, the collective and greater good. To ensure that our family, community, People and the world as a whole is better for us having been present. To be proactive practitioners in good for its own sake. Rav Kook's life was the epitome of this selfless sacrifice and dedication.

A Landmark Book

One of the most important books on leadership in the modern era focuses on this exact point of servant leadership. Published in 1977, "Servant Leadership" by Robert K Greenleaf clarified in a comprehensive and thought-provoking way the centrality of the quality of being a servant in the realm of leadership. He stated that the desire to serve is what

should give birth to the desire to lead, and not the other way around. Greenleaf says "The servant-leader is a servant first... Becoming a servant leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from the one who is a leader first... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first, to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and the most difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?"

This created a paradigm shift in modern leadership thinking.

Indeed, thousands of years before Robert Greenleaf we encounter in the Chumash the ultimate servant leader – Moshe Rabbeinu himself. In the beginning of this week's Parasha – יתרו – we see two critical examples of many throughout Moshe Rabbeinu's life, of his quality of servant leadership.

The Ultimate Servant Leader

When his father-in-law, Yitro, joins him in the desert from Midyan, we see how it is Moshe Rabbeinu himself who stands over him, personally organizing and serving the festive meal. The Midrash Mechilta cited by Rashi, teaches us this insight based on the seeming irregularity of Moshe's absence from the meal. The

verse states (Shemot 18:12) regarding the festive meal that was enjoyed when Yitro joined בני ישראל in the desert as follows:

ויבא אהרן וכל זקני ישראל לאכול לחם עם חותן משה לפני האלוקים

“And Aaron and all the Elders of Israel came to eat bread with the father-in-law of Moses before G-d.”

Noting Moshe’s absence at the meal, the Midrash states:

ומשה היכן הלך, והלא הוא שיצא לקראתו וגרם לו את כל הכבוד, אלא שהיה עומד ומשמש לפנייהם

“And where did Moshe go to, since it was he who went out to meet him and afforded him all of this honor? Moshe indeed was standing over them and serving them.”

Moshe was present and the reason he was not participating in the meal was because, incredibly, he was serving them – ensuring that their needs were being fully attended to.

Hospitality and Leadership

This is a great lesson in both the realms of hospitality and leadership. In terms of hospitality – no matter how great the stature and status of the host is, it is incumbent upon him or her to serve their guests – to ensure that their needs are fully taken care of. Just as the founding father of the Jewish People Avraham was a paragon of hospitality so too was the greatest prophet and teacher and Israel – Moshe. So great is hospitality that it transforms the host, the owner of the food being served, into



True G-dliness means putting the cause before ourselves and seeing ourselves as servants of the People and the greater good.

the head-servant dedicated to the needs of others.

It is also critical in the realm of leadership. Moshe, the great Servant-Leader of the Jewish people, was standing in public and acting as a servant to his heathen father-in-law Yitro. Leadership means leading by personal example – not placing prestige before people and public status before service.

The very next verse highlights the consistency of servant leadership by showing that it is not only in the realm of hospitality that Moshe was a servant, but also in the realm of judgment. The next verse states that on the following day Moshe sat judging the people from morning till evening. Moshe would repeat this day in and day out, placing the needs of the people before his own. We all know that Yitro advised Moshe on how he needed to create a more sustainable system in order to meet the many needs of the people. In principle though, Moshe saw himself first as a servant of his people and therefore saw it as his responsibility to dedicate his life to their needs.

True G-dliness means putting the cause before ourselves and seeing ourselves as servants of the People and the greater good.

Serving Others or Self-Serving?

This then is the hallmark of our great leaders echoing throughout Jewish history, from Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu to Rav Kook and until today – that the leader is forever a servant, always aligning his or her needs with the needs of the כלל, the greater good, and never using others as leverage to advance their own personal aspirations. If as a result of our contribution to others, our status and standing is enhanced and ‘שכרה בצידה’ – we benefit as a result – that is totally in order. Personal remuneration and benefit as a result and consequence of service to others is certainly appropriate. The question is one of focus and priority – do we exist to serve others or do others exist to serve us? The latter is self serving where others are part of our way to get ahead. Judaism passionately believes in the former – the leader first and foremost as a servant.

It is out of a desire to serve that great leaders are born. In our era where many accentuate individualism and personal gain, the unique quality of servant leadership is greatly needed.

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Radiating From Our Land: Being the Or La'goyim We Are Meant To Be



Rabbi Reuven Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi
Dean of Overseas Students, Yeshivat Hakotel

וְעַתָּה אִם שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשִׁמְרֹתֶם אֶת בְּרִיתִי וְהֵייתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים כִּי לִי כָּל הָאָרֶץ:
וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מִמְלַכֵּת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ (שמות יט:ו-ז):

וְשִׁמְרֹתֶם וְעִשִׂיתֶם כִּי הוּא חֻמְתְּכֶם וּבִינְתְּכֶם לְעֵינֵי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמָעוּ וְאֵת כָּל הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה וְאַמְרוּ רַק עִם חֶכְם וְנִבּוֹן הַגּוֹי הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה (דברים ד:ו):
קוּמִי אוֹרֵי כִּי בָּא אֲוֶרֶךְ וְכִבוֹד ה' עֲלֵיךְ זָרַח:
כִּי הִנֵּה הַחֶשֶׁךְ יִכְסֶה אֶרֶץ וְעֶרְפֶּל לְאֻמִּים וְעֲלֵיךְ יִזְרַח ה' וְכִבוֹדוֹ עֲלֵיךְ יִרְאָה:
וְהִלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאֲוֶרֶךְ וּמְלָכִים לְנֹגַהּ זָרַח (ישעיה ס:ג-א):

Many people cite Yeshayahu's description of the Jewish people as an "or la'goyim — a light unto the nations" as a clarion call for us to enlighten others. But what way of life makes this possible?

A Light from the Land of Israel (The Torah Sources)

Though most associate our responsibility to enlighten the nations with Yeshayahu's call to be an "or la'goyim," the foundation lies in the Torah itself.

As the Jewish people prepared to enter Eretz Yisrael and begin their lives as a people in their land interacting with other nations, Moshe encouraged them to continue observing *mitzvot*. One of the many reasons he gave was that other nations would see this observance as wise and intelligent.¹

Naturally, people and nations want to live in a way that others understand and respect. This often leads to assimilation and abandonment of one's own unique values. Moshe taught the first generation of Jews entering Eretz Yisrael to avoid veering from Torah and *mitzvot* in the hope of being appreciated and respected by other nations. Though we might feel self-conscious about our different way of life, the nations will respect us as wise and intelligent if we remain true to the Torah.

In this week's parsha the Torah goes even further. At the footsteps of Mount Sinai, Hashem explained that His *mitzvot* are meant to help us play the proactive role of "mamlechet kohanim,"² to serve as a nation of ministers.³ Like *kohanim* who educate the Jewish people,⁴ all of Am Yisrael is charged with teaching and inspiring the nations of the world.⁵

Our goal and responsibility is not merely to have the nations appreciate our values and way of life, but to teach them to live by Torah values as well. Like the first Jew — Avraham Avinu — who drew people to *avodat Hashem* by "calling out in Hashem's name,"⁶ we, his descendants, should actively call people to recognize Hashem's presence and role in the world. This is how the Netziv explains Hashem's promise to Avraham that his children would be like the stars of the sky:⁷ The Jewish people, like the stars, are meant to enlighten the world.⁸

The idea that emerges from Shemot and Devarim is that Hashem brought us to the land of Israel and gave us Torah and *mitzvot* in order for us to enlighten the rest of the world.

Yeshayahu: The Goal of Our Return

Yeshayahu HaNavi applied this idea to the Jewish people's similar situation hundreds of years after their first entry into Eretz Yisrael. Though they had initially succeeded in building the Beit HaMikdash

and developing a kingdom that other nations respected and sought to emulate,⁹ they eventually veered from the proper path. Yeshayahu described a society rife with injustice and immorality. This reality would lead to the *churban HaMikdash* and an exile meant to punish and purify the Jewish people.

Though most of Sefer Yeshayahu consists of harsh descriptions of the impending *churban*, Yeshayahu concluded with prophecies of consolation, including the description of the Jewish people's return to Eretz Yisrael and their restoration to their place amongst the nations. This is the context in which Yeshayahu Hanavi used the phrase "or la'goyim."¹⁰

Though Jews should always seek to influence others,¹¹ Moshe and Yeshayahu framed this role as part of our presence in Eretz Yisrael. Our life in Eretz Yisrael gives us a national presence and place on the international stage. This affords us the opportunity to build a genuine Torah society which can serve as a model for others.

This is the backdrop to the Zionist vision — presented by the likes of David Ben Gurion¹² and Ze'ev Jabotinsky¹³ — which saw our being an *or la'goyim* as a central part of the Zionist mission. Jabotinsky saw this as the ultimate goal of the state and the third and final stage of the Zionist mission.¹⁴

Continued on page 10

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Revelation & Responsibility Revisited



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

The enactment of the haftara readings and the weekly selections read in conjunction with the Torah portions may be understood from both an educational and experiential perspective. Educationally, the *haftarah* provides *parshanut* – commentary on topics and themes presented in the *parashat hashavua*. The narratives and speeches of the prophets provide additional text and context of words, ideas, and messages found in the Torah and thereby elucidate, highlight and at times interpret the Torah reading. Some *haftarot*, however, dovetail more with the Jewish calendar than with the weekly *parasha*, to enliven the messages and provide contemporary meaning to our annual experiences.¹

The *haftara* reading for *parashat Yitro* (Yeshayahu 6:1-7:6, 9:5-6) is an excellent example of the educational/commentary approach. The primary theme of this week's *parasha* is *Ma'amad Har Sinai* – Divine revelation to *Am Yisrael* at *Har Sinai*; the *haftara*'s- Yeshayahu's *hakdashat nevuah* (consecration of the prophet) through revelation. Firstly, there are numerous textual parallels between the revelations: Both are accompanied by sounds, smoking and shaking.² Both describe Hashem manifest from on high, and both underscore the Divine selection of prophets – Moshe and Yeshayahu,³ as the *Mekhilta* explains: "[They will believe] in you (Moshe) and in the prophets who are destined to follow you."

Oftentimes the words of the prophets resound with consonance of words from the Torah in order to amplify the dissonance. Although Yeshayahu describes Divine revelation in the Beit Hamikdash with similar motifs to the revelation at *Har Sinai*, the contrasts are clear. By *Har Sinai*, Hashem's presence is manifest solely

from atop of the mountain, His transcendence evident to the entire nation. The roots – ה.ל.ע (ascend) and י.ר.ד. (descend) appear seven times each throughout the *parashat hashavua*, highlighting Hashem's revelation from above, and the prohibition of the people to ascend. Even at the end of the *parasha*, there are restrictions regarding ascending the altar.⁴ In order to communicate with Hashem, Moshe is commanded to ascend as Hashem "descends" from celestial spheres upon the mountain in fire. Moshe must then descend the mountain to communicate with the people. Yeshayahu, however, witnesses the *Shekhina* ascending from the Beit HaMikdash to heaven as "His train filled the temple"⁵ Hashem's immanence in this world is emphasized as well as His involvement and interaction with mortal man. In place of the mountain shaking and becoming filled with smoke from above, the doorposts moved and the "House" became filled with smoke.

Instead of the prophet Moshe ascending alone to the fiery mountaintop as the people remain below, Yeshayahu interacts with the angels as he "dwells among a people." Moshe warned the nation not to touch (י.ל.א)⁶ the mountain lest they shall die! Yeshayahu, as did *Am Yisrael*, feared that he would die for having seen the King, yet in contrast, one of the angels brings fire from below (the *mizbayach*) and the prophet is touched (י.ל.א) by an angel, his iniquity removed, and his lips prepared to speak directly with Hashem. If *Har Sinai* broadcasts Divine majesty and transcendence, then Yeshayahu's vision teaches of immanence and humility; the angels call one to the other, "the entire world is filled with His glory."⁷

In both narratives, Hashem offered a proposal of responsibility and each one was accepted affirmatively. To the proposal of

faithfully observing Hashem's covenant, the nation responded, "Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do."⁸ Yeshayahu heard Hashem's offer, "Whom shall I send and who shall go for us" and replied, "Here I am, send me!"⁹ He is therefore an appropriate prophet to rebuke the nation for not remembering or comprehending what they accepted, saw and heard¹⁰ at *Har Sinai*.

The Ashkenazi custom is to add six *pesukim* of encouragement from chapter seven of Yeshayahu followed by another six verses in chapter nine, containing poetic promises of everlasting peace. This may serve as a reminder and commentary of the beginning of this week's *parasha*, when Yitro arrives in peace and advises a judicial system that will provide for peace.¹¹ The *parasha* continues with Hashem's proposal to create a "kingdom of ministers and a holy nation"¹² through commandments and covenant and the *haftara* concludes with the promise of the everlasting Davidic kingdom founded on justice and righteousness.¹³ Revelation may be ephemeral but the consequences and commitments are eternal.

1. For further discussion see Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein, <https://torah.etzion.org.il/en/themes-and-ideas-haftara-general-introduction>

2. Shemot 20:15, Yeshayahu 6:4

3. Shemot 19:9, Yeshayahu 6:8

4. Shemot 20:23

5. Yeshayahu 6:1

6. Shemot 19:12-13, 3x

7. Yeshayahu 6:3

8. Shemot 19:5-6,8

9. Yeshayahu 6:8

10. Yeshayahu 6:9-10

11. Shemot 19:7,23

12. Shemot 19:6

13. Yeshayahu 9:6

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: Can an Ashkenazic/Sephardic Jew ask the other to do melacha for him on Shabbat if that action is forbidden for him but permissible for the other?

Answer: The Rashba writes that it is permissible for one who accepted Shabbat upon himself to ask another Jew to do melacha for him. The Shulchan Aruch (OC 263:17) quotes the Rashba and does not quote a dissenting opinion. The Rema extends this leniency, adding that on motzei Shabbat one who has not yet taken out Shabbat may ask another Jew to do melacha for him.

We must ask: Why is this allowed? The Chachamim prohibit amirah (asking) even to a non-Jew to do melacha! The Beit Yosef and Magen Avraham explain that the difference lies in the circumstances. On erev Shabbat/motzei Shabbat, this person chooses to extend his Shabbat but could have been able to do the melacha. In such situations, we allow you to ask another to do melacha. The Taz explains differently: the issur of amirah (to a Jew or non-Jew) applies only to things which are prohibited for all Jews, and not matters which are partially prohibited. Therefore, when you accept Shabbat early, the prohibition of amirah does not yet apply as the action prohibited to you is not prohibited to all Jews.

This all stands as a backdrop to our question of asking a Sephardi/Ashkenazi friend.

According to the reasoning of the Magen Avraham, this would not be allowed. According to the Taz, this seemingly should be allowed. This act of melacha is not something which is prohibited to all of Am Yisrael, as either Sephardim or Ashkenazim hold it is permitted! Therefore, based on the Taz, there would

be no prohibition of amirah. Nevertheless, the Yalkut Yosef writes that even the Taz would prohibit such a practice. While different sects may have different halachic rulings, each one believes that their practice is the proper halacha for all of Am Yisrael. This is not comparable to erev Shabbat when many Jews have no prohibition as Shabbat has not yet arrived. Therefore, Rav Ovadya does not allow for this based on the Taz. He adds, however, that if one chooses on his own to do the melacha for the other, there is no prohibition.

Rav Messas, however, paskins that based on the Taz, Sephardim may ask Ashkenazim to do melacha for them on Shabbat. His reasoning is based on the introduction to the Beit Yosef, where Rav Yosef Kairo writes that those who have their own minhag should continue in their ways and not accept his rulings. Clearly, he did not view his sefer as a ruling for all of Am Yisrael, and therefore, if Ashkenazim permit something, Sephardim can ask them to do it for them as it is not a melacha that is prohibited for all of Am Yisrael.

In practice, it is not proper for Sephardim/Ashkenazim to ask each other to do melacha. If one does it on his own accord, this is fine, even if it is done with the foreknowledge that it is convenient for the other person.

Question: Can one ask his wife or children to do melacha for him after taking in Shabbat early?

Answer: The Shevet Halevi writes that a father may ask his wife or children in this situation. The pasuk of “lo ta'aseh kol melacha ata uvincha uvitecha... - You shall do no work, neither you nor your son nor your daughter...” only applies to causing

them to violate Shabbat, but if it is not yet Shabbat for the child, this prohibition is not applicable. Igrot Moshe, however, writes that lechatchila one's wife should not do melacha for him if he has accepted Shabbat early.

Question: If I realize that I did not say “v'tein tal u'matar livracha” right before I start saying the end of the bracha (before “Baruch Ata”), what should I do?

Answer: The Rishonim discuss what to do in this situation. According to the Ra'avya, you say “v'tein tal u'matar livracha” and continue the normal text of the bracha from those words on. According to the Rosh, you say “v'tein tal u'matar livracha al pnei ha'adama” but continue right into the bracha as opposed to going back. Seemingly, the Ra'avya understood that the placement of the bakasha within the bracha is essential, whereas the Rosh disagreed. The Mishneh Berurah (117:15) paskins like the Rosh, but writes that lechatchila one should follow the Ra'avya.

If one realizes after saying “baruch ata Hashem”, the Biur Halacha says that you can say “lamdeinu chukecha” because it is a passuk in Tehillim, and afterwards say “v'tein tal u'matar livracha” and continue with the rest of the bracha. Rav Feinstein did not accept this solution as one should not mention pesukim that are not part of tefillah. Nevertheless, many poskim agreed with the Biur Halacha (Eshel Avraham, Yabiyah Omer).

● *Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.*

דיון משפחתי: פרשת יתרו

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



רתו חותן משה מגיע לביקור אצלו במדבר, וכמתבונן מהצד הוא רואה את המאמץ האדיר שמשקיע משה בהנהגת העם:

וַיָּבֵא יתרו חתן מֹשֶׁה וּבְנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֶל הַמִּדְבָּר... וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה לְשַׁפֵּט אֶת הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה מִן הַבֹּקֶר עַד הָעֶרֶב: וַיֵּרָא חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה לָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מֶה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה לָעָם מִדּוּעַ אַתָּה יוֹשֵׁב לְבַדְּךָ וְכָל הָעָם נֹצֵץ עֲלֶיךָ מִן הַבֹּקֶר עַד עֶרֶב: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתְנוֹ כִּי יָבֵא אֵלַי הָעָם לְדַרְשׁ אֵלָיִם: כִּי יִהְיֶה לָהֶם דָּבָר בָּא אֵלַי וְשִׁפְטֵתִי בֵּין אִישׁ וּבֵין רֵעֵהוּ וְהוֹדַעְתִּי אֶת חֻקֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֶת תּוֹרֹתָיו (שמות י"ח, ה-טז).

משה רבנו מקבל קהל מבוקר עד ערב, מאחר והוא השופט היחיד היודע את הדינים ומסוגל לדון ולהכריע, והוא גם הנביא היחיד, המסוגל לדבר עם ה' ולהעביר לאנשים את דברו, וללמד אותם את דרכיו ומצוותיו.

יתרו מתבונן במתרחש מן הצד, ורואה את מה שמשה עצמו איננו מסוגל לראות: וַיֹּאמֶר חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵלָיו לֹא טוֹב הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה: נָבֵל תִּבְלַגְּם אַתָּה גַם הָעָם הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עִמָּךְ כִּי כָבֵד מִמֶּךָ הַדְּבָר לֹא תוּכַל עֲשׂוֹה לְבַדְּךָ (יז-יח). לא יתכן שאדם אחד יקח את כל עול ההנהגה על עצמו.

ומסביר ר' יוסף בכור שור: "נבול תבול – לשון חלשות, כמו 'והעלה נבל'. גם אתה: שלא תוכל לסבול. גם העם הזה: שלא יוכלו לסבול, שיעמדו כל היום להמתין על דינם.

ויש לפרש: "נבל תבול", לשון עירוב, כמו "ונבלה שם שפתם", שמתבלבל אתה והן, שכל אחד צועק לך: "שמעני אדוני!" וזה צועק ואין אתה יודע למי תענה, והם אינם יודעים למי ידברו"

אדם אחד לבדו, ואפילו אם הוא משה רבנו, לא יכול למלא את כל המשימות, ואם הוא מנסה לעשות הכל לבד הוא עלול לפספס, להתבלבל, לא להספיק

ואפילו לטעות. וגם אם לא יעשה טעויות ולא ייכשל, הוא עלול להחלש, עד כדי כך שלא יוכל להמשיך להנהיג את העם.

הפתרון למצב זה הוא לכאורה פשוט – להאציל סמכויות, למנות אנשים נוספים ולהכשיר אותם למלא חלק מתפקידיו של המנהיג, כפי שמציע יתרו: עֲתָה שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי אֵינְךָ וַיְהִי אֶלֶּהִים עִמָּךְ הִיָּה אַתָּה לָעָם מוֹל הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִבֵּאתָ אֶתָּה אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲלֵהֶם הָאֱלֹהִים: וְהִזְהַרְתָּ אֹתָהֶם אֶת הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת הַתּוֹרֹת וְהוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם אֶת הַדְּרֹךְ יְלֹכוּ בָהּ וְאֶת הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ: וְאִתָּה תִּחְזָה מִכָּל הָעָם אֲנָשֵׁי חֵיל יִרְאֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲנָשֵׁי אֱמֶת שֹׂנְאֵי בָצַע וְשֹׂמְתֵי עֲלֵהֶם שְׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שְׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שְׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשְׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֹת: וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת הָעָם בְּכָל יַעַת וְהָיָה כָּל הַדְּבָר הַגָּדֹל יָבִיאוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְכָל הַדְּבָר הַקָּטָן יִשְׁפְּטוּ הֵם וְהִקְלַל מֵעַלְיָךְ וְנִשְׂאוּ אִתָּךְ: אִם אַתָּה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה תַּעֲשֶׂה וְצִוְּךָ אֱלֹהִים וְיִכְלַת עֲמַד וְגַם כָּל הָעָם הַזֶּה עַל מְקוֹמוֹ יָבֵא בְּשָׁלוֹם (יט-כג). לפי הצעת יתרו, משה עדיין מנהיג את העם, ועומד מול הא-להים לשמוע את דברו ולהעביר אותו הלאה אל העם, אך מתחתיו עומדים אנשים נוספים, שמבצעים בפועל את המשימות: לימוד התורה לעם, שיפוט בבתי דין, ועוד.

אם הרעיון כל כך פשוט וברור, כיצד יתכן שמשה לא חשב עליו בעצמו?

יתכן שמשה בעצמו היה מסור לעם ולדבר ה' עד כדי כך שלא שם לב עד כמה כבדה המשימה המוטלת על כתפיו: יתכן שמשה חשב שה' מצפה ממנו להנהיג את העם לבדו (הרי במעמד הסנה ה' אמר למשה לשתף את אהרון בהנהגה רק לאחר שמשה סירב לשליחות כמה פעמים, וה' כעס עליו על כך); ויתכן שמשה לא חשב שיש בעם אנשים נוספים המסוגלים להנהיג בדרגה שלו.

משה רבנו הוא המנהיג הראשון של עם ישראל, ומתמודד לראשונה עם שאלות של מנהיגות.

אחד מהכללים הבסיסיים בניהול ובמנהיגות הוא היכולת להאציל סמכויות. האצלת סמכויות יכולה להיות יעילה ומקדמת עבור הפרויקט, המנהל והעובד גם יחד, אך היא יכולה גם להיות בעייתית אם היא נעשית בצורה לא נכונה. יש מנהלים שחוששים שהאצלת סמכויות תפגע באיכות תהליך העבודה ותוצריה כיוון שהם סבורים שהם יודעים לעשות את העבודה יותר טוב מכל עובד אחר ולכן כדאי שרק הם יעשו אותה. בנוסף – הכשרה של עובד עלולה לגזול מהמנהל זמן רב ולפעמים הוא יעדיף לוותר על כך. אך אחד החששות הגדולים של מנהלים הוא מאיבוד שליטה ובקרה על המתרחש בארגון. קיימים גם חסמים רגשיים כמו גאווה, וחוסר בטחון של המנהל לגבי מעמדו וכבודו מול העובדים.

על מנת להאציל סמכויות בצורה נכונה, צריך המנהל להכיר במגבלות יכולתו, בצורך שלו בשיתוף פעולה עם אנשים אחרים בעלי כישורים אחרים, ולדעת כיצד להעביר סמכות - לבחור אנשים שאפשר לתת בהם אמון; להגדיר להם בצורה ברורה את המשימה; להגדיר בצורה ברורה את רמת הדיווח הנדרשת מהם ואת מקומם מול המנהל; לכוון ולנהל מלמעלה, ויחד עם זאת לאפשר עצמאות ולתת גיבוי בעת הצורך.

כך נוהג משה רבנו בעקבות עצת יתרו – הוא בוחר אנשים ראויים לתפקיד: אֲנָשֵׁי חֵיל יִרְאֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲנָשֵׁי אֱמֶת שֹׂנְאֵי בָצַע (כא); מגדיר את גבולות הסמכות של כל אחד מהם: שְׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שְׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שְׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשְׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֹת (כא); מגדיר תפקיד ברור שלהם כלפי העם: וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת הָעָם בְּכָל יַעַת (כב); מגדיר את היחס בין התפקיד שלהם לתפקיד שלו: וְהָיָה כָּל הַדְּבָר הַגָּדֹל יָבִיאוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְכָל הַדְּבָר הַקָּטָן יִשְׁפְּטוּ הֵם (כב). כאשר האצלת הסמכויות נעשית בצורה נכונה, התוצאה טובה למנהיג וטובה לעם: וְהִקְלַל מֵעַלְיָךְ וְנִשְׂאוּ אִתָּךְ... וְיִכְלַת עֲמַד וְגַם כָּל הָעָם הַזֶּה עַל מְקוֹמוֹ יָבֵא בְּשָׁלוֹם: (כב-כג).

Making time for our souls



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

In this week's Torah portion, we receive one of the greatest gifts in human history: Shabbat. What's the secret of Shabbat that makes it such a precious gift? Shabbat gave a framework for time. During the French revolution, the government decided to dispense with all religious associations and so the days of the week were set according to the number of fingers on our hands; a week would consist of ten days instead of seven. This arrangement was tried nowhere else except in France, and it did not last long. The seven-day week was soon reinstated with the victorious return of Shabbat.

The ancient Greeks mocked Jews for their Shabbat observance. The Greeks, who considered the Jews lazy because they did not work one-seventh of the time, failed to understand the function of Shabbat. It was not a day for idleness, but for rejuvenation. Those who dedicate one day out of seven to the cessation of all work and to rest are never worn down and remain fresh.

Regarding time management, it is customary to say that we must distinguish between what is important and what is urgent. What is urgent is bound to dominate our daily agenda. And yet, progress in life is measured

ויבוא בלק ובניו אל משה... באותה מידה יתרו היה יכול להחליט הפוך, ואז היינו קוראים, כמו על בלק: "וישלח יתרו מלאכים אל בלעם", כדי לקלל את ישראל.

הרב שמואל פולק כותב שיש כאן מסר חשוב: מול אמת מוחלטת, האדם לא יכול להישאר שאנן. הוא חייב לעשות משהו, הוא לא נשאר בשטח האפור. אנחנו רואים זאת ברמה העולמית, כיצד מדינות שונות מגיבות לקיומה של ישראל, אבל גם ברמה האישית, בחיי היומיום שלנו. שתי ההחלטות נובעות מאותו מקום בנפש: משהו גדול קורה, ואנחנו לא יכולים להישאר אדישים להתרחשויות, אנחנו רוצים לעשות משהו. שנזכה לבחור נכון.

by our attention to what is important: family, community, study, prayer, conversation, song and, above all, our souls. Perhaps it's not by chance that we receive the gift of Shabbat immediately after leaving Egypt since Shabbat, in giving us respite from our daily mundane concerns is, in itself, an Exodus from slavery to freedom.



Just one year ago, amidst the Covid-19 outbreak in Israel, I received the following message, that is still relevant today:

"Shalom Sivan, I read that you tested positive and that you are in isolation. Me too. I wanted to share a thought I had once my door was closed, and members of my household and my customers had to manage without me.

"In this week's Torah portion, Yitro joins the nation of Israel and notices that Moshe Rabbeinu, his son-in-law, is working from morning until evening, sitting in judgment of the people's disputes. Yitro does not understand why and asks Moshe: 'What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you sit by yourself, while all the people stand before you from morning till evening?' Moshe Rabbeinu explains to him that his work is never done, that the people

צריך לדאוג שהמעשים יהיו מרובים מהחוכמה. מה שאתה עושה חשוב יותר מכמה אתה יודע.



שני אנשים הגיעו מבחור, וזכו לפרשה על שמם: יתרו ובלק. יש ביניהם דמיון רב. שניהם עקבו בחשדנות ובסקרנות אחרי העם החדש הזה שיצא ממצרים, ושניהם הסיקו מסקנות מעשיות. אבל, מצא את ההבדלים: יתרו התלהב והחליט לעזור ולהצטרף, ובלק החליט שצריך לקלל את העם ולהילחם בו. כל אחד נצרב לנצח בהיסטוריה, על פי בחירתו הטובה או הרעה.

כשקורה משהו דרמטי – צריך להכריע איפה אנחנו בסיפור. הרי בלק היה יכול לבחור אחרת, ואז הייתה לנו פרשה אחרת על שמו, ממש כמו על יתרו: "וישמע בלק את כל אשר עשה אלוקים למשה ולישראל..."

never stop coming to him, to which Yitro sharply responds: 'The thing you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people who are with you, for the matter is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.'

Yitro suggests that Moshe appoint a bevy of assistants: leaders over thousands, leaders over hundreds, leaders over fifties, and leaders over tens – in other words, Moshe should delegate authority to others. There are matters that others can address so that Moshe Rabbeinu has time left over to do what is truly important. And then, Yitro promises, if Moshe will heed his advice, 'then you will be able to endure, and this entire people, as well, will arrive at its destination in peace.'

"If even Moshe Rabbeinu cannot and need not do everything, it would seem that I can't either. And it's noteworthy that all of this happens just before matan Torah, the giving of the Torah. In other words, the prerequisite to receiving the Torah is knowing how to delegate and how to manage our day so that we can make time in our schedule for our souls. May we be so privileged and may you have a speedy and complete recovery. Shabbat Shalom."

לפני כמה שנים, הבת שלנו חזרה ביום שישי מהגן עם כתר לראשה, ועליו כתוב "נעשה ונשמע". היא למדה שכך בני ישראל הכריזו בהתלהבות, במעמד הר סיני: קודם כל אנחנו מוכנים לעשות, לקיים את מה ששמענו פה, וכמובן שבהמשך גם נשמע, נבין ונלמד.

שתי המילים האלה נחשבות לסימן זיהוי יהודי עד היום. מה החשיבות הגדולה בהן? למה מסופר שבני ישראל עלו כאן על סוד גדול? הנה הסבר אחד של חז"ל: "כל שמעשיו מרובים מחוכמתו – חוכמתו מתקיימת. וכל שחוכמתו מרובה ממעשיו – אין חוכמתו מתקיימת, שנאמר: נעשה ונשמע".

כלומר, הסדר של המילים אינו מקרי. היהדות מזוהה כבר אלפי שנים עם אנשים שקודם כל עושים את מה שצריך, מקיימים, תכלס, ואחר כך כמובן גם לומדים, חוקרים ומתפלספים. חשוב להבין ולהתעמק, אבל

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis
Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi
Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd (Yitro) the father-in-law of Moshe said to him, ‘The thing that you do is not good (“lo tov”). You will surely be worn out – you as well as the people that is with you, for this matter is too hard for you – you will not be able to do it alone’” (Shemot, 18:17-18).

Upon arriving at the Israelite camp and converting to our faith, Yitro was concerned that Moshe's personal workload would be detrimental, both to him personally and to the people. Witnessing how Moshe sat alone as the people queued up from morning to evening, Yitro exclaimed, “lo tov” – “the thing that you do is not good”. He therefore proposed that a hierarchical judicial system be established, with numerous levels of courts and only the greatest cases reaching Moshe himself.

There is only one other occurrence in the Torah where this term, “lo tov” appears.

In Gan Eden, after the creation of man, we read:

“HaShem Elokim said, (“lo tov...”) – ‘It is not good that man be alone, I will make him a helper corresponding to him’” (Bereishit, 2:18).

The lead up to the decision to create man a female partner is the only other place in the Torah where the term “lo tov” appears and there is a direct connection between these two occurrences.

On both occasions where the Torah uses the term “lo tov”, it describes a situation where man is alone. In Bereishit we are told that it is “lo tov” that man exist alone without a partner and in Shemot, Moshe is told that it is “lo tov” that he personally carry the judicial burden of the entire people – “you will not be able to do it alone”.

The Torah's definition of “lo tov” is where a person is alone. Yitro warns Moshe that by taking everything on himself, he will

not only be worn out himself, but he will wear out the people around him. Asking others for help is not a sign of weakness, but the key for success and strength.

No man is an island and it is not only the poor who rely on others to survive. Whether it be the love and support of one's family and friends, guidance from elders, direction from leaders, knowledge from educators, produce from farmers, treatment from doctors, security from soldiers, or the benefits we derive from different service providers, we are constantly in need of others.

The realisation that we cannot survive alone should not only provide us with a sense of gratitude, but also instill us with a sense of responsibility. In addition to ensuring that we are not alone ourselves, we must seek to help others that may feel alone.

“It is not good that man be alone”
Shabbat Shalom!

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Continued from page 4

Returning to our place among the nations is meant to facilitate more than just our ability to “live like other nations”; it is meant to facilitate our serving as an *or la'goyim*. S.Z. Kahane used this idea to explain the choice of the *menorah* as the symbol of the State of Israel. The *menorah* symbolizes the light the Jewish people's return to Israel offers the entire world.¹⁵ The Mishkan's *menorah* chosen as a symbol for the state is an earthly version of the Netziv's celestial starlight we are meant to model ourselves after.

In his *hesped* for Theodore Herzl,¹⁶ Rav Kook also emphasized this idea and urged the Zionist movement to focus on the kind of light that would develop a society that could realize this mission. A closer study of Yeshayahu's prophecies will help us appreciate Rav Kook's words.

Reflecting the Right Light (Yeshayahu 60)

In Chapter 60, Yeshayahu mentions our *or la'goyim* role after describing the revelation of Hashem's light upon us.¹⁷ Hashem reveals His light to us and we, in turn, spread it to the rest of the world. Like the moon which reflects the light of the sun, the Jewish people radiate Hashem's light to the rest of the world.¹⁸

Along similar lines, the Radak¹⁹ links *or la'goyim* to another famous Yeshayahu prophecy: “*Ki miTziyon teitzei Torah u'dvar Hashem miYerushalayim.*”²⁰ The Jewish people — residing in Yerushalayim — should teach the Torah, the practical expression of Hashem's light,²¹ to the rest of the world. We should embody Hashem's light through our personal lives and spread this light to others through the words of His Torah.²²

The Radak sees *or la'goyim* as connected to the continuation of the “*miTziyon teitzei Torah*” prophecy as well. The following *pasuk* describes world peace: “Nations will not raise swords against each other and no longer study the art of war.” The juxtaposition of world peace to *or la'goyim* teaches that peace will be achieved when people are unified by the light of Torah. As opposed to John Lennon's song *Imagine*, which linked world peace to the negation of ideology, Yeshayahu teaches us that world peace can only be achieved when people are unified by an appreciation of Hashem's Torah.²³

Rav Kook explains that this is why it is so critical to emphasize the religious and spiritual sides of our identity. In order for the Jewish nation in the Jewish state to radiate Hashem's light to the rest of the world, we must ensure that our state is rooted in and guided by the light of His Torah.

Desperate to be accepted by secular society, many Jewish movements throughout the ages, as well as elements within today's State of Israel, diluted Jewish values and adopted contemporary ones — often using the term *or la'goyim* to justify this shift. They hoped that accommodating Judaism to contemporary tastes would bring others to identify with and learn from them. In truth, reforming Judaism to reflect modern sensibilities meant that instead of radiating Hashem's light, they were merely reflecting contemporary values. They lost touch with the light of Torah Judaism and were ultimately seen by others as no more meaningful than the society they were mimicking.

We should learn from this mistake, heed the words of Rav Kook, and build our identity on Hashem's light as reflected in His Torah. When we do, we have a meaningful light to offer to the world.

Fulfilling Our True Role

Like in the times of Moshe Rabbeinu and as foreseen by Yeshayahu, our return to Eretz Yisrael is meant to include our serving as an *or la'goyim*. This role will earn us respect and bring peace to us and the entire world. Yet this vision remains elusive.

Despite the State of Israel's significant contributions to the world, such as drip irrigation, electric car grids, Waze, USB's, pillcams, solar windows, space cameras and other technologies, Jews continue to be hated. The State of Israel is the most vilified nation on the planet and lives under constant threat of attack — both from without and within.

This is because we have not fulfilled our mission to become a true *or la'goyim* — a nation that brings the genuine light of Hashem to the world and offers humanity true direction and meaning.

May we realize what being an *or la'goyim* truly means and live our lives in a way that allows us to play this role. May doing so allow us to impact the world in the

intended way and, through this, bring peace to the State of Israel and the entire world.

1. Devarim 4:6. Similarly, Rav Hershel Schachter, *shlit"a*, (Our Light Unto the Nations, Hamizrachi) links *or la'goyim* to the Torah's description of the nations of the world seeing “Hashem's name upon us and revering us (Sefer Devarim 28:10).” Our relationship with Hashem and personification of the *tzelem Elokim* ideal serve as a model for all humanity.
2. Shemot 19:6.
3. See Rashi (ibid.) who explains the phrase this way.
4. Devarim 33:10; Mishneh Torah L'Rambam, Hilchot Shemitah V'Yovel 13:12.
5. Seforno (ibid.). See also R' Avraham ben HaRambam (ibid.) who records that his father explained that we are meant to be role models for the other nations.
6. Sefer Bereishit 12:8, 13:4.
7. Sefer Bereishit 15:5.
8. Ha'emek Davar, ibid.
9. See, for example, Melachim I, Perek 10.
10. Sefer Yeshayahu 42:6, 59:6, 60:3.
11. Interestingly, the Netziv (Herchev Davar, Bereshit 47:28) and Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch saw *galut* as a way for the Jewish People to accomplish this goal.
12. Yichud Ve'yi'ud, pg. 359.
13. Ne'um B'kenes Hayesod Shel Hahistadrut Hatziyonit Hachadashah, Ne'umim 2:179.
14. Stage one is the formation of the state, and stage two is the ingathering of the Jewish people.
15. See Shir Hashirim Rabbah (1:21) which uses the idea of *or la'goyim* to explain Shir Hashirim's comparison of the Jewish people to olive oil.
16. Hamispeid BeYerushalayim.
17. Sefer Yeshayahu 60:1-3. These *pesukim* are the source for the *Hit'oriri* paragraph of Lecha Dodi.
18. See Metzudat David (ibid) and the Malbim (ibid) who explain these *pesukim* this way. Our role is to bring the nations of the world to commit themselves to Hashem as opposed to idol worship.
19. Radak, Yeshayahu 42:6. See also Jabotinsky's words (ibid). See also Seforno (Shemot 19:6) who links our role as *mamlechet kohanim* to this *pasuk*.
20. Sefer Yeshayahu 2:2. See also Sefer Michah 4:2.
21. See Mishlei 6:23.
22. See Radak (ibid) who explains that we should teach other nations the seven *mitzvot* they are meant to observe.
23. See also Tzefanya 3:9.



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To Thank Before We Think



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

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 G-d.

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

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



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.

However, it also makes sense to see them as three groups of three. The first three (one G-d, no other G-d, do not take G-d's name in vain) are about G-d, 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 G-d's image (Gen. 9:6). The third three (don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness) are about the basic institutions of society: the sanctity of marriage, the integrity of private property, and the administration of justice. Lose any of these and freedom begins to crumble.

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

Envy, covetousness, desiring what someone else has, is an emotion, not a thought, a word, or a deed. And surely we can't help our emotions. They used to be called the "passions," precisely because we are passive in relation to them. So how can

envy be forbidden at all? Surely it only makes sense to command or forbid matters that are within our control. In any case, why should the occasional spasm of envy matter if it does not lead to anything harmful to other people?

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

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

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

Rene Girard, in his classic *Violence and the Sacred*,³ says that the most basic cause of violence is mimetic desire, that is, the desire to have what someone else has, which is ultimately the desire to be what someone else is. Envy can lead to breaking

many of the other commands: it can move people to adultery, theft, false testimony, and even murder.⁴

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

So the prohibition of envy is not odd at all. It is the most basic force undermining the social harmony and order that are the aim of the Ten Commandments as a whole. Not only though do they forbid it; they also help us rise above it. It is precisely the first three commands, reminding us of G-d’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 G-d wanted us to be. We have what G-d 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 G-d, why should we want anything else merely because someone else has it? It is when we *stop* defining ourselves in relation to G-d and start defining ourselves in relation



If what matters most in our lives is how we appear in the eyes of G-d, why should we want anything else merely because someone else has it?

to other people that competition, strife, covetousness, and envy enter our minds, and they lead only to unhappiness.

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

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

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

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- In your experience, is envy a natural emotion?
- Is there a positive aspect to the existence of envy in our lives?
- How can letting gratitude into your life help you to avoid envy?

1. To be sure, Maimonides held that the first command is to believe in G-d. *Halachot Gedolot* as understood by Nachmanides, however, disagreed and maintained that the verse “I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt” is not a command but a prelude to the commands.
2. This has long been part of Jewish thought. It is at the heart of Chabad philosophy as set out in Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi’s masterpiece, *Tanya*. Likewise, Ibn Ezra in his commentary to this verse says that we only covet what we feel to be within our reach. We do not envy those we know we could never become.
3. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).
4. See Helmut Schoeck’s classic, *Envy: a Theory of Social Behaviour* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969). See also Joseph Epstein, *Envy* (New York: New York Public Library, 2003).
5. See Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Mesiras HaTorah



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

The Mishnah (Avos 1:1) records that in addition to the *ikar ha'emunah* (Principle of Faith) known as *Torah min haShamayim*, that the entire Torah is G-d-given, we have a tradition that “Moshe received the Torah from Sinai.”

One should not make the error of thinking that *Torah miSinai* means that the text of the Torah as we have it is the same as the text that was dictated to Moshe at Har Sinai. The Torah states explicitly that the text of the Torah is, in fact, a composite of three different texts. Some *parshiyos* in the Torah are introduced with the words *לאמר* while others begin *וידבר ד' אל משה בהר סיני לאמר* and yet others start *וידבר ד' אל משה בערבות מואב*.

The Gemara (Chagigah 6a-6b) explains that according to the accepted opinion, the principles and all the details of all of the mitzvos were told to Moshe at Har Sinai, then repeated in the *Ohel Mo'ed*, and reiterated a third time in *Arvos Mo'av* (Rashi, Vayikra 25:1). In other words, Moshe received three different texts of the mitzvos, and, at the conclusion of the forty years in the Midbar, Hashem instructed Moshe as to whether to use the first version, the second version, or the third version when he recorded a particular *parsha* in the Torah (see Chazon Ish, Orach Chaim 125:2-3).

All the *neshamos* of Bnei Yisrael were present at Har Sinai so that they would be affected by the *giluy Shechinah* (Divine Revelation), as the *passuk* teaches, “so that awe of Him shall be upon your faces, so that you shall not sin” (Shemos 20:17). An impression was made on the *neshamos* of the members of the Jewish Nation at Har Sinai; they could henceforth be identified as “those who are merciful, bashful, and who perform acts of kindness” (Yevamos

79a), to the extent that if one is lacking these *middos*, we must check his ancestry, for he must not have been present at Har Sinai (Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'Ezer 2:2).

Nevertheless, while it is true that all of the *neshamos* were present, the *bris* of Har Sinai is not legally binding on a *neshamah*, only on a person. Rashi quotes the Gemara (Shevuos 39a), which explains that the original *bris* at Har Sinai was made only with those people alive at that time, not with the future generations. We, today, would not be obligated to observe the mitzvos were it not for the second *bris* at *Arvos Mo'av*. It was this *bris* that obligated the future generations.

Given the limited binding power of the *bris* Sinai, there must have been a different objective of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. We may analyze the function of the declaration of the *Aseres HaDibros* in light of the *machlokes* between Rashi and the Ramban regarding the sequence of events surrounding *Ma'amad Har Sinai*.

The Ramban (Shemos 24:1) understands that the *pekkim* in *Parshas Yisro* and *Parshas Mishpatim* follow the chronological order. Accordingly, the declaration of the *Aseres HaDibros* in *Yisro* represented a step in the process of the *geirus* of the Jewish People. The Gemara (Kereisos 9a) derives the *dinim* of *geirus* from the experience of Bnei Yisrael at *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. Just as Bnei Yisrael undertook *milah*, *tevilah*, and *hartza'as dam* (*korbanos*) leading up to their acceptance of the Torah, so too must future converts receive a *bris milah* (for males), immerse in a *mikveh*, and bring a *korban*.

The *Rishonim* point out that another requisite component of *geirus* is *kabbalas ol mitzvos* (acceptance of mitzvah observance). Just as Bnei Yisrael declared “We

will do and we will obey” (Shemos 24:7), a *ger* must have a *kabbalas ol mitzvos* as well. Without this, the *geirus* is invalid. Thus, the *geirus* process was not completed until the end of *Mishpatim*, which describes the *kabbalas ol mitzvos* and the *korban geirus*.

The Gemara (Yevamos 47a-47b) teaches that aside from an initial *kabbalas ol mitzvos* by a prospective *ger*, just before he completely immerses himself in a *mikveh*, there is usually an additional ceremonial acceptance of mitzvos before the *beis din*. “*Talmidei chachamim* stand over him and inform him of some minor, easy mitzvos and some major, difficult mitzvos.” According to the Ramban, the declaration of the *Aseres HaDibros* represented this dramatic sampling of the mitzvos *haTorah* that is part of the *geirus* process. Rashi (Shemos 19:11), however, writes that the *parshiyos* regarding *Ma'amad Har Sinai* follow the principle of “*parshiyos* in the Torah do not always appear in chronological sequence.” First, the Jewish People underwent the *geirus* described at the end of *Mishpatim*, which included *kabbalas ol mitzvos* and the *korban geirus*. Thus, the event of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* that is described in *Yisro* took place after the national *geirus*. According to Rashi, therefore, the declaration of the *Aseres HaDibros* is to be understood as a national act of *limmud haTorah*.

As Rav Soloveitchik expressed it, the *machlokes* Ramban and Rashi revolves around the question of whether the event of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* was presented before non-Jews or before Jews, before those who did not yet have a complete *kedushas Yisrael* or before those who already had a complete *kedushas Yisrael*.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the *Parsha II*.

The Yom Kippur Seuda



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

Parshat Yitro begins with Yitro arriving at where Klal Yisrael were encamped and Moshe Rabbeinu coming out to greet him. We are then told about the advice Yitro gives to Moshe regarding appointing judges for the people. There are two opinions in the Gemara as to when this Parsha took place, and the Ramban holds that it happened before Matan Torah and the Even Ezer holds that it happened after.

However, there is a big question with the chronology of events. After Yitro has a Seuda with Moshe when he first arrives, the Posuk (18:13) says וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת – “And it was on the next day.” On the day after Yitro arrived, he began giving advice to Moshe. Rashi says that וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת was the day after Yom Kippur. This presents a very big problem. If, as Rashi is saying, it was the day after Moshe came down from Har Sinai and was indeed Motzei Yom Kippur, it means Yitro came and had the Seuda on Yom Kippur itself.

A lot of the commentators ask this question. The Ramban provides probably the simplest answer that when the Posuk says מחר, it isn't referring to the immediate



The Gemara explains that Shlomo Hamelech ruled that the Simcha of the Beit Hamikdash was able to push off the commandment of not eating on Yom Kippur.

next day but rather a few days after Yom Kippur. Similarly, Rashi explains that the use of the word מחר in Shemot 13:14 (וְהָיָה כִּי־שִׁשְׁאָלְךָ בְּנֶדְךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מַה־זֶּאת) in reference to the question of the evil son also doesn't mean 'tomorrow' in its most literal sense but rather that the question will be asked at some point in the future.

The Maharal provides a deeper answer. He says that when Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Har Sinai on Yom Kippur, that day of Yom Kippur became a day of Kapparah – of atonement.

The Gemara in Moed Kattan 9a brings the story of the Beit Hamikdash being inaugurated by Shlomo Hamelech. Part of the inauguration period was days of

festive meals. When you look at the dates of the inauguration, it comes out that seven days of festive meals in celebration of the inauguration immediately preceded seven days of Sukkot. This would mean that one of the days of eating was on Yom Kippur! The Gemara explains that Shlomo Hamelech ruled that the Simcha of the Beit Hamikdash was able to push off the commandment of not eating on Yom Kippur. This is because the Simcha of eating on that day was equivalent to the Mitzvah of fasting on that day.

Based on this, the Mizrachi says we can understand that the day Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Har Sinai with the second set of Luchot was certainly a day of joy and celebration. It was a day of pure joy, despite it being Yom Kippur. Just like with the inauguration in the days of Shlomo HaMelech, it was also decided that on the day of Yom Kippur that Moshe descended from Har Sinai with second set of Luchot, it was certainly permitted to eat as an expression of the joy and celebration of the day.

● Edited by Yehuda Kaufold and Josh Harris.

Charging Through Life



Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

In this week's parsha, Yitro, we encounter history's single biggest turning point, a moment that changed everything, for everyone, forever: the giving of the Torah by G-d to Moses and the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. From this moment onwards, nothing would be the same. The Torah had entered the world.

But, what is the Torah really? And why is its impact so powerful and far-reaching? We know that the Torah comprises 613 distinct commandments – the mitzvot – but what is their meaning and purpose?

The starting point is to understand that the Torah's total focus is the human being. The Talmud (Shabbat 88b), records how, when Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah from G-d, the angels vehemently protested, asking how G-d could consider giving away His most treasured possession – the Torah – to a creature of flesh and blood. G-d told Moses to answer the angels, and Moses proceeded to list the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt"; "Honour your father and your mother"; "Don't murder"; "Don't steal"; "Don't commit adultery". "Do you have a father and mother?" Moses asked the angels. "Have you been enslaved in Egypt? Have you passion or jealousy or greed, or any evil inclination?" In so doing, Moses clearly demonstrated that the Torah was intended for human beings. Or, put another way, human beings are created in order to fulfill the mitzvot of the Torah.

But, how do the mitzvot work?

The Torah calls the first human being Adam, which comes from the Hebrew word adama, meaning "earth" or "ground". What is the connection between the two? The Maharal explains that humans are similar to the ground in one essential

respect: they are both pure potential. Whether or not a piece of land will produce fruit depends on what is done with it. Even the most fertile piece of land will not produce fruit if it is left to lie fallow; it needs to be ploughed, fertilised and cultivated. So too, the human being is pure potential, and to live a fruitful, productive life requires great and continuous efforts. We arrive in this world as pure potential and, through the process of life, we actualise that potential. And it's up to us. We have been given free choice to turn that potential into personal growth and spiritual greatness, into becoming refined, elevated, moral and holy – but we can also choose to squander it and simply let it lie dormant.

The Maharal (Tiferet Yisrael, chapters 6-8) says the 613 mitzvot are a blueprint for us to "create ourselves" – to access and actualise our G-dly potential. The mitzvot have been specifically designed by our Creator to catalyse our latent spiritual energy. At its heart, this process of self-actualisation – of converting potential into actuality through performing the mitzvot – is an act of sublime creativity.

What are the mechanics here? How exactly do the mitzvot unleash our Divine potential? The Maharal explains that the mitzvot have been formulated by the Creator of everything, and therefore have the spiritual energy to develop the full potential of the human being. There is a natural bridge between Torah and the soul. With every new mitzvah we perform, we create a corresponding extra dimension within our soul. In essence, by living in tune with Torah, we live in tune with our soul; by living a true Torah life, we nurture and expand our spiritual selves.

Living in harmony with the soul brings with it a deep sense of spiritual connection

and tranquility of spirit. Indeed, the Midrash says the union between body and soul is fraught with tension. These two constituent parts of the human being come from different worlds, and have different needs. The Midrash illustrates this with the analogy of a marriage between a farmer and a princess; the farmer brings the princess all of the produce from the field that is so precious to him, but which is meaningless to her. So too, the body brings the soul all of the physical pleasures of this world, but the soul remains empty and unsatisfied. The soul originates from the palace of G-d and requires the goods of the spiritual world to feel satisfied and fulfilled. It requires a life of meaning and good deeds, and a connection to G-d, which the Torah provides. This is what gives us satisfaction and pleasure at a deep level.

There are many ways to demonstrate this. For example, we've all experienced the warm glow of satisfaction that comes from giving to others. A recent research project conducted by Michael Norton of Harvard Business School found that, regardless of income level, those people who spent money on others reported greater happiness, while those who spent more on themselves did not.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is the feeling of guilt – the deep sense of spiritual unease we experience – when we do things that are not in harmony with the soul.

Ramban explores another way the mitzvot are catalysts to unleash the full potential of a person. He emphasises that the mitzvot are not for G-d's benefit, even though He commanded us to perform them. He says G-d gave us the mitzvot for our own sakes – to mould us into better people. According to the Ramban, each mitzvah

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Being A Good Listener



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Not many parshiyot are named after individuals. What was so unique about Yitro that he merited to have a parsha referred to by his name? Moreover, there is debate among the Rishonim as to whether this parsha transpired prior to or following Matan Torah. According to the opinion of *ein mukdam u'meuchar b'Torah* – that Yitro is not in chronological order, why is this episode of Yitro's arrival purposely placed to precede Matan Torah?

Rav Wolbe in his Shiure Chumash, derives an important lesson from Yitro's actions. Imagine someone reading the New York Times and coming across an article about Kriyat Yam Suf. They may be amazed at learning of the miraculous event, yet they proceed to turn the page and continue on to the next article. They may be impressed, even amazed, but are not at all affected by what they just learned.

What was Yitro's reaction? He hears about the miracles that transpired at Yetziat Mitzrayim, and it permeates his very being. He immediately reacts by leaving his home and traveling with his daughter and grandsons to meet up with his son-in-law.

The Torah declares: “*vayishma Yitro*” (Yitro hears). One can “hear” but not “listen”. Onkelos translates the word “*nishma*” in the famous phrase “*naase v'nishma*” as “*nekabel*” – we will accept. It is a hearing that triggers a reaction – an acceptance.

Shlomo Hamelech requests of HaKadosh Baruch Hu “*v'natata l'avdecha lev l'shmoah*” – “provide for your servant, a heart that can hear” (Melachim I, 3:9). What exactly is Shlomo requesting? Sound enters through the ears not the heart. However, if one is affected by what he hears, then it will enter one's heart and trigger a reaction. Pharaoh heard and even witnessed G-d's strength, yet, “*kaved lev Pharaoh*” – his heart was hard and nothing was able to pierce it. Essentially, each *makka* went in one ear and out the other, having no lasting effect on him.

Perhaps, Yitro's arrival is purposely placed prior to Matan Torah, to teach us how to listen! G-d is about to speak to us and transmit the Torah to us. It is not enough to just hear what G-d says, but we have to listen, accept and internalize all of those commandments. Our response needs to be like that of Yitro – who immediately took what he heard and acted upon it. We too

must learn this lesson from Yitro. When we are inspired, we need to internalize and act upon it.

It is not only crucial to be a “good” listener – when we refer to *mitzvot ben adam l'Makom*. Unfortunately, at times when we are with friends and family we don't grant them the proper attention. They speak to us, but we are not listening attentively. We may check our messages or be distracted by our phones. We need to not hear them, but rather to **listen** to them as well. To try to understand what they are communicating. Whether it is requesting our opinion and assistance or providing us with advice and constructive criticism. Moshe was very busy but he took time to greet his father-in-law and to entertain and implement Yitro's suggestions.

May we be good listeners – in both the spiritual and social realms so that we internalize what we hear and properly react so we can maximize our potential.

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refines us in a particular way. He gives the example of the mitzvah to send away the mother bird before taking the chicks or the eggs from the nest, and how this helps us cultivate the quality of compassion. He also refers to the mitzvot of commemorating the great miracles of Jewish history. These are not, he says, for glorifying G-d, but rather for our own sake, so we should understand and appreciate these

formative moments of our people, and so we can reinforce our faith and clarify our worldview.

According to this, the mitzvot are a comprehensive programme of thought and action designed by G-d to help us become wise, compassionate, refined, loving, idealistic, giving, courageous, spiritual,

ethical and holy. To help us become better people in every conceivable way.

So, from the moment in history when we received the Torah, life would never be the same. From that moment on, we had a blueprint for how to live life, how to love life, and how to fulfill our awesome potential.

Parshas Yisro: Legacy and Continuity



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In Parshas Yisro, the purpose of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* comes to fruition. When Hashem promised Moshe the people would be physically freed from Egyptian bondage, He further promised that redemption would not end with physical freedom. *And I will take you to Me as a nation, and I will be to you a G-d* (Shemos 6:7). The Ibn Ezra teaches – *And I will take you to Me: When the Israelites will receive the Torah on Har Sinai.*

With the great Revelation at Sinai in this week's *parsha*, and the transmission of the *Aseres Ha'Dibros*, the former slaves are transformed into a people unto G-d. *And Elokim spoke all these words, saying: I am Hashem; Do not have gods of others before Me; Do not take G-d's Name in vain; Remember/Guard the Sabbath day to keep it holy; Honor your father and mother; Do not kill; Do not commit adultery; Do not steal; Do not bear false witness against your fellow; Do not covet all that your neighbor has* (ibid, 20:1-14).

In regard to the fifth *dibra*, the Torah commands us: *Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be lengthened on the land that Hashem, your G-d, is giving you* (20:12).

Regarding this foundational mitzvah, upon which the beginning of morality in our Jewish society begins and rests, R' S. R. Hirsch powerfully teaches, "*Yetzias Mitzrayim* and *Matan Torah* are the two basic facts in the history of the Jewish people that form the foundation of our allegiance to G-d as the Master of our fate and the Guide of our lives. These two facts are *historical truths*. However, the sole guarantee of their authenticity is tradition, and tradition depends solely on its faithful transmission from parents to children, and on its

willing acceptance by children from the hands of their parents.

"Thus, the survival of the great Divine institution that is Judaism rests entirely on the theoretical and practical obedience of children to parents. Accordingly, **כיבוד אב ואם** is the basic condition for the eternity of the Jewish nation.

"Through the father and the mother, G-d gives the child more than just his physical existence. Parents are also the link that connects the child to the Jewish past and enables him or her to be a Jewish man or woman. From the parents, the child receives the tradition of the Jewish mission, which is shaped by knowledge, a code of conduct and upbringing. The parents transmit to the child Jewish history and Jewish Law, so that eventually he, in turn, will pass them on to his own children. Just as he looks up to his parents, so will his own children someday look up to him. Without this connection between parents and children, *the chain of generations is broken, the hopes of the Jewish past are lost for the future, and the Jewish nation ceases to exist...*

"The mitzvah of **כיבוד אב ואם** requires of us that we demonstrate in every way, and in our whole behavior toward our parents, our deep appreciation of the great importance that G-d has given to our parents in our regard...

"It is this mission of the parents – not the amount of kindness, large or small, they have shown their children – that lies at the root of the mitzvah of **כיבוד אב ואם**, a mitzvah that increases with age and maturity of the children and extends even beyond the death of the parents. The unconditional

and imposing demands of this mitzvah transcend by far any moral obligation that ordinary morality – the so-called morality of reason – could deduce from considerations of gratitude."

So foundational is this *mitzvah*, and of such critical importance, that it bridges the *mitzvos bein adam la'Makom*, to the *mitzvos bein adam la'chavairo*. For **כיבוד אב ואם** is a *mitzvah* in both categories. Through honoring our parents, we learn to honor G-d; through appreciating our parents, we learn to appreciate G-d; and through serving and revering our parents, we learn to serve and revere G-d.

"When bar mitzvah boys asked R' Aharon Leib Shteinman zt'l what *kabbalah*, resolution, they should take upon themselves for their bar mitzvah, he usually suggested working on two traits/*mitzvos*: honoring their parents, and saying only the truth. In regard to *kibbud av va'eim*, besides the *hakaras ha'tov* a person must show his parents, it's good to learn that one must listen to others, and, at times, make one's own desires subservient to a higher authority..." (Reb Aharon Leib, Artscroll, p.332).

"Numerous *talmidim* witnessed R' Mosheh Twersky's, zt'l HY"D, exceptional respect for his mother, commenting that these occasions were the only time they ever saw their Rebbe move with such speed. Rebbetzin Twersky shared a humorous example of her husband's superlative *kibbud eim*. Just a few weeks before R' Twersky's *petirah*, his mother, Rebbetzin Atarah Twersky, came for a visit. R' Twersky was learning in the dining room, and his mother came in to get something. R' Twersky immediately stood up to his full

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Gloomy Predictions



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The opening pasuk of this week's Haftara – “b’shnat mot ha’melch Uziyahu...” – mentions the precise year when Yeshayahu received this nevuah, i.e. the year in which King Uziyahu died. Considering that most of Yeshayahu’s prophecies do not begin in this manner, we must assume that a thematic connection exists between that unusually explicit date and the “nevuah” that follows.

Yeshayahu, in the time period of Uziyahu, foresees the unfolding of a messianic era, when Am Yisrael can realize its biblical destiny to become a source of guidance for all mankind. It is **because** Yehuda and Yisrael have achieved the status of a ‘superpower,’ and **because** the Temple and Jerusalem have become its national and religious center, that Yeshayahu anticipates the realization of Israel’s ultimate goal.

Even though G-d intended for Am Yisrael to utilize their newfound prosperity towards achieving this messianic goal, unfortunately, Am Yisrael instead became greedy with its wealth; its society became both affluent and haughty.

To his dismay, Yeshayahu now foresees G-d’s anger and His impending punishment of Am Yisrael for their misuse of this prosperity. This prophecy in chapter two is only the beginning of a set of prophecies concerning G-d’s disappointment with the generation of Uziyahu which concludes in chapter five with the famous “**Mashal Ha’Kerem.**” In that chapter, G-d compares His efforts to help Am Yisrael prosper to the efforts of a dedicated farmer working hard to assure that his vineyard would produce the finest of grapes. Despite the farmer’s tireless efforts, the vineyard produced ‘sour grapes’ instead. The farmer,

so angered and disappointed, decides to allow his vineyard to be trampled upon. So too, G-d has been angered, for even though He had done everything possible to ensure that Am Yisrael would achieve their goal, the exact opposite happens instead.

In several ways, this prophecy is similar to G-d’s **opening** prophecy to Yechezkel, where Yechezkel receives his prophetic mission after seeing a very complex vision of the Schina. It is also a bit similar to G-d’s **opening** prophecy to Yirmiyahu, where he receives his mission as well.

But if the purpose of this vision is simply to introduce G-d’s mission to Yeshayahu, it should be chapter **one**, not chapter six! Furthermore, since Yeshayahu’s prophecies begin in the time of Uziyahu, it would not make sense that his **first** nevuah would be specifically in the year that Uziyahu dies.

Finally, even though the words of this nevuah are quite difficult to translate (let alone understand), it does leave the impression that G-d is actually **leaving** the “heichal!” Note that even though Yeshayahu indeed sees G-d in the “heichal”, only the ‘skirts of his robe’ (“shu’lav”) remain in the Temple. G-d himself is now **high** and **lofty**, preparing to leave the Temple, as the “seraphim” cover their eyes and begin to move their wings. One could even suggest that “m’lo chal ha’aretz kvodo” – His presence fills all the earth – reflects the fact that His presence, that had been once ‘concentrated’ in the Temple, has now left that spot, and thus fills the entire earth instead! Even the angels’ recitation of “kadosh, kadosh...” may reflect that G-d is now ‘separate’ – cut off – too holy to remain in this defiled Temple.

This interpretation suggests that Yeshayahu is witnessing not simply the Shchina

in the Temple, but rather its departure from the Temple! Hence, it is specifically **during** this vision that Yeshayahu receives his divine mission to inform the people that **because** of their wayward behavior, G-d will soon come and punish them.

Thematically, this vision relates specifically to the time period Uziyahu. During the early years of his reign, the potential existed for the Temple to become the international symbol of G-d’s presence on earth. Symbolically, this would be represented by the Shchina’s dwelling in the Mikdash. But now that Am Yisrael has become haughty, the Shchina can no longer dwell in the Mikdash, but rather must **leave** the Temple, just as Am Yisrael must now leave their land.

This is not Yeshayahu’s **opening** prophecy, but rather his **critical** prophecy that marks the **transition** from G-d’s original plan to help Bnei Yisrael achieve their goal during the time of Uziyahu, to His new decision to punish them for misusing their wealth.

Let’s return now to the opening pasuk – “**B’shnat mot melech Uziyahu...**” Chazal interpret “b’shnat mot” not as the year that Uziyahu died, but rather as the year he became a “metzora” (a leper).

When and why did Uziyahu become a leper?

Uziyahu’s punishment corresponds to his sin. Because of his haughtiness, he felt worthy of entering an area of the Mikdash that is restricted to **kohanim**! His punishment – becoming a **metzora** (leper) – is fitting, for Torah commands that a **metzora** must be **sent away** from all three camps of Bnei Yisrael, not only from the **Mikdash**, but also from the camp of Levi **and** the camp of Israel! Uziyahu desired

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The Earth's Fuel



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Parashat Yitro is famous for the story of Ma'amad Har Sinai – G-d's Revelation to Beneh Yisrael at Mount Sinai, when He pronounced the Ten Commandments.

This is not the first time when we find the number 10 associated with a major world event. In fact, we encountered it just recently, in our reading of earlier Parashiyot in the Book of Shemot, which tell of the ten plagues which G-d brought upon Egypt. Moreover, the Mishna in Pirkeh Abot (5:1) teaches that G-d created the world with "Asara Ma'amarot" – ten "proclamations." As we read in the opening chapter of the Torah, G-d brought each part of the world into existence by proclaiming that it should exist, and there are ten such proclamations in all.

Thus, the world came into existence through ten proclamations, G-d brought Beneh Yisrael out of Egypt through ten plagues, and He presented the Torah to them in Ten Commandments. What is the significance of this parallel? How are these three events connected?

A number of early commentators explained that the ten plagues served as a reaffirmation of G-d's creation of the world. At the time of creation, there were no witnesses to the event, and so it could

not be later proven. In order to prove that He created the world, G-d brought ten supernatural plagues – each of which corresponds to one of the "proclamations" through which He created the world. For example, the plague of blood, when G-d transformed Egypt's water into blood, and then changed it back into water, reaffirmed His creation of water. The fact that G-d exerted such control over the water demonstrated that He created it. Likewise, bringing wild beasts confirmed His creation of wildlife, and bringing darkness confirmed His creation of light. By suspending the laws of nature, and then restoring them, ten times, G-d affirmed His absolute control over the world, thus proving all ten stages of His creation of the universe.

The ten plagues, then, were brought not simply to force Pharaoh to release Beneh Yisrael, but, primarily, to reaffirm that G-d created the world.

And then, after the Exodus from Egypt, G-d brought Beneh Yisrael to Sinai, proclaiming the Ten Commandments. Once the world's creation was reaffirmed through the ten plagues, it was time for G-d to provide the world with the "fuel" it needs to be sustained – the Torah. The Ten Commandments contain 620 letters,

representing the 613 Biblical commands, plus the seven obligations enacted by the Sages. Thus, the Ten Commandments encompass the entirety of the Torah. The progression from the ten plagues – which reaffirmed the ten stages of creation – to the Ten Commandments shows us that our recognition of G-d must be followed by our acceptance of the Torah. It does not suffice to know and to believe that G-d created and governs the world. This belief must inform our conduct, and lead us to live the way the Torah demands.

This is why the Ten Commandments begins with the proclamation, "I am Hashem your G-d who has taken you from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." The giving of the Torah is a direct continuation of the Exodus from Egypt. Once our faith in G-d as the Creator was reaffirmed in Egypt, the next step is standing at Mount Sinai to wholeheartedly accept the Torah.

Torah study and observance are the earth's "fuel." They are the reason why it was created, and why it continued to exist. It is not enough to believe in G-d and know about G-d – we must live in accordance with His will, which is the very purpose for which He created the earth and created us, its inhabitants.

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height and remained standing until his mother left the room. Rebbetzin Atarah didn't notice that her son had stood for her. A few minutes later, she again needed something from the dining room. When she reentered the room, R' Twersky stood up and remained standing until his mother left the room. This happened a

third time, at which point Rebbetzin Atarah realized what was going on. She subsequently told her daughter-in-law, "I stopped going in there, because otherwise he would have kept that up the whole day!" (A Malach in Our Midst, p.255-256)

In honoring our parents, we are thereby honoring G-d – Who graciously bestowed

these very parents upon us – and we are ensuring that the transmission of Torah will continue from generation to generation.

The Missing Listen



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One of the primary disciples of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, was “the Nazir,” Rav Dovid Cohen, *zt”l*. The Nazir, in his monumental *sefer* called *Kol HaNevuah* – The Voice of Prophecy, teaches us what he believes is the core characteristic necessary for a real and deep connection with G-d: “The sages of Israel open up the power of *Binah* – Understanding by unblocking their ears to hear the chain of tradition from all earlier generations, stretching back when our fathers heard G-d’s voice directly. ‘If they are not prophets, they are the students of prophets’ (*Pesachim* 66a).” The key is listening.

We know that everything flows from the beginning. Our entire way of life begins with the giving of the Torah in this week’s *parshah*. And the first words of the *parshah* are, “And Yisro heard...” (*Shmos* 18:1). And Hashem prefaced His giving of the Torah with the words, “And now, if you will surely listen to My voice and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure among all the nations, for the entire earth is Mine.” We see based on the opening words of our *parshah* and Hashem’s introduction to the *Aseres HaDibros*, the Ten Commandments, that listening is the necessary precondition to our receipt of the Torah.

Our *parshah* is named after Yisro, who is first mentioned at this point in connection with his ability to listen. What did he hear that caused him to come contemporaneously with the giving of the Torah? He learned about the miracles in Egypt and by the sea. But everyone in the world heard about these things as well. What differentiated Yisro? He “heard deeply until his heart was moved.” He stopped and paid attention to the significance of what he was hearing. He internalized the new landscape in the world. He took note

of the meaning of everything he heard and realized that “the times they were a’changing.” A new era was dawning with the birth of the Jewish people as a nation and their exodus from Egypt. But he was not satisfied with his new understanding alone. He took action. He traveled to join the Jewish people.

Unfortunately, the masses, both in Yisro’s time and today, do not know how to listen. As one singer put it, the problem is “people hearing without listening.” One fundamental part of listening deeply is paying attention with an ear to understand when things have changed and how they have changed. One must listen to the significance of what happens around him, acknowledge when there is a new reality, and then act with bravery like Yisro based on his new understanding.

Chazal (*Shmos Rabah* 27:6) teach that in the merit of “And Yisro heard [וישמע],” he merited “And Moshe heard [וישמע] the voice of his father-in-law [Yisro]...” (*Shmos* 18:24).. Yisro and Moshe seem to be two different worlds, people on two incomparably different planes of existence, yet they both share the ability to listen intensely, to internalize the significance of that which they hear in order to “hear deeply until the heart is moved.”

The ability to hear gives meaning and significance to whatever a person sees. That is why, as the Nazir says, learning Torah from a bearer of the oral tradition is a necessary prerequisite for any true understanding of Torah, *Yiddishkeit*, and Hashem’s will for us in the world. The written Torah, by itself, even with all of the *seforim* in the world to complement it, can never replace hearing the Torah from one’s rebbe.

The *Gemara* itself makes this point in the story of the non-Jew who denied the

veracity of the oral Torah and came to both Shamai and Hillel to convert (*Shabbos* 31a). Shamai threw him out because of the absurdity of his request. One cannot convert to Judaism if he denies the oral Torah on which all of *Yiddishkeit* is built.

But Hillel agreed to teach this prospective convert the Hebrew alphabet, “*Aleph, Beis, Gimel, Daled...*” When the non-Jew came back to study with him the next day, he taught him the same letters, but in the reverse order, “*Daled, Gimel, Beis, Aleph.*” The man said to Hillel, “But yesterday, this is not how you taught it to me!” Hillel then answered him, “If you relied on me yesterday [as a reliable transmitter of the correct order of the Hebrew alphabet], you should also rely on me for [the accurate transmission of] the oral Torah!”

The letters that we read and all of written *seforim* in the world have no context or meaning for us at all without an oral tradition, passed from teacher to student, connecting us today to the oral Torah Moshe received at Sinai.

Our generation has largely lost the ability to hear the messages they receive from Heaven. They cannot focus on them or listen deeply to their significance because their eyes are constantly glued to those little devices in their hands. They never focus on anything very long before swiping on to the next one. So many people become more and more closed off within themselves. They become lost in the stories, pictures, and videos flashing before them and rarely listen to or think deeply about what is really happening in the world or even in the lives of their children, husbands, wives, or friends.

The *Gemara* (*Brachos* 40a) says, “If you listen to the old, you will hear the new.” A Jew who listens to those who came before him, those who made themselves

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To Thine Own Self Be True



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Bill, Jim, and Scott were at a convention together sharing a large suite at the top of a 75-story hotel. After a long day of meetings, they were shocked to hear that the elevators in their hotel were broken, and they would have to climb 75 flights of stairs to get to their room.

Bill said, “Let’s break the monotony of this unpleasant task by concentrating on something interesting. I’ll tell jokes for 25 flights, Jim can sing songs for the next 25 flights and Scott will tell sad stories for the rest of the way.” On the 26th floor, Bill stopped telling jokes and Jim began to sing. At the 51st floor, Jim stopped singing and Scott began to tell sad stories.

“I will tell my saddest story first,” he said. “I left the room key in the car.”

This week’s Torah portion, Yisro, concludes with a strange instruction: “You shall not ascend My Altar on steps so that your nakedness will not be uncovered upon it.”

The biblical commentators explain that the priests serving in the Temple wore short pants, spanning from the thighs to the knees. Ascending stairs requires one to take wide, extensive, and spacious steps, which would expose more of their body, and would not befit the reverence required in G-d’s home. The Torah, therefore, required a ramp ascending to the altar, since this allows the priest to take small strides in a dignified and respectful manner.

Rashi explains this in greater detail: “Steps require you to take wide strides. Although this does not in actuality expose your nakedness... nonetheless, taking wide steps is close to exposing nakedness. Thus, by taking wide steps, you treat the stones of the altar in a humiliating manner.”

Rashi adds that this mitzvah teaches us an important moral lesson. “If regarding these stones which lack the perception to be hurt by their humiliation, the Torah says, ‘Since there is a need for them, do not treat them in a humiliating manner,’ your fellow human being who is created in the image of your Creator and is sensitive to humiliation, how much more so must you treat him with respect!”

This week’s portion captures the most significant event in the history of the Jewish people and of the world — when G-d, in a moment never to be repeated again — revealed to an entire nation His existence, charging it with the mission of saturating the world with holiness.

One would expect that the closing sentence of this portion would somehow capture the power and grace of this extraordinary moment, one that in many ways shapes the moral history of humanity. Yet the Torah chooses to culminate this section with what seems to be a simple and mundane law.

Why?

It is precisely in these final words that the Torah shares with us a moving lesson regarding the human quest to “ascend G-d’s Altar,” to climb the ladder of moral and spiritual enlightenment.

Often in life, people experience a new awareness that inspires them to move their lives to a different level, to live deeper, and to love deeper. They are moved to make changes.

Yet sometimes, as a result of a genuine longing to abandon a previous lifestyle of shallowness, falsehood, addiction, promiscuity, loneliness, or shame, people begin to take wide and expansive steps, determined to reach great peaks in short spans

of time, craving to master elevated modes of consciousness and lifestyles.

Thus, immediately following the most spiritually enlightening and earth-shattering event in history, when G-d shared Himself with humanity, the Torah culminates with this declaration: “You shall not ascend My Altar on steps, so that your nakedness will not be uncovered upon it.” Do not become who you are not. Do not jump to places beyond yourself. Every movement forward must be internalized and integrated into your individual identity because when you take steps that overwhelm you, rather than elevate you, you may end up naked and exposed. You might fall down fast and hard. People who overestimate themselves, often end up underestimating themselves.

Never disregard, the Torah is teaching us, the value of one small move in the quest for truth. Wherever you are in life, you can serve G-d genuinely according to your own potential and situation. You can discover the light of G-d within your present condition. Challenge yourself to encounter your own inner light and truth; you need not climb on the truths and experiences of others. Grow you must; challenge yourself you must. But take the ramp, not the stairs. Don’t jump ahead of yourself, because your authentic self may be left behind. And when you discover that, you may fall down and lose everything. You might end up bare.

King Solomon put it simply: “Do not stand in the place of the great.” Why? Not because by stepping into the shoes of the great, you will be robbing somebody else of his or her place of greatness. Rather, by doing so, you will be denying yourself your own individual process, the one that is great for you. Real people are inspired by other people but never copy them.

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Yisro: Where G-d is Found



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpia, OU-NCSY

Rebbe Shlomo Halberstam, the Bobover Rebbe, zy'a, of the post-Holocaust era, revived his community with love, resilience and faith. The Rebbe restored *kavod* to thousands of survivors and helped them rebuild their lives, and was the paradigm of fatherly love, *chein v'chesed*, grace and righteousness.

Family weddings in Bobov were majestic; thousands joined the Rebbe to share in the celebration, dancing into the wee hours of the morning. For all the survivors, their families and the community, *s'machos* uplifted them with a sense of victory, affirmation, continuity, faith and celebration. All felt certain that *Netzach Yisrael lo yishaker*, "The promise of the eternity of Am Yisrael is true."

At the height of the dancing and fervor, the Rebbe took a breather and stood at his shtender. Scanning the thousands of revelers, the Rebbe caught sight of an elderly *chasid* dancing, his arms on the shoulders of a taller *chasid* in front of him in the circle. The Rebbe called over a young man who was nearby and whispered to him, "*Ti mir a toiveh*, please do me a favor: go stand between that elderly *Yid* and the tall fellow in front of him, so that the *zakein* need not exert himself and have to stretch uncomfortably during the *rikud*."

Amid such rejoicing and *d'veikus*, the Rebbe not only perceived the vulnerability and possible discomfort of another person, his mind computed and communicated a solution. At the height of his spiritual bliss, the Rebbe remained aware of the seemingly minor need of another.



ויאמר אל משה אני חתוך יתרו בא
אלך וראשתך ושני בניך עמה

He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Yisro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons." (18:6)

Our Sages describe Yisro as a spiritual seeker who traveled the world, experiencing a multitude of paths, faiths and idolatrous practices. Rav Simcha Zissel, the Alter of Kelm, puts his finger on what drove Yisro's search: until he came in contact with Yiddishkeit, Yisro had understood the goal of spirituality to be transcendence and escape from the day-to-day reality of this world. As much as one might desire to escape the mundanity of this world, this is indeed an elusive goal.

Rashi notes that Yisro's comment to his son-in-law Moshe reflects the life-changing insight he'd learned from taking in the Torah perspective: "If you will not come out for my own sake, come out for the sake of your wife; and if you will not come out for your wife's sake, come out for the sake of your two sons." Yisro reminds Moshe that Yiddishkeit is not just about our own transcendence. Being a leader and teacher of Klal Yisrael cannot come at the expense of 'normal' social, cultural and familial responsibilities.

When we bring to mind a 'holy moment' or envision a 'spiritual person', we might think of someone with their eyes closed, 'vertically' focussed, reaching *beyond* this world. Interacting with a 'mundane moment' or being a 'people-person', by contrast, is characterized by a 'horizontal focus', reaching *out* to the world. These two modes of being seem to be mutually exclusive, however Yiddishkeit insists that we be completely given over to both. We must pursue our inner, vertical world, and simultaneously to the minutiae and needs of the outer, horizontal world.

And this is why truly holy people, even amid their 'biggest' moments, notice little things. Even when our service of Hashem

and fulfillment of mitzvos is flowing with passionate devotion, intensity, focus or transcendent *d'veikus*, we can still remain aware of the needs and wellbeing of those around us. The text of *tefillah* doesn't actually take us out of the world — it awakens us to the needs of the world and focuses our devotion on taking responsibility for others. This reminds us that our 'vertical' striving is not in conflict with our 'horizontal' connectivity.



G-d is found within people and between people — within all of our relationships. The *Heichal haBracha*, the Rebbe of Komarna, zy'a, teaches that the relationship between love of others and love of G-d is hinted to in the gematria, the numerical value of *Ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocho, ani Hashem*: 907. It is the same value as *Ve'ahavta es Hashem Elokecha*, "And you shall love the Eternal One, your Divinity." This 'equating' of the two mitzvos reveals that *Ve'ahavta*, too, is rooted in G-d's Oneness.

The first discourse that the Lubavitcher Rebbe delivered on the upon accepting the mantle of leadership of the Lubavitch movement was a 'statement' that the three loves — love of G-d, love of the Torah and love toward a fellow Jew — are all one, intertwined and a veritable unity. They are in no way three competing values; they are two complimentary sides of one coin. Fulfilling *Vahavta* completes the mitzvah of *Ahavas Hashem*, bringing us closer and deepening our bond with the Ribbono shel Olam. The Alter Rebbe explains that the mitzvah of *Vahavta l're'acha kamocho* is a commentary on the commandment *Vahavta es Hashem Elokecha*.

May Yisro's reminder to Moshe Rabbeinu serve to refocus our own attention on those who are closest to us. And may we all draw close to Hashem, together.

Timely Teshuvah

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

Am Yisrael continue their journey from Egypt through the Sinai desert. The Torah tells us that they left Refidim and came to Har Sinai (Shemot 19;2). Yet we already know the Jews were coming from Refidim. As we are aware, nothing is repetitive in Torah, what information is being added here? Rashi explains that just as Bnei Yisrael approached the area of Har Sinai in a state of teshuvah, likewise, when leaving Refidim the people were engaged in teshuvah. Rashi's explanation leaves us a bit perplexed. If they already did teshuvah when leaving Refidim, why did they need to do teshuvah once again when coming to Har Sinai? Further, why is teshuvah at this juncture so crucial?

The Netziv in his commentary Haemek Davar, explains that preparation is fundamental when advancing in holiness. As the Jewish people were about to experience the most quintessential event of their lives, it was not sufficient to prepare

themselves upon arriving at Har Sinai, the groundwork needed to be laid before that.

Rav Weissblum in He'arat Derech, notes that before doing any mitzvah, one should ask two important questions; first, "what am I about to do?" Second, "For whom am I about to do this?" These questions enable us to achieve the proper mindset and allow the mitzvah to be truly experienced, not simply be a series of meaningless motions. To the extent one prepares, one connects more deeply and fully.

Our frame of mind creates all the difference. The Gemara recounts the story of Rabi Chiya's extensive efforts to ensure that the Torah would not be forgotten among the people. Rabi Chiya sowed flax seeds. He used the flax to make nets to trap deer, from the deer hides he made parchment on which he wrote the Torah scrolls. Rabi Chiya was personally involved in the entire process to guarantee that the scrolls from which the Torah was to be taught would be infused with the proper intentions. It is said in the name

of the Gra that if the members of a shul would be careful to focus their intentions in preparing the materials for the building and concentrate completely on the holy task of building the shul, then all the tefilot said in that shul would have perfect kavanah. The Gra notes that it is for this reason that many Tanaim and Amoraim would learn and teach outdoors under trees. They knew they could not ensure that the houses and buildings were built with the most perfect intentions and did not want less than impeccable energy to affect the purity of their learning.

The core element of teshuvah is being mindful and focused. Am Yisrael understood that to access the realm of kedushah they must immerse themselves in preparation. Teshuvah is not a one-time affair, we must be in a constant state of working and improving ourselves. Is it any wonder we have the brachah of teshuvah in our davening 3 times daily? This is the key to a life of kedushah; an awareness that this is the type of life we live.

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receptacles for the oral Torah, develops within himself the ability to hear deeply. He becomes able to listen to the point that his heart is affected. By training himself to listen in this way, he makes himself a vessel for new ideas, new messages, and an awareness of each new reality

as it appears. One who listens intently, and does not always demand to be heard, develops the intellectual and emotional depth to become worthy of being heard as well.

May Hashem grant us the will and strength to listen to the wisdom of

previous generations in order to "hear deeply until the heart is moved." May we listen to the old so that the new reality of redemption, Moshiach, and the *Beis HaMikdash* will penetrate our hearts and reveal themselves in the world.

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Of course, there are moments you make take a big jump that may initially seem frightening. Big things happen when ordinary people muster the courage to actualize extraordinary visions. The path to recovery and to healing always requires

a drastic leap. Yet we must ensure that these big steps enhance our true identity rather than crush it; that they embody our inner calling, mission, and power, not a superficial emulation of other people's standards and behaviors.

"To Thine Own Self Be True," is also true in the religious and spiritual life. Sometimes even more. G-d wants you to be you, not me. He wants me to be me, not you.

The Ground Shook



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

Chazal say that there will be an earthquake, a spiritual foundational event.

It happened on the day the wall of Jerusalem was breached when a pig stuck its hooves in it: “Eretz Yisrael quaked over an area of four hundred parasangs [parsa] by four hundred parasangs.”

When Yonatan ben Uziel asks to reveal the end, the land is shocked and he is not allowed to do so.

“When the Almighty sees His children in distress, He causes three tears to fall into the great sea, in other words – ‘gooha’” and Chazal explain, “This is an earthquake.”

When the people of Israel arrive in the land, the earth shakes before them in the brook Arnon and multitudes of Amorites are crushed to death under a mountain.

And this is what happens this week. During Matan Torah. “The earth trembled; The heavens dripped, Before the LORD, Him of Sinai.”

Upon an earthquake, Chazal implemented that one should bless: “On the apocalypse and on the horrors... He says: ‘Blessed are You, whose power and might fill the world.’” In a powerful world where everyone wants to outdo everyone else, this is the very moment when G-d reminds us



The high towers, the distance, the human loneliness, the competition are what separate the building we have built.

that there is no other power that fills the world. An earthquake, like other great natural phenomena, reminds us that in every house, under the ground, there is a crack. It is Syrian, African, Polish, religious or leftist. It is there. And we will do everything, but above all – listen. Subterranean rumblings were heard before we asked in amazement, “What is suddenly erupting?” We know that the existence of our house, nationally and privately, is very fragile since this crack. Since this house was destroyed. After every earthquake in the world, when there is again talk of “strengthening the infrastructure,” we will remember this foundation stone that was broken in that destruction and that always stands in the center of every house, reminding us that we must not rise above anyone, not by our “sanctity,” not even by being in the right. “G-d said

to Moses, ‘Go down, warn the people not to break through to G-d to gaze.’” and Rashi explains: “The term הרס, “breaking down”, always denotes the separation of the collection of parts that constitute the edifice. Similarly, those who depart from the position which people have taken up break down that position.”

According to Rashi, if we do not support each other like a wall, there will be an earthquake. If, despite the instructions of those wiser than us, we are so confident, if we ignore the subterranean sounds that scream at us from the ground.

The high towers, the distance, the human loneliness, the competition are what separate the building we have built.

Let us walk carefully on the fault line of our house, remembering what happened when walls were breached, when we wanted to discover an end before its time, remembering the tears of G-d, the dangers that lurk at the entrance of the Promised Land. We will remember the giving of this Torah that forced us not to separate, to be a tombstone for the people before a mountain that threatens to bury us, for we have no more stable house than this.

Continued from page 19

to come too close, and now he must be banished as far away as possible from the Shchina.

Furthermore, Uziyahu’s own sin is quite reflective of his generation. Even though they did not worship idols, their prosperity and wealth led to their haughtiness. Their **own** pride was more important to

them than G-d’s! Their own accomplishments became their idols.

Chazal’s interpretation thematically ties together the incident of Uziyahu’s leprosy and this specific prophecy. If man is **so** haughty that he considers himself worthy to enter the Kodosh Kodoshim, then G-d

Himself can **no longer** dwell there; the Shchina must leave the Mikdash.

Despite his gloomy predictions, Yeschayahu’s prophecy concludes on a note of hope. Despite the forthcoming destruction and exile, a remnant shall indeed return. Am Yisrael’s ultimate goal will not be forgotten.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
balashon.com

After G-d gave the Ten Commandments, the people were afraid. They retreated from the mountain, and asked Moshe to speak to them instead of G-d.

The Torah records Moshe's response (Shemot 20:17):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם אַל-תִּירְאוּ כִּי לִבְעֹבוֹר נִסוּת אָחֶיכֶם בָּא הָאֱלֹהִים וּבְעֹבוֹר תִּהְיֶה יְרֵאתוֹ עַל-פְּנֵיכֶם לְבַלְתִּי תִּהְיֶה אִשָּׁא:

One English translation is as follows:

“Moshe answered the people, ‘Be not afraid; for G-d has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray.’”

Another has Moshe saying:

“Do not be afraid, for G-d has come to elevate you, so that the awe of Him will be with you always, keeping you from sin.”

The main difference between the two translations is their rendering of the word נִסוּת – is it “to test” or “to elevate”?

The answer isn't clear, and that's due to the various meanings of the root נסה.

The translation “to elevate” has support in Rashi's commentary. He says that נִסוּת is related to the word נָס, which in biblical Hebrew means “flag” or “flagpole.” The verb, “to lift up”, is a sign of the flag being raised on high. (According to some linguists, נסה might be cognate with נשא, of the same meaning.)

Today, the common meaning of נָס is “miracle,” but that meaning almost never appears in the Tanakh (or according to some scholars, never does.) However, if we understand the meaning “flag” as part of a more general sense of “sign”, then the development to “miracle” is easier to grasp. These aren't just miracles for their own sake, but signs from G-d.

What about the other explanation of נסה – “to test, to try”? The noun familiar to us is נְסִיוֹן – “trial, attempt.” This is the interpretation of Ibn Ezra and Ramban. They both quote biblical verses like Devarim 8:2 and 8:16 where it is clear that G-d is testing the people. Ramban writes:

“Every expression of נְסִיוֹן means ‘test,’ [...] For the master will sometimes try his servant with hard work in order to know whether he will endure it out of his love for him.”

The meaning of this verse remains up for debate. However, is it possible that there is a connection between the two meanings of נסה? One interesting theory suggests that the way we test the weight of an object is to lift it up, and a person's strength is measured by his ability to lift, to bear. From here נסה developed the sense of testing in general.

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

In the Aseret HaDibrot, what do the 2nd, 3rd and 5th commandments have in common?

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

Only in the case of these three commandments are
 mentioned.
 In the 3rd one forbidding
 taking Hashem's Name in
 vain, the Torah states: You
 shall not take the Name of
 Hashem your G-d in vain,
 for Hashem will not absolve
 anyone who takes His name
 in vain. (20:7)
 In the 5th one concerning
 honouring one's parents,
 the Torah states: Honour
 your father and mother,
 so that your days will be
 lengthened upon the land
 that Hashem your G-d gives
 to you. (20:12)
 In the 2nd one forbidding
 idolatry the Torah states:
 You shall not prostrate
 yourself to them nor serve
 them, for I, Hashem your
 G-d, am a zealous G-d,
 visiting the guilt of the
 parents upon the children,
 upon the third and upon
 the fourth generations of
 My enemies. (20:5)



**THIS WEEK in
Jewish History**

- FEB. 11, 1986:** Natan Sharansky, prominent Prisoner of Zion released by Russia.
- SHVAT 22, 5619 (1859):** Yahrzeit of the Kotzker Rebbe, renowned for his sharp wit.
- FEB. 14, 1896:** Der Judenstaat published by Theodor Herzl, envisaging a Jewish state.
- SHVAT 24, 3412 (348 BCE):** Zechariah predicted consolation for Jews and encouraged rebuilding the Second Temple.
- SHVAT 25, 5643 (1883):** Yahrzeit of R. Yisrael Salanter, founder of the Mussar (Jewish ethics) movement.
- FEB. 17, 1949:** Dr. Chaim Weizmann was elected the first President of Israel.

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