

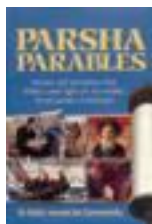
BS"D



To: Parsha@YahooGroups.com
From: crshulman@aol.com

**INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON YISRO - 5764**

To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/parsha/join> or send a blank e-mail to parsha-subscribe@yahoo.com. Please also copy me at crshulman@aol.com. A complete archive of previous issues (as well as a long list of torah links) are now available at <http://www.teaneckshuls.org/parsha> (hosted by onlysimchas.com)



From: RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY [rmk@torah.org] Sent: February 12, 2004 To: drasha@torah.org Subject: Drasha - Yisro Parsha Parables — Parshas Yisro 5764 A Parent's Nachas By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky In Parshas Yisro the B'nai Yisrael receive the Torah. But the story is not an open and shut case. Hashem sends Moshe to instruct the Jewish People of certain prerequisites — standards that B'nai Yisrael need to accept in order for them to receive the Torah.

And thus Hashem commands Moshe: "You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me. And now, if you hearken well to Me and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples, for Mine is the entire world." Hashem then sets a standard for his people — a standard upon which they are judged until this very day. "You shall be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel." Moshe summoned the elders of the people, and put before them all these words that Hashem had commanded him and the nation responded positively: "Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do!" And then the Torah tells us that, "Moshe brought back the words of the people to Hashem" (Exodus 19:4-9).

It is only after those words of preparation and the unanimous response of unconditional acceptance that Hashem instructs Moshe Rabbeinu about how to prepare Klal Yisrael on how to receive the Torah.

The question is simple. Hashem sits in Heaven and records every spoken word and every action of humankind. Why did Moshe have to go back and repeat the Jewish nation's unanimous declaration of commitment to Hashem? Wasn't Moshe sure that Hashem heard? He should have just waited for further instruction.

Rabbi Yussie Lieber is well known for the amazing successes he has had as an outreach professional and as a master educator for many years. A few years back he was asked to be the guest speaker at Philadelphia's Politz Hebrew Academy's annual dinner. Arriving at the dinner he noticed that Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky, the revered Rosh Yeshiva of the Philadelphia Yeshiva was also on the program and Rabbi Lieber clearly felt awkward. He wondered why he was chosen to be the featured speaker on the same program where such a revered sage was also listed.

So Rabbi Lieber began his speech with a joke. "I am going to give you a number," he began. He then proceeded to recite a telephone number in Lakewood, New Jersey. "That's my mother's number," he continued. "If any of you are inspired by my words tonight, give her a call. I'm sure she would have nachas."

The crowd chuckled and Rabbi Lieber did indeed give an inspiring talk. The next morning Rabbi Lieber called his mother as usual to say hello.

His mother, curiously enough, mentioned, "I heard that you spoke wonderfully last night."

Rabbi Lieber was a bit surprised. How did she know about his talk. "In fact," continued his mother, "it was so wonderful that the Philadelphia Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky called me to tell me how inspired he was!"

We can assume many things. We even know how wonderful parents think that their children are. But Moshe Rabbeinu taught us all a lesson. Even if you are sure that a parent knows how wonderful his children are, it does not hurt to relay the message. Because even the Ribbono Shel Olam wants to shep a little more nachas from his children! Good Shabbos

©2004 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Dedicated by Michael & Rikki Charnowitz in memory of Ephraim Spinner Liluy Nishmas R'Ephraim Yitzchok ben R'Avraham

Drasha, Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Torah.org. Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a Project of the Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation. Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Associate Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore, <http://www.yoss.org/>. Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> Project Genesis, Inc. learn@torah.org 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 (410) 602-1350 Baltimore, MD 21208

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Subject: SICHOT64 -17: Parashat Yitro Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Student Summaries Of Sichot Of The Roshei Yeshiva Parashat Yitro

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A
"AND THE NAME OF THE SPECIAL ONE WAS ELIEZER"

Adapted by Dov Karoll

And Yitro... took Tziphora... and her two sons, the one who was named Gershom... and the one who was named Eliezer... (Shemot 18:2-4)

The Midrash Tanchuma (Parashat Chukat 8) asks: Why does the Torah write, "And the one was named Eliezer"? Why does it not say instead, "And the second son was named Eliezer"? It answers with the following story.

When Moshe ascended the Heavens, he found G-d studying the topic of para aduma, the red heifer, citing the law in the name of the scholar who taught it: "My son Eliezer says, Cattle are defined as an eglu, a calf, at the age of one, and as a para, a cow, at the age of two." This is indeed the first mishna in Tractate Para, a law cited in the name of Rabbi Eliezer.

Moshe asked G-d, "The whole world is Yours, and You quote laws in the name of people?" G-d answered, "There is one righteous person who will teach the first law in regard to the para aduma. This is Rabbi Eliezer, who says, 'Cattle are defined as an eglu, a calf, at the age of one, and as a para, a cow, at the age of two.'"

Moshe responded: "Master of the Universe, may it be Your will that this scholar be one of my descendants." G-d answered, "Indeed he is from your descendants, as the verse states, 'And the one was named Eliezer,' meaning, 'And the name of the special one was Eliezer.'"

This selfsame Rabbi Eliezer is the central figure in the well known Talmudic episode of "Tanuro shel akhnai" ("the snake's oven"), recorded in Bava Metzia 59a-b.

The Gemara cites a dispute regarding an oven constructed by sticking together pieces of pottery. This oven was known as "the snake's oven," because Rabbi Eliezer's arguments "surrounded" the issue, but the rabbis nonetheless objected to his ruling. Rabbi Eliezer believes that such an oven cannot become impure, because it is not considered a proper vessel. The other sages ruled that it can become impure, claiming that it is defined as a proper vessel.

The Gemara relates that Rabbi Eliezer proceeded to provide "all the answers in the world" to establish his position, but they were all rejected. He said, "If the law is in accordance with my ruling, let the carob tree prove it," and the carob

relocated by either 50 or 400 amot, depending on two versions cited in the text. The rabbis responded that you cannot bring proof from the carob.

He said, "If the law is in accordance with my ruling, let the stream prove it," and the stream reversed its direction, with the water flowing upstream. The rabbis responded that you cannot bring proof from the stream.

Rabbi Eliezer continued, "If the law is in accordance with my ruling, let the walls of the study hall prove it," and the walls nearly collapsed. Rabbi Yehoshua then reprimanded the walls, asking, "If the scholars are debating the issue, why do you involve yourselves in it?" The Gemara explains that the walls did not fall in deference to Rabbi Yehoshua, but they did not return to an upright position in deference to Rabbi Eliezer. Rather, they were suspended in an intermediate position.

Rabbi Eliezer continued, "If the law is in accordance with my ruling, let proof come from the Heavens." A voice came forth from the heavens, proclaiming, "Why do you dispute the position of Rabbi Eliezer? The law is always in accordance with his ruling!" To this, Rabbi Yehoshua stood up and proclaimed, "It [the law] is not in the Heavens!" (Devarim 30:12).

The Gemara then inquires as to the significance of this statement. Rabbi Yirmiya explains that once the Torah was given, Heavenly voices can play no role in legal discourse. G-d has already established a method for resolving legal dispute in the Torah, namely, the ruling of the majority of sages: "And you shall turn toward the many" (Shemot 23:1).

Following this incident, Rabbi Natan saw the prophet Eliyahu, and Rabbi Natan asked him, "What did G-d do at that time [when Rabbi Yehoshua said, 'It is not in the heavens']?" Eliyahu answered, "He smiled and said, 'My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me.'"

On that day, all items that Rabbi Eliezer had proclaimed to be ritually clean were brought in and burnt, and a decision was reached that he must be excommunicated for not accepting the authority of the Sanhedrin. They asked, "Who will tell him?" Rabbi Akiva, who was Rabbi Eliezer's student, responded, "I will go, because if the wrong person goes, Rabbi Eliezer could destroy the whole world."

What did Rabbi Akiva do? He put on black clothing, and sat four amot away from Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Eliezer asked him, "Akiva, why is today different from previous days [that you will not come near me]?" Rabbi Akiva answered, "It seems that your colleagues have separated themselves from you." Rabbi Eliezer understood what was meant; he proceeded to rip his clothes and sit down on the floor, as the Halakha dictates for a person in excommunication (as for a mourner), and began to cry. As a result of his tears, the Gemara relates that one third of the olive crop, one third of the wheat crop, and one third of the barley crop were destroyed, and some say that even the dough in the hands of women rotted. Rabban Gamliel, who had led the excommunication, subsequently was on a boat, and a wave came to drown him. He said, "It seems that this is only because of Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenos." He stood up and declared, "Master of the Universe, You know that I did not act for my own honor, nor for the honor of my family [the house of David], but rather for Your Honor, to prevent the promulgation of dispute in Israel!" The sea then calmed, and he was saved.

Also, Rabbi Eliezer's wife was Rabban Gamliel's sister. From then on, she would not allow Rabbi Eliezer to fall on his face in prayer. There came a day when she saw that he had fallen on his face in prayer, and she cried out, "You have killed my brother!"

Indeed, at that time, word came from Rabban Gamliel's house that he had passed away. He asked her how she knew. And she said that he has a tradition from her father's family that "All gates are locked other than the gates of abuse (ona'a)."

There are many lessons that can be gleaned from this Gemara. First of all, the Maharal (Netivot Olam 2, Netiv Ahavat ha-re'ia 2) explains that these "proofs" are not meant literally. He explains that the carob tree is symbolic of the tradition upon which his position is based, the stream symbolic of clarity of thought, and the walls of the study hall

are symbolic of the depth of study upon which his position was based. Alternatively, it could be that the miracles really did take place, but the sages in the room could not see the first two, and they only realized afterward that they were really taking place.

But there is another, more basic question: why is the ruling on high in accordance with the position of Rabbi Eliezer? Do the heavens not know the rule of "And you shall turn toward the many"? One answer is that this was a test of the sages, to see if they could remain steadfast with their ruling despite the tremendous pressure generated by the introduction of the heavenly voice.

I would like to suggest a different approach. Let us begin by analyzing the nature of the dispute at hand. Rabbi Eliezer and the sages disputed whether an oven which was stuck together from a variety of pieces is defined a complete vessel. Rabbi Eliezer says that this is not defined as a complete vessel. Why? A complete vessel is not pieced together in this way; rather, it should be made from one unit. And, in fact, Rabbi Eliezer is correct in the theoretical, abstract, "Heavenly" perspective. In a pure sense, only a vessel which is whole and complete should be considered a complete vessel, subject to impurity. After all, only something that is fitting to absorb sanctity and holiness is correspondingly subject to impurity. The negative impact of impurity will only function where there is capability for sanctity. Thus, according to Rabbi Eliezer and the Heavenly court, this oven is not defined as a vessel. According to the Sages, on the other hand, in this world we have a more flexible standard for completeness. In fact, nothing in this world is really complete. An oven made of several strips that have been connected, stuck together with sand, is to be considered whole. Sanctity can reach even those who are not "complete" in the sense referred to by Rabbi Eliezer.

From the continuation of the Gemara, we see the Sages' courage and strength, not only in overruling Rabbi Eliezer in accordance with the rule of the majority, but also in uprooting all of his rulings, and putting him in some form of excommunication. It was not a full excommunication, but they did "separate themselves from him," for they needed to establish the importance of accepting the rule of the majority. This was carried out despite the fear that Rabbi Eliezer would wreak tremendous havoc in response to this ruling.

As Rabban Gamliel said, he did not act for his own glory or even for the glory of the Davidic line. He did what he felt was necessary to maintain the unity of the Torah. He could not accept competing streams and "two Torot." He recognized the importance of keeping the Torah community united, even if this came along with taking strong action against a man of such great strength in learning and spirituality.

Nonetheless, the Gemara concludes that Rabban Gamliel was punished for the suffering he caused Rabbi Eliezer. This is the very unique Rabbi Eliezer, "the special one whose name was Eliezer."

[This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Yitro, 5763 (2003).] Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash Alon Shevut, Gush Etzion 90433 E-Mail: Yhe@Etzion.Org.II Or Office@Etzion.Org.II



From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: February 12, 2004 To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Yisro "RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Yisro

Eliezer -- The Son of Moshe Rabbeinu
The Medrash Rabbah teaches that when Moshe ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah, he heard G-d expounding on the laws of the Parah Adumah [Red Heifer]. G-d was quoting a

Mishna, and was citing the teacher mentioned in the Mishna by name.

"Rabbi Eliezer says the decapitated calf (Eglah Arufah) needs to be within its first year of life (bas sh'nasah) and the Parah Adumah needs to come from a calf that has already entered its second year of life (at which time it may be considered a 'Parah')" [Parah 1:1].

Upon hearing this, Moshe entreated G-d "May it be Your Will that this Rabbi Eliezer be one of my descendants." G-d swore to Moshe that this wish would be granted. This is alluded to by the verse, "And the name of one of them was Eliezer" [by the birth of Moshe's son in this week's parsha - Shmos 18:4].

This Medrash begs for an explanation.

Another Medrash teaches that when Moshe asked Yisro to marry Yisro's daughter Tziporah, Yisro stipulated the following condition: Your first born son from her will be dedicated to Avodah Zarah -- idol worship. All subsequent children may be raised for the sake of Heaven. Moshe accepted the condition and took an oath to abide by it.

This too is a mind-boggling teaching of our Sages. It is not only mind-boggling that Moshe agreed to the condition, but even the fact that Yisro asked for such a condition is mind-boggling! Even though Yisro's career had been serving as a priest to Avodah Zarah, other Medrashim indicate that by this stage in Yisro's life, he had already "seen the light." He no longer believed in Avodah Zarah as a 'true religion'. Why then would he want his first grandson to follow in the ways of his original folly? It is incomprehensible that Yisro should have made such a request, and it is incomprehensible that Moshe Rabbeinu should have acquiesced to it.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz and Rav Shimon Schwab both explain this latter Medrash as shedding light on an important dispute in terms of the best way to raise children. Yisro did not want his first grandson to be an idolater. Heaven Forbid. Yisro had seen the light, but Yisro was a person who came to the Truth through experimentation. He did not just accept revelation of the Torah on a silver platter. He was a searcher and a seeker. He tried out other alternatives first. Our Sages say he had tried out all the religions in the world and concluded that they were all fraudulent.

Yisro's philosophy was "I found the truth on my own, and I feel that this is the best way to raise children." Yisro felt that it is best for children have to see for themselves, make their own mistakes, and come to the proper conclusion on their own.

Moshe Rabbeinu did not favor this approach. He argued that it is only necessary to learn through experience when one is still searching to find out what the truth is. However, if one already knows the truth for certain, there is no point in experimenting any further. Moshe knew that the truth was "Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" [our G-d is the One and only G-d]. But to win Yisro's agreement to marry Tziporah, Moshe compromised and cut a deal with Yisro. His first-born son would follow Yisro's approach of searching for truth and experimentation with other religious beliefs. All subsequent children would follow Moshe's approach of unquestioning faith and certainty that Hashem is One and His Name is One. Both Yisro and Moshe fully contemplated and expected that even the first son would conclude his religious search with the same realization that Hashem is the only true G-d.

This explains the verses "And the name of the one (shem ha'echad) was Gershom ... and the name of the one (v'shem ha'echad) Eliezer" [Shmos 18:3-4]. This is not the normal way to write a sentence. It should say, the name of the one was Gershom and the name of the *second* was Eliezer. Why is Eliezer called "ha'Echad", as if he were the first son?

The answer is they were both 'firsts'. Gershom was the first to follow Yisro's curriculum, so to speak, and Eliezer was the first to follow Moshe's curriculum.

If Yisro's approach of logically searching and coming to understand the basis of a true religion makes sense at all, it only makes sense when one is approaching mitzvos that themselves have logic and rationale behind them. But what will such a searcher do about a 'chok'? What will the

seeker do when he approaches a mitzvah that makes no sense? He will not accept it!

We can find some rationale or reason for virtually all the mitzvos in the Torah, even those categorized as 'chok'. Parah Adumah is the exception to this rule. It is the quintessential 'chok'. Shlomo Hamelech [King Solomon] said, "I will be wise, but it is distant yet from me" [Koheles 7:23]. What will happen when the searcher and experimenter encounters the Parah Adumah?

The answer is that here too, the Rabbis do attempt to find some type of rationale. They explain that the Parah Adumah is an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. "Let the mother come and clean up the mess of the child."

Rav Shimon Schwab makes the following brilliant insight which sheds light on the first Medrash quoted above. The rationale given for Parah Adumah only makes sense according to the opinion that a Parah Adumah must be three years old. If it is three years old, then it can have a child. (A cow cannot give birth until it is three years old.) The reasoning that a Parah Adumah is the mother of the calf that cleans up for her child does not make sense according to the opinion that a Parah Adumah can be made from a "two year old" calf, because a two year old calf cannot be a mother. But that is exactly is the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer in the Mishna. So according to Rabbi Eliezer, Parah Adumah is a chok through and through -- there is absolutely no rationale for it!

Clearly, then, it was necessary for Rabbi Eliezer's philosophy to be that the way to accept Torah is through Emunah -- pure belief, not through experimentation and finding rationales and reasons that appeal to us logically.

When Moshe Rabbeinu heard G-d quoting the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer, he said "I want this individual to be from my children" -- meaning, may he follow my philosophy of education in life, namely that one accepts based on belief rather than on experimentation and understanding." G-d assured Moshe that this was the case and brought the fact that the name of Moshe's son was in fact Eliezer as a supporting allusion.

An Antidote for Coveting -- You Wouldn't Want To Trade Places

I once heard the following homiletic insight (drush) on the tenth of the Ten Commandments.

There are differences in the vocabulary used in the Torah's two enumerations of the Ten Commandments regarding the prohibition of coveting (Lo Sachmod). However, both versions end with the same expression: "nor all that belongs to your fellow man" (v'chol asher l'rei-echa).

One may ask, after the Torah spells out that the prohibition of coveting applies to a neighbor's wife, and house, and male servants and female servants, his oxen, his cows, his donkeys -- what is the summation "and all that belongs to your fellow-man" really adding?

I once heard that it is coming to teach us how to prevent jealousy towards a friend. One might look at a neighbor's wife and see how wonderful she is. One might look at his house and see how well he lives. One can look at his job and his children and think "boy -- he has it so good!"

The Torah is telling us to consider "kol asher l'rei-echa" -- look at the whole picture. Everyone has their own pack of problems in life. No one's life is perfect. As apparent as it may seem that this person has it 'made', we do not know the whole story. What happens in the privacy of our neighbor's innermost chambers? We can never know for certain. It is always necessary to take into account "kol asher l'rei-echa" [all that is doing with your neighbor].

Many times, if not most times, if not all the time, when we learn about "all that is doing with our neighbor," we will not want to trade places.

I recently heard an insightful reality. If everyone were to place everything on the table -- all the good and all the bad -- (and they are

asked to pick any person's complete package) everybody would wind up taking back their own package.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 448, Lo Sachmod (Thou Shall Not Covet) Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. RavFrاند, Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> Project Genesis, Inc. learn@torah.org 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 (410) 602-1350 Baltimore, MD 21208



From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network
[shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: February 12, 2004

PENINIM ON THE TORAH
BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM
Parshas Yisro

And Yisro heard all that Hashem did to Moshe and to Yisrael, his people. (18:1)

Yisro was not the only one who heard about the miracles which Hashem wrought for His people. All the nations of the world heard. Yet, the Torah writes that only Yisro heard. Was his ability to hear different from that of the others? The commentators explain that everyone heard, but only Yisro applied what he heard.

To paraphrase Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, "Yisro did not simply hear; rather, he derhered, a Yiddish expression which denotes a specific quality of listening. We suggest another idea. More often than not, we attend a lecture, an ethical discourse, and are impressed with the message that has been expounded. We listened - we heard - we even accepted the idea, but, as far as we are concerned, it is a great idea - for someone else! It has nothing to do with us. There is no personal message. Yisro heard and understood the personal aspect of the miracles which Hashem had wrought.

And you shall make known to them the path in which they should go. (18:20)

In the Talmud Bava Metzia 30b, Chazal interpret the words, "the path," as a reference to performing acts of loving-kindness. In his Shaarei Teshuvah 3:13, Rabbeinu Yonah asserts that tzedakah, charity, is performed with one's money, while gemillus chasadim, acts of loving-kindness, are performed both with one's possessions and with one's body. A person should see to it that he provides assistance to his fellow man, regardless of his own personal financial standing. A smile, a nice word, a personal visit, serve this objective; it is not the monumental deeds that make the difference. Simple acts of caring can change a person's life. Chesed begins when we take notice of those around us in order to respond to their needs.

I recently read about a project initiated by a professor in clinical psychology. He encouraged his students to get involved in helping people. They asked, "What is there to do?" That is a typical question of those who are looking for a way to avoid responding to the needs of others. The professor took one of his students, whom we will call Joe, and brought him to a senior citizens center, so that he could do something for others. The following is what happened as a result of Joe's visit. When Joe first came to the home, he noticed that there were a large number of elderly patients just lying around in bed wearing their old cotton gowns, doing nothing but staring up at the ceiling. These people were acting like they had become victims of senility, but this was not the case. Senility is not necessarily a natural consequence of old age. It often occurs when people do not feel loved or useful. At first, Joe did not know what to do. Indeed, this was the first time he had been in such

a home. The professor suggested that he approach a certain elderly woman and begin a conversation with her. Joe went over to the patient, and they began to talk. It was more of a monologue than a dialogue. Nobody had listened to the woman for so long that she had a lot to share. She talked about her life, the ups and downs, the successes and failures, the happy times and the sad ones. She even spoke about her impending death. She had made peace with the fact that she would not live forever. She had so much to say, but no one had cared to listen! Joe was thoroughly moved by the experience. Therefore, he returned the following week. Soon he began to spend the day visiting many of the patients. It became known as Joe's Day. He would come to the home, and all the patients would gather to speak and even to listen. Someone cared.

No longer did they sit around in their worn-out gowns, staring at the ceiling or at the clock on the wall. Some asked their children to bring them new clothes. They had their hair done; they wanted to look nice, because someone finally cared. Joe realized that kindness can be expressed through the little things we do. Look around, and you will find a lonely person who needs company, a hassled worker whom no one remembers to thank, a young student whose parents have seemingly forgotten about in the maelstrom of life, a spouse who needs a smile, a child who needs an encouraging word. It is the little things that we do - or do not do - that make the difference. That is what chesed is all about.

One more story: Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, was a giant in Torah scholarship. He was also a giant in chesed. He did not merely delegate others to perform acts of chesed; even at his advanced age, he personally went out of his way to help those in need. He exhibited a sense of caring for others that was unparalleled. An observant psychologist who lives in Yerushalayim related the following story. When he walked into shul on Erev Pesach, he was greeted by a number of mispallelim, worshippers, "You must have done something special to have merited a visit from Rav Shach." "Who? What are you talking about?" he asked them. "Rav Shach was walking around your courtyard last night for about an hour," they said. "Impossible. You must be mistaken. Why would Rav Shach visit my courtyard?" the psychologist asked incredulously. After awhile, it became clear to the psychologist that, indeed, Rav Shach had been at his house. He now became chagrined, exclaiming, "Woe is me. It is my fault. I told the Rosh Hayeshivah not to come up to the house. It is because of me that the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of our generation, waited outside for an hour." The worshippers looked at him, without a clue as to what he was talking about. The psychologist was miserable. On Chol Hamoed, one of the Intermediate Days of Pesach, he traveled to Bnei Brak to ask mechilah, beg forgiveness, from Rav Shach. The Rosh Hayeshivah joyfully welcomed him to his home, saying, "I should ask you for mechilah!" Afterwards, Rav Shach explained what had occurred and what had precipitated his trip to Yerushalayim. On the night before Pesach, when everyone was occupied with Bedikas Chametz, searching their homes for chametz, a bachur, young man, came to speak to Rav Shach. The Rosh Hayeshivah perceived that something was clearly wrong emotionally with this bachur. He then telephoned the psychologist to ask if he would spend some time speaking with the young man. The psychologist was prepared to travel to Bnei Brak if that was what Rav Shach desired. Rav Shach told him that he would send the bachur over to him. Little did the psychologist know that Rav Shach, feeling that the bachur should not travel alone, would go along and wait outside for the duration of the visit. Upon being asked why he did not send someone else with the bachur, Rav Shach responded, "I am an old man and, thus, have very little to do to prepare for the Yom Tov of Pesach. Why should I bother someone else who is busy? Furthermore, I had the opportunity to take a stroll and partake of the refreshing air of Yerushalayim while I thought of divrei Torah. What greater pleasure is there?" This story speaks for itself.

So shall you say to the house of Yaakov and relate to Bnei Yisrael. (19:3)

When was the last time someone got up and attributed his success in Torah study to his mother? It is certainly not a common scenario. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, is quoted as saying, "It is well worth it to work a lifetime, establishing seminaries for thousands of young women, in order that the result will be one good mother!" He substantiated this when he added, "Look at what one mother accomplished! Rashi's mother raised a son that illuminated the world. What would the Torah have been without Rashi? No Rashi on Chumash - no Rashi on Navi - no Rashi on Talmud. Torah would never have been the same. All because of one mother."

Each in his own manner, the commentators, explain why Moshe Rabbeinu was instructed to convey the Torah first to Bais Yaakov, the women, and then to Bnei Yisrael, the men. The Midrash attributes it to the women's alacrity in mitzvah performance. Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer explains that men usually accede to their wife's advice. The Moshav Zekeinim al HaTorah from the Baalei Tosfos cites Rabbeinu Moshe M'Narvona, zl, who says that it was in Leah Imeinu's merit. She had a tablet made of gold, upon which was engraved the words, "Torah tzivah lanu Moshe," the Torah was commanded by Moshe. She would gaze at this tablet all day to the point that her eyes became tender as a result of the reflection from the gold. Therefore, her descendants/daughters, merited to hear the Torah first.

Rabbeinu Bachya asserts that women preceded men in hearing the Torah because the success of a man's Torah study is based upon the women in his life. A mother sets the tone for a child's attitude toward Torah study. She inculcates a love for Torah in her child, a love that will continue to endure as he develops and matures. The koach ha'chinuch, power of education, that rests upon the mother is compelling. When the Chafetz Chaim, zl, would hold his mother's old, tattered Sefer Tehillim in his hands, he would become very emotional and say, "Do you have any idea how many tears my mother shed over this Tehillim, as she entreated Hashem to grant her that her son should be a Yehudi kasheir, proper Jew?"

The Chafetz Chaim's daughter once related the following story concerning her grandmother. She said, "My grandmother was not a miracle worker. I do remember that at the end of her life, after her son, my father, had become renown throughout the Torah world as the saintly Chafetz Chaim, a number of close friends approached her with the obvious question: How did you merit to have a son that illuminated the eyes of the world? What was your recipe for success?"

She replied that she could not remember anything that she had done that would have catalyzed such success. After they pestered her some more, she added that there was one small thing that came to mind. Prior to her wedding, her mother had asked to speak to her. These were her words: "My daughter, listen to what I have to say. We are commanded to raise our sons to study Torah and have yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. Therefore, I ask of you that every free moment that you have, take your Siddur in hand and pray to Hashem that you merit to raise your children to be G-d-fearing and observant Jews who will devote themselves to Torah study. Do not forget to shed tears when you pray." She gave her daughter a Siddur in which Sefer Tehillim was included.

The Chafetz Chaim's mother continued, "That is all I did. Whenever I had a free moment, I would take out the Siddur and recite Tehillim, crying out my heart to Hashem that my Yisrael'ke would develop into a talmud chacham, Torah scholar, and a yarei Shomayim."

Upon relating this story, Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl, would add, "Rashi's rebbe was Rabbeinu Gershom Me'or Ha'boleah. He was greater than Rashi. Yet, Rashi merited to become the Rabbon Shel Kol Yisrael, quintessential Torah teacher of the Jewish people. Why? Because of his mother, the tzadekes, who was the sister of Rabbeinu Shimon Hazekein m'Magence and because of his saintly father."

It is related that Rashi's father possessed a valuable, precious stone that the priests needed for their idol. He, of course, was not about to grant them access to this stone. They surreptitiously convinced him to travel with them on a boat, with the intention of forcibly taking the stone from him. When Rashi's father realized what they were about to do, he threw the stone into the water, thereby forfeiting his own life. In return for this extraordinary act of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, a Bas Kol, Voice from Heaven, came forth to announce that he would merit a son that would illuminate the world.

The Gaon m'Vilna said about Horav Zalman, zl, m'Volozhin, brother of Horav Chaim, zl, m'Volozhin, that he was above the human dimension. He was like a Malach Elokim, a Heavenly angel. This is attributed to his mother who, when she was in labor and about to give birth to him, refrained from expressing any moaning whatsoever, because her husband was studying together with the Shaagas Arye. In her desire not to disturb these two giants of Torah, she contained her expression of pain until the final moment of birth. In this merit, the Shaagas Arye blessed her that her newly born son would be able to vanquish his yetzer hora, evil-inclination, and become similar to a Heavenly angel. This all demonstrates that when parents value Torah education, so do their children.

Children learn to respect what they see respected at home. When they are exposed to a double standard or hypocrisy, they react in kind. In concluding the impact that Jewish mothers have had on their children, we cite the mother of the Rosh Hayeshivah of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin and founder of the Daf Hayomi, folio a day, Horav Meir Shapiro, zl. Rav Meir Shapiro would always relate two thoughts that his mother had shared with him as a young child. These ideas inspired him and, in turn, became the source of inspiration to so many others. His mother would say to him, "Meir'l, my child, see that you study well and learn Torah, because every day that goes by with no Torah learned is something precious lost that can never be retrieved. Who knows what the next day may bring?" She would also emphasize the greatness of Torah when she said, "Work harder and sacrifice more. For such a great and mighty Torah, this is too small a sacrifice." When a child grows up hearing these two maxims as part of his daily lessons, it is no wonder that he achieved such distinction. Indeed, all of us are beneficiaries of her legacy.

l'iluy nishmas ha'isha ha'chashuva Maras Liba bas R' Tzvi niftar 28 Shevat 5762 T.N.TZ.V.H.

From: Aish.com [newsletterServer@aish.com] Sent: February 10, 2004
Subject: Shraga's Weekly - Yitro

<http://www.aish.com/torahportion/shragasweekly/showArticle.asp>

Parsha: Yitro (Exodus 18-20)

GET THE MESSAGE!

BY: RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS

In this week's Parsha, three million Jews gather at the foot of Mount Sinai and personally witness G-d Almighty giving the Torah. Despite what you may remember from Hebrew School, let me assure you that Mount Sinai is the central event in Jewish history!

It is surprising, therefore, that the name of this Parsha is "Yitro." Who was this man Yitro?

The Parsha begins:

"Yitro, the Priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard all that G-d did for Moses and Israel..." (Exodus 18:1)

Yitro heard about the amazing events of the Exodus and came to join the Jewish people. Rashi asks: "What was it specifically that Yitro heard that caused him to come? He heard about the splitting of the Red Sea and about the war with Amalek."

But really the entire world heard about the splitting of the Red Sea and the war with Amalek! So why does the Torah single out Yitro?

The answer is that Yitro was a truth seeker. He had traveled around, trying every type of spiritual path, ultimately rejecting one after another as false. He was honest with himself and committed to the truth. Did others hear about the Exodus? Of course! But only Yitro was open to its message. It was this act of greatness which brought Yitro to become part of the Jewish people - and for that the parsha of the Ten Commandments bears his name!

KNOWLEDGE OR FAITH?

Certainly the Ten Commandments is the most famous part of the Torah. But what is the first of the Ten Commandments anyway?

"I am G-d."

What kind of commandment is that? That's not a command -that's a statement!

Explain the Sages: This is the Mitzvah to know there is a G-d.

But to whom is this Mitzvah addressed? If it's for people who already believe in G-d, they don't need to be told. And if it's for people who don't believe in G-d, they don't care what the Torah says anyway!

The answer is as follows: The Torah does not say "BELIEVE" in G-d. Nor does it say to wonder, feel, intuit, assume, presume, hope, or aspire that there's a G-d. Rather, the Torah commands us to "KNOW" there is a G-d!

Western society typically associates religion with "blind faith." But the Torah commands us to use reason and logic to ascertain G-d's existence. This intellectual understanding is crucial; feelings alone can deceive. In the Aleynu prayer, we say "know today and place it on your heart." Rational knowledge comes first; only then are we to connect emotionally. "Know there is a G-d" is the first Commandment - the most central idea of Judaism.

How does one achieve this knowledge? One word: Objectivity. The Talmud (Avot 1:8) tells us: "Be a judge, not a lawyer." A lawyer may sometimes advance his position without regard for its truth or validity. A judge, on the other hand, weighs each side carefully. When considering a question as profound and deep as the existence of G-d, we must be an impartial jury!

The Torah suggests 3 tools for attaining this objectivity:

TOOL #1: Listen To What Others Are Saying

Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai are two famous disputants in Talmudic literature. They argued about almost everything and saw the world from nearly opposite perspectives. (For example, Beit Hillel says we should light one Chanukah candle the first night, and add one candle each subsequent night. Beit Shammai, on the other hand, says to light 8 candles the first night and then decrease one candle each night.)

Jewish law, interestingly, follows Beit Hillel. And the Talmud explains why: In any disagreement, Beit Shammai would always state his own opinion. Whereas, Beit Hillel would always first state the opinion of Beit Shammai, and only then state his own position. In this way, Beit Hillel demonstrated that he was not just concerned with being right, but was seeking the truth that lied somewhere in between. That's why Jewish law follows Beit Hillel.

We see this dynamic in our own relationships as well. We've all met someone who stubbornly defends a ridiculous position, to avoid admitting being wrong. (The irony is that ultimately there is far more embarrassment in stubborn persistence, than in admitting the truth.)

To elude this trap, we can train ourselves to take other people's ideas seriously. The cardinal rule is: stay focused and calm. Communicate and discuss, rather than yell-and-proclaim. If anxiety about needing to be right becomes the primary concern, you become entrenched in a position. Getting defensive, interrupting, and responding impetuously you've lost the battle. Hillel (and Yitro), on the other hand, was willing to listening to another's opinion, subjugate his ego and acknowledge a truth not his own.

This is particularly important in marriage. Each partner brings to the relationship different insights and strengths. The ways we differ is not a

threat; it is our opportunity to grow. If G-d had wanted us to be free of the need for each other, He'd have created us to split like an amoeba. Marriage is a unit, and when we focus on our common goals, we begin to view life in terms of "we," instead of the narrower "you-and-I."

This is true on a national level as well. Today, a wide gulf exists between different Jewish groups. As times, it seems the gap is unbridgeable. But in fact, there is greater area of agreement than we might think. We all agree on the need for tolerance, mutual trust, respect and understanding. We must find those areas of agreement and use them as a basis for building our relationships.

TOOL #2: Seek Friends Who Challenge You

The Talmud tells the story of Rebbi Yochanan, a great scholar who had a study partner named Reish Lakish. (Before becoming a rabbi, Reish Lakish was a bandit. But that's another story...) These two men studied together for many years, until one day Reish Lakish got sick and died. Rebbe Yochanan was seen walking in the street, totally depressed. His students asked him, "What's wrong?" He said, "My study partner died and now I have none." They told him, "Don't worry Rebbi, we'll take care of it." So they went and found a brilliant young man to study with Rebbe Yochanan.

Two weeks later, Rebbi Yochanan is seen walking in the street again, totally depressed. They asked: "Rebbi, what happened? Why are you so sad? We sent you the most brilliant study partner. What's the problem?" He told them: "My new study partner is so brilliant that whatever I say, he brings 24 proofs that I'm correct. But when I studied with Reish Lakish, he showed me 24 proofs that I was wrong. That's what I miss. I don't want someone who will just agree with me; I want a partner who will challenge my position. In this way we will arrive at the truth together."

A good challenge - is that what friends are for? YES! The Sages say: "Better the criticism of a friend, than the kiss of an enemy." Your friend will tell you when you have spinach stuck in your teeth; your enemy will smirk and say you look great! The Torah speaks of Dikduk Chaverim, which literally means fine-tuning with friends. With this attitude, I see others not as adversaries, but as a welcome counterbalance to my own perspective. In choosing my friends, I want someone who will challenge me to become better in life, not just better on the tennis court.

TOOL #3: Don't Be Afraid To Ask

One more story:

About 100 years ago in Europe, there was a wealthy man, named Rav Eisel Charif of Slonim. His daughter was ready to get married, so Rav Eisel sought the best young man. In those days, "the best young man" meant the top Yeshiva student. So Rav Eisel traveled to the town of Volozhin, which was brimming under the tutelage of its famous Rosh Yeshiva, the Netziv. (It is said that in the years the Netziv ran the Yeshiva, some 10,000 students passed through.) When Rav Eisel arrived, he walked into the study hall, made a loud klop on the table, and announced: "I have a very difficult question on a passage in the Talmud. Whoever can supply the correct answer will have my daughter's hand in marriage."

A great buzz swept through the study hall. The chance to marry Rav Eisel's daughter! Soon a long line formed, and one by one the students were given their chance to provide the answer. And one by one, Rav Eisel rejected the answers as incorrect. This went on for days. Some students even stood in line 2, 3, 4 times. But still no one came up with the correct answer. When the students had all exhausted their options, Rav Eisel packed his bags and began to head out of town.

He had just reached the edge of the city, when he heard a voice shouting after him: "Rav Eisel, Rav Eisel!" He turned around to see a young Yeshiva student running in his direction. The student explained: "Rav Eisel, I know I wasn't able to satisfy the condition for marriage, but just for my own sake, sir, could you please tell me what is the correct answer?"

"Aha!" shouted Rav Eisel. "You will be my son-in-law!"

In our lives, the pursuit of truth can sometimes be stifled if we don't have the courage to ask. Seeking another's help is an admission that I don't have all the answers myself. This may necessitate asking an uncomfortable question. Or humbly admitting I don't know. Or risking the appearance of ignorance. But all this is infinitesimal when compared to a life perpetuated in falsehood. The Yeshiva student demonstrated this courage; it is the hallmark of intellectual honesty.

THE SINAI EXPERIENCE

When the Jewish people stood at Sinai, they unconditionally accepted to fulfill all 613 Mitzvot. For those just beginning, 613 sounds like an awful lot ... even overwhelming! Where does one begin to tackle such massive breadth and depth? If only there was one, powerful idea we could grasp. Something that summed up all the rest.

Rebbeinu Bechaye explains that while the Torah contains 613 mitzvot, everything is ultimately contained in the very first command, "I am G-d." It all boils down to that one line. Why? Because it is around this point that all else revolves. Once we "know there is a G-d," the rest flows from there - because we recognize it as a unified, holistic system.

What was the exact encounter at Mount Sinai? The Talmud says: Every Jew experienced G-d's Voice. A Voice so powerful that the people not only heard, but they "saw the sound waves" emerging from G-d's mouth. This physiological phenomenon is called "synesthesia," whereby all the senses are intensified and fused.

Jewish tradition tells us that each and every Jewish soul - past, present and future - stood that day at Mount Sinai. When The Voice tore through all 7 Heavens, the Torah was engraved on the stone tablets ... but was first engraved on the heart of every Jew. The Voice spoke and we heard. In Shema Yisrael, (the Jewish Pledge of Allegiance), we begin with the word Shema - "Listen." Carefully and calmly, we listen. Just like Yitro listened.

The Sfats Emes says that to receive the Torah, one has to desire truth. Do we truly want to attain clarity in life? Be a pursuer of truth. Listen carefully. For the mitzvah of "Know there is a G-d" invites us to rediscover the truth.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Shruga Simmons

Rabbi Shruga Simmons spent his childhood trekking through snow in Buffalo, New York. He has worked in the fields of journalism and public relations, and is now the Editor of Aish.com in Jerusalem. You can contact him directly at: simmons@aish.com

See the full Parsha Archives: http://www.aish.com/torahportion/pArchive_hp.asp

Shruga's Weekly contains one yearly cycle of essays that repeat.

(C) 2004 Aish HaTorah International - All rights reserved. Email: webmaster@aish.com Home Page: <http://www.aish.com> Live camera from the Western Wall: <http://www.aish.com/wallcam>

From: ohr@ohr.edu Sent: February 11, 2004 To: weekly@ohr.edu
Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Yitro
TORAH WEEKLY - For the week ending 14 February 2004 / 22 Shevat 5764 - from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
<http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/1472>

Written and compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

OVERVIEW Hearing of the miracles G-d performed for Bnei Yisrael, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe

accepts his advice. Bnei Yisrael arrive at Mt. Sinai where G-d offers them the Torah. After they accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain, and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, G-d's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments: 1. Believe in G-d 2. Don't worship other "gods" 3. Don't use G-d's name in vain 4. Observe Shabbat 5. Honor your parents 6. Don't murder 7. Don't commit adultery 8. Don't kidnap 9. Don't testify falsely 10. Don't covet. After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them. G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

INSIGHTS

- Does Shabbat Like You?

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

May I ask you a personal question?

How's your Shabbat?

Does every Shabbat make you feel suffused with holiness? Does every rock and building and tree whisper to you "Shabbat!" Do feel so much closer to G-d than the rest of the week?

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

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

And even if Shabbat isn't a burden, and we enjoy the food, the company, the Shabbat nap, but do feel that we have left one reality and entered another world?

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

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

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

You might think that Shabbat is a day in the week.

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

You'd be wrong. It's not.

Shabbat is a being. Shabbat is an existence with feelings and likes and dislikes. Shabbat can choose to come to you once in your life, or every week - or never. Because if you never felt Shabbat, it's because it never came to you. It didn't feel comfortable with you.

Because you don't feel comfortable with it.

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

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

Every we week, we have to remember to make Shabbat holy, to exert ourselves and infuse those precious hours with Torah, with spirituality,

enthusiasm and kedusha, for if we make it holy then the Shabbat queen will arrive with all her retinue of blessings to crown our week.
- Based on Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz in Da'at Chochma U'Mussar
(C) 2004 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

From: National Council of Young Israel [YI_Torah@lb.bcentral.com]
Sent: February 10, 2004
Parshat Yisro 22 Shevat 5764 February 14, 2004 Daf Yomi: Chulin 22
Guest Author: RABBI YEHOASHUA WENDER
Young Israel of Houston, Texas

There is a famous midrash in Parshat V'zot Habrachah that relates to the Jewish people's receiving the Torah on Har Sinai. The midrash says that, before we received the Torah, HaShem went to the children of Esav and offered them the Torah. They asked, "What is in it?" "Thou shalt not murder!" answered HaShem. They responded, "Our father built his reputation on murder. How could we leave his ways?" And, so, they refused the Torah.

HaShem then went to the descendants of Yishmael. HaShem informed them that stealing was forbidden. They, too, would not abandon the ways of their ancestor.

The children of Amon and Moav also rejected the Torah. Their problem was the prohibition of adultery. After all, their birth was a product of immorality.

Finally, Bnei Yisrael were approached and offered the Torah. The midrash tells us that the Jewish nation's immediate response was Naaseh V'nishma - "we will do and we will listen." They didn't even bother asking what was in the Torah, for they had total trust in HaShem. Therefore, the Torah became our legacy forever.

One can assume that HaShem offered the Torah to those nations so that in the future they would not be able to come back and complain that only the Jews were given the Torah. The opportunity was there, and they can only blame themselves.

It is important to note that HaShem challenged each nation with a law which would present it with the greatest difficulty. It is possible that they could have lived with the other 612 mitzvot. Yet, each group failed the overall test.

It would seem that Bnei Yisrael never actually had that test. Since they never asked concerning the contents of the Torah, HaShem never tempted them with a similar challenge. If this is true, it would be most interesting to know with which mitzvah would we have had the greatest problem. Would we have been able to pass the test, or would we have failed like the others?

In actuality, there is a deeper understanding of this midrash. Our baalei mussar (teachers of ethical thought) tell us that the greatest yetzer harah (evil inclination) of the Jewish people is in the realm of philosophy. As a people, we are always questioning, always doubting, and often straying. After all, the episode of the golden calf came only forty days after Matan Torah. This is the meaning of our being "stiff-necked people."

It has often been pointed out that the non-Jewish world seems to have much less of a problem with belief. Watching preachers at work, we can see an endless sea of believers. "I believe" seems to come so easily for the rest of the world. The ranks of agnostics, humanists, and atheists always seem to have a large percentage of Jews. Throughout history we have always been among the first to conceive of or embrace new philosophies. Indeed, it is within the realm of the mind that the Jew has always had its stiffest tests.

In the light of this explanation of the baalei mussar let us examine the midrash. Our response of "we shall do, and we shall listen" seems totally out of character. How unlike our people to accept something on blind faith! One would think that, of all the peoples of the world, we, the Jews, would be most unlikely to react in this way. But, at least for the moment, we reached the level of angels and trusted HaShem implicitly. It was our

greatest moment. This was, in fact, our greatest test, and we passed it with flying colors, for the "people of the mind" were willing to subjugate their thoughts to those of their Creator. Esav had rejected the Torah because of his people's weakness. Yishmael, Amon, and Moav had done the same. But we had triumphed!

What follows? The first commandment. Belief in HaShem. The foundation of our faith--but often the loose brick that gives way. Not murder, not stealing, not immorality. Just plain simple belief. Simple for others; so difficult for us. We now see that we, too, were treated like the others. The hardest came first. The difference is, we said yes!

It is important to note that, like all the other mitzvot, belief in HaShem has many levels. The older we are, the wiser we grow, the greater should be our emunah. This commandment is one of the six mitzvot tadirot (constants), and it should therefore attract our special attention. Unfortunately, for many of us, it does not. We are often left with the juvenile understanding of HaShem and His universe that we had growing up.

Na'aseh v'nishma came at a moment of great inspiration. Regrettably, it didn't last. The stiff-necked people were soon back in philosophical trouble. We must learn from their error. We must solidify our faith with Torah study that speaks to the issue. The First Commandment isn't first by accident. It deserves our highest priority!

NCYI's Weekly Divrei Torah Bulletin is sponsored by the Henry, Bertha and Edward Rothman Foundation - Rochester, New York; Cleveland, Ohio; Circleville, Ohio