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Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski

The Power of Belief

Rather recently, books have appeared advocating "positive imagery," suggesting that if you imagine the scene that you wish to occur, this will make it happen. The first tendency is to dismiss this almost derisively. "I was laid off eight months ago. I have repeatedly imagined myself happily employed at a new job, but I am still unemployed." It is quite difficult to counter such observations. Magical thinking is juvenile, one says, and wishing it will happen does not bring it about.

Logically, I would go along with this observation. However, I came across an essay in the sefer Ohev Israel, by the Chassidic master, Rebbe Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apt. He cites Rashi's statement (Genesis 7:7) that Noah vacillated in his belief that there would indeed be a flood, and did not enter the ark until the rising waters forced him to. The Rebbe of Apt asks, "How can one say that Noah, whom the Torah describes as a perfect tzaddik, was lax in his belief in Hashem's words?"

The Rebbe explains that the word emunah, faith, is related to the word omein, which means "to raise up," as in the Book of Esther, which uses the word omein in the sentence that Mordecai reared Esther. This connotation, the Rebbe says, means that emunah can "raise" things, i.e., bring them about. Therefore, Noah did not allow himself to have a strong belief that the flood would occur, because he feared that this might actually cause the flood to materialize. Noah still held out hope that the people might do teshuvah that might avert the flood, and his intense emunah might hasten it. Thus, Rashi's comment is not an aspersion on Noah.

We have the principle that a positive middah is more powerful than a negative middah. If, as the Rebbe says, a strong belief (emunah) may result in a negative result, then certainly, a strong positive belief may bring about a desired result.

However, the belief must be genuine and complete, which may be difficult to achieve.

Rebbe Yitzhak Meir of Gur cited the Midrash, that before offering the Torah to the Jews, Hashem offered it to other peoples. The Moabites asked, "What does the Torah say?" and Hashem said, "You shall not commit adultery." The Moabites rejected the Torah because, "We are a lustful people. We cannot accept that restriction."

Hashem then offered it to the Edomites, who asked, "What does the Torah say?" and Hashem said, "You shall not commit murder." The Edomites rejected the Torah because, "Our father, Esau, was blessed 'to live by the sword.'

Why did Hashem offer the Torah to other nations? So that they should not say, "You favored the Jews. If you had given us the Torah, we would have been the chosen people." Now Hashem can say, "I offered it to you, but you rejected it."

"But," Rebbe Yitzhak Meir asked, "how does that address the charges of the Moabites and the Edomites. They will still say, 'You quoted us "You shall not commit adultery." and "You shall not commit murder," but to the Jews You said, "I am the Lord your G-d." Had you told us that, we would have accepted the Torah.'

Rebbe Yitzhak Meir explained, "The Torah is intended to help a person overcome his physical drives. The primary physical drive of the Moabites was lust, and that of the Edomites, bloodshed. These are not the primary drives of the Jews. The Jews' primary drive is skepticism. Other nations could believe that idols, rivers and mountains were gods. Jews, on the other hand, witnessed many supernatural miracles, yet as the Torah relates and our history confirms, continued to doubt Hashem. Therefore, Hashem approached each nation with what would be the greatest challenge for them. For the Moabites it was restraint of lust, for the Edomites it was restraint of killing, and for the Israelites, it was to believe in Hashem.

Emunah is indeed a powerful force and may make things happen. However, sincere and complete emunah is difficult to achieve.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Yisro

*Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
Yisro Connected the Dots*

There is a famous pasuk and a famous Rashi at the beginning of Parshas Yisro. The pasuk says, "And Priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moshe heard all that Elo-kim did for Moshe and for Israel His nation, for Hashem took Israel out of Egypt." [Shemos 18:1] Rashi [based on Zevachim 116a] explains that Yisro heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the War with Amalek. When he heard about these great miracles, he thought to himself: "I need to check this out for myself and see what is going on with these miraculous people."

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

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

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

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

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

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

I saw in the sefer Darash Mordechai from Rav Mordechai Druk what I think is a very beautiful explanation. When the Ribono shel Olam came to Klal Yisrael to give them the Torah, something happened in the world that never happened before, and has not happened since: The world stopped...to the extent that there was not a peep heard in the world. No bird chirped. No dog barked. The world was silent. Something was happening. The Gemara states [Zevachim 116a] that the world’s population was amazed at this phenomenon and could not figure out what was happening. They all gathered around the wicked Bilaam and asked him: “What is going on? Is this the beginning of another Flood?” It was like right before a Tsunami – all the animals were quiet. Everyone wanted to know what was about to occur. Bilaam (citing another pasuk in Tehillim [29:10] “Hashem L’Mabul Yashav...”) assured them that Hashem promised He would never bring another Flood to the world. The nations were afraid and they asked Bilaam “Perhaps Hashem’s oath was not to destroy the world by water, but He might yet destroy the world again by fire or earthquake.” Bilaam again reassured them that the Divine Oath was a guarantee that the entire civilization of the world would never again be destroyed. They persisted: “What then is this great sound that we are hearing?” Bilaam told them “The Ribono shel Olam has this great treasure which He has kept hidden in His safe for 974 generations before the world was created. He now is preparing to give this great treasure to His People. That is what is happening! This is a momentous event, as it is written “Hashem gives power to His people...” [Tehillim 29:11].

What was the reaction of all the Nations of the World? They immediately responded “...Hashem should bless His people with Peace.” [ibid.]. In other words, “Gezunte Heit!” – Fine and dandy, let Hashem give His people the

Torah, He should just let us alone and we will be fine. As long as it is not going to affect us, we will go back along our merry way, doing what we were doing and not be concerned about this Torah.

In that reaction we find the difference between Yisro and the Nations of the World. They saw things happening, but as long as these events – as miraculous as they might have all been – didn’t affect them, their reaction was “I don’t want to know about it. It’s none of my business!” No reaction. Yisro’s strength was that (in today’s parlance we would say) he connected the dots. After 9/11 when everybody wondered: “Where was the CIA? Where was the FBI? Where was the Defense Intelligence Agency? Why didn’t they see this coming? Everybody said, “Well they knew there was something called Al-Qaeda, they knew there was someone call Osama bin Laden, they knew there was this, they knew there was that... but they didn’t connect the dots!” If you don’t connect the dots you don’t see the connection.

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

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

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

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

It struck me to connect this thought with an incident in the life of Rav Gifter, zt”l, about which I was not 100% clear. I called Rebbetzin Eisenberg, Rav Gifter’s daughter, and she was a bit fuzzy on the details as well, so she called a couple of her brothers. They also could not swear to exactly what happened.

However, this is my recollection of the story: When Rav Gifter [1915-2001] went in the 1930s from the United States of America to Telshe in Lithuania to study in the famous European Yeshiva, he went by boat. He did not travel first class. He went steerage. Above him on one of the nights of the trip they were having a big dance, and everyone was having a good time. People were dancing, drinking, and enjoying themselves immensely. All of a sudden, the boat hit a storm. “And the boat was about to break apart.” [Yonah 1:4]. You have to realize this is not all that many years after the sinking of the Titanic. People had that tragedy fresh in their minds. People were scared and frightened. But then the storm passed. The people went back to dancing. This incident made a great impression on the young Mordechai Gifter. He said it was a moment when one’s life flashes in front of him. One inevitably thinks “I could drown in the North Atlantic.” And then in a moment, the danger passes and you are saved! What do people do? They go back to dancing!

This is a rerun of the story of the frightened Nations of the World who anxiously asked Bilaam to explain to them what was happening. Is it a

Flood? Is it a Fire? Is the world coming to an end? "No! The Jews are being given the Torah!" "Fine. Let it be like that. I am going right back to doing my own thing!"

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

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Rabbi Hershel Schachter
COVID and Derech Halimud

Just a few days ago there was a long article in the New York Times about Rav Chaim Kanievsky and the COVID situation in Eretz Yisroel. I was very saddened to read the statistic that although the Chareidim make up only 12% of the Jewish population in Eretz Yisroel, 28% of those infected with COVID were from the Chareidi circle. What a tragedy! More than twice as much as it should have been.

Every morning in the davening we speak about the value of human life. We comment that all human activities are so trivial that to a certain extent, humans are not more consequential than animals. However, we go on to say, the B'nai Yisroel, the followers of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov who keep mitzvos are in a very different category.

The opening passuk in the Torah tells us, "בראשית ברא אלהים" and Rashi in his commentary quotes from the Midrash that the word "בראשית" means "בשביל ראשית", i.e. for the Jewish people, that are referred to by Yirmiyahu (2:3) as ראשית and for the Torah which is referred to in Mishlei (8:22) as ראשית. The passuk is telling us that the world was created on behalf of the Jewish people who are going to keep the Torah. This was the whole purpose of creation.

The simple reading of the mishnah in Pirkei Avos (3:14) is that all men were created btzelem Elokim. The Jewish people have a greater degree of tzelem Elokim, which is referred to as bonim laMakom (since children always carry the DNA of their parents). The M'eiri in his introduction to shas quotes an interesting Midrash that maintains that the first five of the Aseres Hadibros were written on the first luach and the second five were written on the second luach, and there is a correspondence between the first set of five and the second set of five. Specifically, the sixth of the Aseres Hadibros is related to the first; the seventh to the second, etc. The connection between the first and the sixth dibros is that the Torah prohibits murder because man was created btzelem Elokim and one who kills is demonstrating that he does not believe that there is such a thing as Elokim. Because we believe that B'nai Yisroel have a greater degree of tzelem Elokim, we are always much more careful regarding safeik sakonah (possible danger) than all of the medical doctors. For example, when a bris has to be postponed because the infant is not well, even after the doctors release the baby from the hospital and say that he is up to having the circumcision, the halacha in the Gemarah tells us that we still have to wait additional days. And, in recent years, the mohalim have established a minhag regarding the bilirubin count that is also more stringent than what the doctors would say.

Halacha tells us that even if there is a sfeiik sfeiika, a very slight risk, of sakonah, still that slight safeik is sufficient to be docheh Shabbos and Yom Kippur and most of the mitzvos of the Torah. So the question begs itself, how could it possibly be that the number of infections in the Chareidi community due to COVID is twice as high as what it should have been, proportionally?

My impression is that part of the explanation is a result of the derech ha'limud adopted in many of the yeshivas. There is a big emphasis on pilpul, sevoros, chakiros, and ha'veh a'minas in the Gemarah. The Gemarah considers the highest level of learning to be one who learns l'asukei sh'meitza aliba d'hilchosa - to reach a final conclusion as to what the halacha is. When I was a student in the Yeshiva, one of the talmidim asked a rebbe after we learned a whole piece of Gemarah that was relevant to halacha l'meisa - halachic practice, "so how do we pasken?" The rebbe, who was a European, responded in Yiddish, "call up the Agudas Harabonim and ask them". In the Lithuanian yeshivas in Europe learning halacha l'meisa was frowned upon. They misinterpreted the idea of learning Torah l'shmo to mean that one should not focus his learning arriving at a conclusion as to what the halacha is. It is well known that the Chazon Ish worked hard to correct this misunderstanding and influence the yeshivas to concentrate more on halacha l'maaseh.

Many students in the yeshivas today are trained to raise all logical possibilities about the halacha - maybe it's like this and maybe it's like that; on the one hand and on the other hand, etc.. Rav Avigdor Nevenzal pointed out that the Malbim (in his commentary on Mishlei 1:7) understands that "ארייל" is a specific type of a fool who is always raising questions and doubts, that maybe it's like this and maybe it's like that.

When I was a student in college, there was a popular British philosopher by the name of Bertrand Russel. One day, one of my classmates brought with him a copy of Russel's "dictionary of philosophy". As I seem to recall, for every letter of the alphabet Russel has a word and a cartoon to convey the meaning of the word. Under the letter "A" you find the word "arithmetic" and the cartoon depicts a priest with the collar around his neck in a backward position, teaching young children arithmetic. The priest writes on the blackboard 1+1+1=1. They believe in the Trinity but the bible says "Hashem Echad", so they assume that one plus one plus one equals one. Of course, we all know that that does not correspond to reality.

Chazal always believed in experimentation. It is generally assumed today in all of the yeshivas that it does not make any sense to have a machlokes in the Gemarah regarding metzius - a factual point. The Ramban points this out, quoting a passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi which asked, how can there be a disagreement between Rav Yochanon ben Nuri and the chachomim whether orez and dochen can become chometz, why didn't the Tanaim test it out and ascertain what the reality is? Halacha cannot contradict reality!

In the shailos u'teshuvos literature, there is a serious discussion between the Chasam Sofer and the Maharam Schick regarding to what extent do we rely on medical knowledge. One thing is for sure, though: with respect to sakonas nefashos we certainly follow what the doctors say at least to the extent of considering it a safeik sakonah which is docheh almost kol ha'Torah kula.

This entire attitude that many otherwise very observant Jews have to totally ignore the recommendations of the medical community regarding the risks of COVID is in total contradiction to the Jewish tradition of psak halacha. The religious Jews always placed more value on human life than doctors did.

The Beis Ha'Levi explains that when the Jewish people responded, "כל אשר דבר יהוה נעשה ונשמע" (Shemos 24:7) at Har Sinai, na'aseh meant that we committed ourselves to observe the mitzvos, and nishmah meant that we committed ourselves to learn Torah. What does it mean to learn Torah? The Chumash tells us "ולמדתם אתם ושמרתם לעשותם" - "you should learn them (the 613 mitzvos) and observe them." It is for this reason that the Rambam authored the Sefer Ha'mitzvos as an introduction to the Mishnah Torah. At the beginning of each section in Mishnah Torah, he gives you a list of the mitzvos that will be covered in this section. By the time you complete the entire Mishnah Torah you have covered all of the 613 mitzvos.

The basic mitzvah of talmud Torah is to be familiar with all of the 613 mitzvos and all of their details. Answering a question Rav Akiva Eiger has on a Tosofos is comparable to eating the icing on a second piece of cake as part of dessert. The primary goal and focus of limud ha'Torah is to know halacha l'maaseh how to keep all the mitzvos ha'Torah. In my opinion much

of the tragedy of the high infection rate among the Chareidi population is due to the faulty derech ha'limud which eschews focusing on the correct thing to do halacha l'maaseh, and instead focuses on pilpul and ha'veh a'minas.

Let us all return to the traditional style of learning that was practiced for so many centuries and merit the promise of the Torah, "וְהָיָה בְהֵמָּה וְלֹא שִׁמּוֹת בְּהֵמָּה". More divrei Torah on Parshas Yisro Copyright © 2021 by TorahWeb.org. All rights reserved.

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subject: Covenant and Conversation

A Nation of Leaders (Yitro 5781)

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

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

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

What is specifically Jewish, however, is the principle of the covenant at Sinai, that Israel is the chosen people, the only nation whose sole ultimate king and legislator is God Himself. "He has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws, Halleluyah." (Psalm 147:19-20) What the covenant at Sinai established for the first time was the moral limits of power.[1] All human authority is delegated authority, subject to the overarching moral imperatives of the Torah itself. This side of heaven there is no absolute power. That is what has always set Judaism apart from the empires of the ancient world and the secular nationalisms of the West. So Israel can learn practical politics from a Midianite but it must learn the limits of politics from God Himself. Despite the contrast, however, there is one theme in common to both episodes, to Yitro and to the revelation at Sinai, namely the delegation, distribution and democratisation of leadership. Only God can rule alone. The theme is introduced by Yitro. He arrives to visit his son-in-law and finds him leading alone. He says, "What you are doing is not good." (Ex. 18:17) This is one of only two instances in the whole Torah in which the words lo tov, "not good", appear. The other is in Genesis (2:18), where God says, "It is not good [lo tov] for man to be alone." We cannot lead alone. We cannot live alone. To be alone is not good.

Yitro proposes delegation:

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

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

In the next chapter, prior to the revelation at Mount Sinai, God commands Moses to propose a covenant with the Israelites. In the course of this, God articulates what is in effect the mission statement of the Jewish people: You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:4-6)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion
Shabbat Shalom: Yitro (Exodus 18:1 – 20:23)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel — “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall you work and do all acts of physical creativity; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord your God, on which you shall not do any act of physical creativity’ (Ex. 20:8-10)

Undoubtedly the greatest gift of the Jews to the world is our Bible, the 24 books from Genesis to Chronicles, the quintessential centerpiece of which is the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments.

If enlightened Western culture emerged from the twin influences of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian literatures, the “mother of human and humane morality” is the “Ten Utterances” (Aseret Hadibrot in Hebrew) expressed by an invisible and ineffable God from atop a desert mountain before a newly freed slave people, who adopted these ethical norms as the Declaration of Independence of their newly forming nation.

Indeed, in the past 3,500 years, no philosopher or theologian has come up with a more inclusive or trenchant moral code which says it better than the Divine Words uttered at Sinai: “Honor your father and your mother...” (basic gratitude to those who gave you life and nurture)

“You shall not murder.”

“You shall not commit adultery.”

“You shall not steal.”

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

“You shall not covet” (that which belongs to another).

Here, in very few words, is set down the basic inviolability of every human being; if society would only adhere to these principles, the world would become a Garden of Eden.

But I must ask two important questions. I have listed the last six commandments; the fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” the prohibition of “working” on the Sabbath, with which I opened this commentary, doesn’t seem to belong with the rest. What transgression against the integrity of another human being do I commit by opening up my business on Saturday morning? Moreover, if the essence of what was commanded at Sinai was principles of morality, why must the first three commands deal with God, the God who took us out of Egypt, the God who demands exclusivity of fealty, and the God whose name dare not be taken in vain? Is it not possible to be ethical or moral without necessarily believing in God?

Let us begin with the first of the “Ten Utterances,” not so much a commandment as it seems to be almost a definition of God’s “essence”: “I am the Lord who took you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage,” I am the Lord who insists that every human being be free! We must remember that the Book of Exodus emerges from the Book of Genesis, where God describes the creation of the world and creation of the human being. And what is remarkable and unique about the creation of the human is that he/she—unlike all other creatures of the universe—is created in God’s image, is inspired with the soul of Divine life, is endowed with a portion of essence from God on High (Gen. 1:27, 2:7).

This means further that the human being was created to have freedom of choices, to be empowered to do even that which God would not have wanted him to do (Seforno ad loc, and the story of the eating of the forbidden fruit).

Yes, God charges the human to develop and take responsibility for the world, to perfect the imperfect world which God created (Gen. 2:15; Isa. 45:7) and God believes that the human, created after all in His image, will eventually succeed in doing that (Isa. 2; Mic. 4). But let no one dare enslave the human, whom God made to be free, and let no one dare to violate the human created in the Divine image (Gen. 9:7). Herein lies the force of these three “commands.”

This Divine basis for human freedom and inviolability—for our biblical morality, if you will—is not at all self-evident. It was not only the Greek pagans who modeled the gods of Mount Olympus after humans, but it was also the Greek philosophers who accepted the right of the conqueror to acquire slaves, the right of the victor to take the spoils, the justice of the powerful controlling the weak. But it was Moses and the later prophets who articulated the responsibility of the rich and powerful to care for the poor and the weak, it was Abraham who articulated “God’s path of compassionate righteousness and moral justice,” and it was the author of the Book of Job who reminded the Jewish master to remove the injustice of owning a gentile slave; after all, “did not the one who made the Jewish master in His belly also make the gentile slave, did not the womb of the same One prepare them both?” (Job 31:15 and Maimonides, Laws of Slaves, last law).

Now we can understand the majestic significance of the prohibition of working on the Sabbath; the Sabbath reminds us that God created the world, that God created the human being in His Divine Image, and that the human being is inviolate and free. Herein lies the ultimate value and equality of every human being, in both a moral as well as a political sense.

God demands that no totalitarian ruler may enslave his subject, may reduce him to slave labor seven days a week, may control his thoughts and beliefs. God is our Ultimate Employer, who guarantees our ultimate freedom, who doesn’t allow us to work on the seventh Sabbath day! This is why, when Moses repeats the Decalogue in the Book of Deuteronomy, he links the Sabbath rest not to the creation of the world but rather to our exodus from Egypt: “Observe the Sabbath day... in order that your male gentile servant and your female gentile servant may rest like you, so that you remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there...” (Deut. 5:12-15).

It is the necessity of Sabbath rest which precludes slavery and thereby ensures universal freedom!

Shabbat Shalom!

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Insights Parshas Yisro - Shevat 5781

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Malka ben Rav Kalman z”l. Sponsored by Kalman & Chana Finkel. “May her Neshama have an Aliya!”

Struggling to Accept

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

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

This difference in the translation of the word “וישמע” is only natural. When it occurs by Yisro, it is referring to the accounting of the incidents that Yisro had heard. By Moshe the word is referring to his reaction to the solution that Yisro had proffered to resolve an overworked justice system; therefore the

Targumim translate it as “accepted” because the Torah means to inform us that Moshe valued Yisro’s solution and agreed to implement his innovative design for the court system.

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

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

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

Highly Pleasurable

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

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

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

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

Rambam in the Yad (Hilchos Dayos 6:2) rules: “There is a mitzvah to cleave to Torah scholars and their students so that one may learn from their actions, as the verse states, ‘and to Him you shall cleave.’ By cleaving to Torah scholars, one cleaves to Hashem.” In other words, socializing with Torah scholars is a specific commandment that is related to cleaving to Hashem. Maharsha seems to understand that the Gemara is referring to the mitzvah of hachnosas orchim – hosting guests. But this is difficult to understand. The

mitzvah of hachnosas orchim is derived from Avraham Avinu hosting the “three Arabs” that he found on the road outside his tent. We don’t find that there is a bigger mitzvah for welcoming guests who are Torah scholars. In fact, a careful reading of the Gemara reveals why Rashi doesn’t agree with Maharsha’s interpretation. The Gemara makes a very clear statement about the value of hosting a Torah scholar and benefitting him from one’s possessions. This doesn’t fall under the category of hosting guests, this falls under the mitzvah of cleaving to Hashem. That is why the verse in our parsha ends with the words “before God.” When Yisro invited Aharon and the elder of Yisroel to partake in his meal he was displaying his desire to be connected with Hashem.

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

Did You Know...

This week’s parsha contains one of the most memorable events in Jewish history – that of our people standing at the base of Mount Sinai and receiving the Torah. Many incredible events transpired on that day, and perhaps the greatest of them all was when Hashem spoke to us and started telling us the Ten Commandments.

1. Rashi, in this week’s parsha (24:12), tells us something quite fascinating.

He quotes a Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:16) and says that included within these Ten Commandments, are all 613 mitzvos. How you ask? Well, we aren’t entirely sure, but the very same Rashi (24:12) points us in the direction of R’ Saadia Gaon – who actually showed how each and every mitzvah fits into these Ten Commandments in the Azharos (poems written by Geonim on the 613 mitzvos) he composed.

2. The Midrash (ad loc.) further tells us that there are actually 620 letters within the Ten Commandments, 613 of them alluding to the 613 mitzvos, and the remaining seven as an allusion to the seven days of creation. This connection to creation is to show that the world was created for Torah.

3. The gematria (numerical value) of the word Torah is 611. This alludes to the verse “Torah Tziva Lanu Moshe – Moshe charged us with the Torah,” referring to the fact that the first two of the Ten Commandments were said to us by Hashem Himself. Unfortunately, Bnei Yisroel couldn’t handle that level of revelation of Hashem (their souls left them as they yearned to return to connect to their Creator). So Moshe taught Bnei Yisroel the rest – 611 mitzvos (the numerical value of Torah).

4. Regarding the luchos, the Gemara (Nedarim 38a) tells us that their dimensions were six tefachim by six tefachim, and three tefachim thick. In today’s measurements, this would be approximately two feet by two feet, and one foot thick. Visually, this would be two completely square blocks that would actually form a perfect cube if combined. This should dispel the common misperception that the luchos were rounded off on top – a mistake probably brought into our cultural consciousness by uninformed artists.

5. The luchos were made of sapphire, making them incredibly heavy. Of course, we cannot know exactly how much they weighed, as we don’t know exactly how much was carved out for the words, but together they would have weighed somewhere around 640 pounds, making lifting them a mighty feat indeed.

6. There is some discussion that the first luchos, being from Hashem, had the entire Torah on it, while the second ones simply had the Ten Commandments (Beis Halevi Derush #18). However, there is an opinion in the Midrash (quoted ad loc.) stating that even in the second luchos, after

each commandment, every parsha and detail regarding that commandment was written.

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Parshat Yitro

Moshe-San

"You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence." (20:4)

As every believing Muslim knows, "Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice dates from the historic event when Prophet Abraham was commanded by God, in the form of a dream vision, to sacrifice his son, Ishmail. But while he was in the act of sacrificing his Ishmail, God sent the angel Gabriel with a huge ram. Gabriel informed Abraham that his dream vision was fulfilled and instructed him to sacrifice the ram as a ransom for his son." Sound familiar? But it's not just Islam that has a rather different version of world history than us. Are you familiar with the belief that Moses actually came to Japan to learn the wisdom of ancient Shinto during the forty days that the Bible says he was on Mount Sinai, receiving the Torah from G-d. Or that the Japanese are one of the ten 'Lost Tribes' of Israel?

The supposed common ancestry of the Jews and the Japanese makes fanciful reading but maybe Hashem allowed this idea currency to rescue His People from what could have been a murderous encounter.

In Tokyo in 1941, Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes and the Amshenover Rebbe sat facing four Japanese admirals in dress uniforms. Heads shaven, arms folded stiffly across their chests, they sat motionless. The opening formalities were brief. In fact, considering the usual time-consuming graciousness that customarily began such formal encounters, they were just short of insulting. "We appreciate your coming today; we appreciate your cooperating with us..." Then, suddenly, the opening shot. "What is the inherent evil of your people that our friends the Germans hate you so much?" None of the admirals, not even the one who had spoken, deigned to look at the objects of the question. The Amshenover Rebbe said to the translator in Yiddish, "Tell him the Germans hate us because we are Orientals."

Scarcely three seconds had passed between the posing of the question and this calm response. The admiral involuntarily shifted his eyes to look directly at the rebbe. "What does this mean? You are Asians? We are Asians!" "Yes," the rebbe agreed. "And you are also on the list. In Berlin, not many years ago, perhaps three or four, a young German girl fell in love with a fine young man, a Japanese man who was working at the Japanese Embassy. Naturally enough, the two young people wanted to marry, but such a marriage was forbidden by the laws of 'racial purity' that prohibit a fine German girl from marrying a Japanese person."

"You are lying," the first admiral said. "No," the rebbe said calmly.

"Consider for yourself: What is the image of Hitler's 'master race'? How does he describe it? In films, documentaries, newspapers, who is shown bringing victory home to the German fatherland? Always, always, the so-called Aryans. Tall, broad-shouldered, blond hair, blue eyes. I am not six feet tall. I do not have blue eyes. I don't have blond hair — even before it turned white. The reason they hate me, the reason they hate all of us, is because we don't fit the image of the Aryan master race."

He said no more. There was no need to point out the scarcity of tall, broad-shouldered, blond, blue-eyed Japanese. Silence. Then one of the admirals said, "Tell our Jewish guests there will now be a brief recess. Tell them we have been inexcusably inconsiderate in not allowing them time to rest from

their long trip and in not offering proper refreshments. Tell them we will meet in two hours' time in a more comfortable place."

When, several hours later, the Jews were shown into a large conference room lined with windows — the atmosphere was entirely different. Again, the four admirals were lined up proudly on one side of a table but now, seated beside them were two newcomers, resplendent in long white robes and tall stiff black hats tied decorously under their chins. They were high-ranking Shinto priests. The discussion centered almost exclusively on religion: comparisons and contrasts between Shinto and Judaism, extended explanations of the theory of common origin that the Japanese were descended, in part, from one of the "ten lost tribes" that had come to Japan, and the theory that Moses had actually come to Japan to learn the wisdom of ancient Shinto during the forty days when he was on Mount Sinai, receiving the Torah from G-d. For over an hour, Rabbi Shatzkes described the basic principles, ideas and ceremonies of the Jews.

It was late afternoon before the meeting drew to a close. As a final note, the Amshenover Rebbe repeated the gratitude of the refugees to the Japanese for taking them in and treating them so well. "Go back to your people," said one of the admirals. "Tell them they have nothing to fear. We Japanese will do our utmost to provide for your safety and peace. You have nothing to fear while in Japanese territory."

Apart from receiving the Torah on Sinai, Moshe was incidentally providing a scenario, which thousands of years later would rescue his great-grandchildren from the Nazi inferno — even if the Japanese got their geography a bit wrong and mistook Mount Sinai for Mount Fuji.

Source: "The Fugu Plan: The Untold Story Of The Japanese And The Jews During World War II" by Marvin Tokayer

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Dvar Torah Yitro: What is the antidote to jealousy?

What is the antidote to jealousy?

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

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

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

Yet according to the Kotsker Rebbe, that wasn't the case. He explained that when Yitro gave his advice to Moshe, he suggested that Moshe should look for four qualities in each appointed judge:

Anshei chayil — Men of valour,

Yirei Elokim — Believers in Hashem,

Anshei emet — People of truth, and

Sonei vatza — People who hate unjust gain.

The Kotsker Rebbe highlights the quality of 'anshei emet' — 'people of truth'.

When it comes to dispensing honour, if we look around us, who are those who are given honour? Is it a just system? Is it a true system? Is it always fair? Not at all. Because it is not a system which comes from Hashem. But the person of truth knows that honour is not important in this world. People of truth know that what is important in this world is your values, your attributes, what kind of person you are, how you deal with others, how truthful you are in this world and not how much honour you get from others. So indeed the antidote to jealousy is truth. And from Parshat Yitro we learn that when it comes to honour, what counts is not how much honour I have but rather, as the Ethics of the Fathers teaches, “Eizehu mechubad?” – “Who is truly honourable?” “Hemechabad et habriot.” – “It’s the person who gives honour to others.”

Shabbat shalom

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Yisro

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Shabbos Speak

This week we read the Aseres HaDibros, known throughout civilization as the Ten Commandments. Most of the commandments are well known, and even observed, albeit in varying degrees by manifold societies. One command, however, begs for correct observance by the Jewish nation, “Zachor es yom haShabbos l’kadsho — Remember the Shabbos to keep it holy.” This commandment has a sister command stated in the second set of Luchos in Deuteronomy, “Shamor es yom haShabbos l’kadsho, Observe the Shabbos to keep it holy.”

The laws of Shabbos observance fills an entire tractate and myriad pages of commentaries. There are 39 melachos, categories of creative work, that are prohibited on Shabbos. That is observance. But what does “remember the Shabbos to keep it holy” mean? Obviously if one observes the Shabbos, he remembers it!

Though the Talmud derives from this verse the mitzvah of kiddush, at which we remember the Shabbos with an open declaration of its sanctity, it seems to be telling us something more than declaring its entry over a cup of wine. But how does the command of remembering Shabbos add to the mitzvah of observing it?

The next verse reads: “Six days shall you work and accomplish all your work: but the seventh day is Shabbos to Hashem” (ibid 20:9)

Shouldn’t the order of the two p’sukim be reversed? First the Torah should tell us to accomplish our work in six days, then tell us that the seventh is Sabbath, and only then tell us to sanctify it by remembering it? After all, we stop work before we say kiddush? The prophet Isaiah tells us, “If for Shabbos you restrain your feet (from going) and if you honor it by not doing your ways, or seeking your needs, or speaking the forbidden, then you shall be granted pleasure from Hashem. (Isaiah 58:13-14).

The Talmud derives that Shabbos talk, like Shabbos action, should be distinguished from weekday actions or speech. Just as one does not perform business on Shabbos, he should not talk about doing business either.

Thus some Jews who unfortunately are unable to contain themselves from discussing the mundane on Shabbos, preempt their mundane banter with the useless caveat, “nit oif Shabbos geredt,” meaning, “this really should not be discussed on Shabbos.”

Unfortunately some do not heed their own precursory and continue their irreverent discussions.

A fable I heard years ago, personifies a sad state of spirituality, but, perhaps shines a meaningful explanation for our question.

It was amazingly quiet, during the laining in the small shul on 43rd Street one Shabbos, when Cohen sauntered over to Finkelstein and in a hushed tone asked, “Nit oif Shabbos g’redt, do you know anybody who has a car for sale? My old clunker died on Thursday.” Finkelstein was surprised. “You know,” he admitted, “Nit oif Shabbos g’redt, I am thinking of selling my ’96 Chevy!”

“Really?,” responded Cohen in delight, “Nit oif Shabbos g’redt, how does it run?”

Nit oif Shabbos g’redt, it runs great! It has only 43,000 miles and I just put in a new transmission!

Suddenly, they heard a klop on the bimah. They turned to see the icy stares of the gabbai.

They nuzzled their noses into the chumashim as the Ba’al Koreh continued to read from the Torah.

A few minutes later, Cohen crept back toward Finkelstein. “Nit oif Shabbos g’redt what color is it?”

As the stares began anew, Cohen answered in a low whisper, “Nit oif Shabbos g’redt, its blue.”

Cohen realized that he forgot to ask a most pertinent question. “Nit oif Shabbos g’redt, how much do you want for it?”

Finkelstein responded, “Nit oif Shabbos g’redt, \$4,200. Cash.”

A few minutes later Cohen countered, “nit oif Shabbos g’redt, how about 3,500?”

Finkelstein snapped back. “Nit oif Shabbos g’redt nothing less than 4,000!”

Cohen was quiet. “I’ll think about it.”

Cohen was the first one in shul for Mincha that afternoon. The moment Finkelstein walked in Cohen ran over to him.

“Nit oif Shabbos g’redt, you know the car you told me about this morning. It’s a deal! I’ll take it for four thousand!

Yankel, shrugged. “Too late. Nit oif Shabbos g’redt I sold it during musaf!”

Perhaps with the words, “remember the Shabbos to keep it holy,” the Torah tells us more than just to make kiddush. It qualifies our Shabbos by defining the proper approach to its observance! Shabbos was created for sanctity! Remember it, and speak about it in holy terms. Shabbos should not be a frame of reference in which we set our mundane plans. Rather it should be the central focus of holiness.

Often we hear people use Shabbos as a reference point for their weekly activities. “After Shabbos we are going to a party.” “I have a great stock tip, I’ll tell you about it after Shabbos!” “What time is Shabbos over? I have to catch a plane.”

Shabbos, and remembering it should be mentioned and remembered in the context of sanctity and appreciation! It must be associated with all the wonderful benefits we derive from it! That is what the Torah means by the words, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy!” We should cherish the Shabbos, prolong it, savor it, and bask in its holiness. Therefore the Torah follows its charge with the formula, “Six days shall you work and accomplish all your work,” When one feels that his work was accomplished during the previous six days, then Shabbos will not be just a stepping stone in planning the next six! He no longer will associate the Shabbos with what he can not do, but rather he will associate Shabbos with the amazing spirituality that it bestows upon Israel.

Dedicated by Michael & Rikki Charnowitz in memory of Ephraim Spinner Ephraim Yitzchak ben Avraham ob”m — 17 Shevat

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Rav Kook Torah

Psalm 41: God Sustains the Ill

Chanan Morrison

ה' יִסְדְּנֵנוּ עַל-עַרְשׂוֹ; כֹּל-מִשְׁכְּבוֹ הַפִּקֵּת בְּהִלּוֹ. (תהילים מ:ד)

“God will sustain him on his sickbed;

You will transform his bed in his illness.” (Psalms 41:4)

In what way does God come to the aid of those who are ill?

The Shechinah dwells over the sick

There is a clear connection between body and soul. Positive feelings, such as love, equanimity, and faith, bolster our psychological and physical health.

On the other hand, negative feelings, such as jealousy, anger, resentment and fear, have a detrimental impact on our health.

When we are ill, the body’s forces are greatly weakened and we may fear that death is near. At precisely this point, our spiritual side gains strength and renewed energy. Positive forces are awakened from within. A critical, jealous heart may be transformed into a heart full of compassion and generosity. We are drawn to holy aspirations, even though we felt estranged from such sentiments while healthy, due to preoccupation with worldly pursuits. Reliance in God grows, hope and faith flower. With this renewal of spiritual life, the ill person discovers an unexpected resource of strength.

The Talmud describes this phenomenon with an intriguing statement: “The Shechinah dwells above the head of the person who is ill” (Shabbat 12b).

Why specifically the sick person’s head?

When a person is fit and preoccupied with physical pleasures, his head - his thoughts and desires - can be a dark and lowly place. But when the body is

weak, worldly pursuits lose their powerful allure. Freed from their grip, an inner purity is awakened, and one's perception of reality becomes clearer. The sick person may find within himself a latent love of God and a yearning to follow God's ways - on a level beyond that of healthy individuals. The head, the center of thought and reflection, becomes a vessel for God's Divine Presence.

In order to impress upon us awareness of the potential holiness of those who are ill, the Sages taught that one who visits the sick should not sit on their bed. Rather, he should sit reverently before them, like a disciple who sits humbly before his master.

This strengthening of spiritual life - that is the assistance that God provides to the sick. "God will sustain him on his sickbed." In fact, this is a basic purpose of illness. When our physical world comes crashing down, we are driven to reevaluate life, to look beyond the superficial appeal of physical pleasures and free ourselves from the shackles of worldly distractions. Illness can become a transformative experience, a time of heightened spirituality, an opportunity for deep teshuvah and forgiveness. As the Sages taught, "A person does not recover from illness unless he has been forgiven for all of his sins" (Nedarim 41a).

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Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Yisro

פרשת יתרו תשפ"א

ואתה תחזה מכל העם אנשי חיל יראי אלקים אנשי אמת שנאי בצע

And you shall discern from among the entire people, men of accomplishment, G-d-fearing people, men of truth, people who despise money. (18:21)

Yisro advised Moshe *Rabbeinu* to seek Judges who possessed four exemplary attributes; most important, they were seeking *anshei chayil*, men of accomplishment. *Rashi* interprets accomplishment as referring to men of means who would not be swayed, who could resist pressure, thus enabling them to render their judgment not subject to external influence. *Sforno* interprets *chayil* to mean men who possess good judgment, common sense, and the ability to recognize when truth is being related and when it is not. Interestingly, after sifting through the ranks of the people, he found numerous *anshei chayil*, which is a strong indication of the overriding significance to be attributed to the ability to judge with common sense. This in no way ignores the other attributes. How far can one get in life, however, without *seichel*, common sense?

The *Mechilta* interprets *anshei chayil* to mean *baalei avtachah*, men upon whom one can rely, trustworthy people who are always there when needed (author's extended definition). What connection does *anshei chayil* have with reliability? *Chayil* is defined as valorous, with the various synonyms that fall under the rubric of valor. Reliability is not one of them. *Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, quotes from Shlomo *HaMelech's* magnum opus on the *Eishes Chayil*, Woman of Valor (*Mishlei* 31:10), in which he describes the various exemplary attributes of the woman who has achieved this distinction. Shlomo *Hamelech* begins with his famous question: *Eishes Chayil mi yimtz'a*, "A woman of valor, who can find?" a question that indicates that such a woman is truly a rarity. Toward the end of the homily on womanhood, however, he states: *Rabos banos asu chayil*; "Many daughters have done valiantly, a statement that indicates that many women are capable - and achieve the distinction - of *chayil*."

The *Rosh Yeshivah* distinguishes between *asu chayil* and one who has earned the right to the appellation, *eishes chayil*. One who performs acts of valor, good deeds, is to be commended, but, for all intents and purposes, it might be a one-time deal or based upon convenience or comfort. It does not

define the identity (so to speak) of the woman until she is to be relied upon to act in this manner always. It is who she is. Her essence is *chayil*. Such a person is *mi yimtz'a*, rare to be found.

With this idea in mind, the *Rosh Yeshivah* approaches *anshei chayil* as *baalei avtachah*, men of reliability. They do not come to the fore consistently, only when it is convenient. They are consistent in their *chayil*. A leader must be consistent, decisive, never vacillating and unambiguous. Moshe *Rabbeinu* discovered that men of quality who maintain consistency throughout, have indeed a vital, but rare, attribute. Such men must comprise our leadership, because one who is not reliable is incapable of leading.

Veritably, this quality is related to Hashem. *Chosamo shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu emes*, "The seal of Hashem is truth." We are used to translating *emes* as true/truth in the narrow western vernacular to mean that something which is conformable to an essential reality is considered to be true. In Hebrew vernacular, *emes* means being true to one's word (trustworthy, reliable), adhering to a commitment. In his commentary to *Shemos* 6:3, *U'Shemi Hashem lo nadaati lahem*, "But through My Name Hashem, I did not become known to them," *Rashi* interprets this as: "I was not recognized by them in My aspect of truth, because of which I am named Hashem, which implies *ne'eman l'ameis Devarai*, "I am faithful to uphold My word." We derive from *Rashi* that *emes* means to uphold one's word. This is an essential quality that must be part and parcel of leadership, without which one is deficient in the *middah*, attribute, of *emes*, truth.

ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש

You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers/priests and a holy nation. (19:6)

The Torah hereby informs us of our mission statement, the identity which we must strive to achieve as members of *Klal Yisrael*. The *Kohanim* stand at the spiritual helm of the nation as mentors and paradigms of moral/spiritual perfection. They have dedicated their lives to the service of Hashem - a mission which the Torah expects all of us to complete. Second, we are to become a *goy kadosh*, holy nation. Holiness is achieved via separation and removal of oneself from the moral temptations and conflicts that would destroy our spiritual ascent. One can hardly live a life of abandon, of moral profligacy and material excess, and expect to be close to Hashem. *Kedushah* requires devotion. One's devotion must be focused on Hashem if he hopes to achieve holiness. Thus, the Jewish People are charged with a dual mission: to serve as the aspiration and inspiration for an entire world to recognize Hashem and to strive for spiritual perfection; to have their own intrinsic value of sanctity and moral perfection, so that they can fulfill their own spiritual potential. One can hardly mentor others if he himself is deficient.

The appellation *goy kadosh* is not exclusive to Torah leadership. *Mi k'amcha Yisrael*, "Who is like Your People *Yisrael*?" applies to all Jews, regardless of lineage or erudition. Torah-observant Jews whose commitment to Hashem is unequivocal, whose *mitzvah* observance is without fanfare, and who do what is right without seeking accolades and tributes, earn the title *goy kadosh* for their many meaningful acts of *chesed*, lovingkindness. The following three examples (quoted by *Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita*) are about Jews who exemplify *mi k'Amcha Yisrael*.

On December 4, 2010, a deadly forest fire in the Carmel Forest of northern *Eretz Yisrael* snuffed out 44 lives and consumed much of the Mediterranean forest covering the region. Among its victims was a young, unmarried 26 year-old man, by the name of Yakir Suissa. An observant Jew who was meticulous in his *shul* attendance, he made a point to attend a daily Torah *shiur*. As he was a friendly fellow, people thought they knew him, until after his death when it was discovered that he had performed an extraordinary act of *gemillas chesed* to help a *kollel* fellow who was strapped with overwhelming debt.

Yakir was standing in line at the *makolet*, grocery store, when a young *kollel* fellow in front of him asked the owner of the *makolet* to charge his present purchases. "I cannot do this anymore. Your balance is far beyond

the standard credit that I allow. You will have to pay cash today,” the owner said to the young man. The *kollel* fellow asked for one more chance at leniency: “Please, I am very short this month, and, if I cannot purchase these items, we will not have food at home. My children must eat. I promise that next week I will have payment.” The owner was a good person who just did not want to go broke: “Fine. This one time, I will allow it, but you must bring me some money next week.”

When the young man left, Yakir turned to the owner and said, “I am his relative. Tell me, how much does he owe you?” “Twenty-five hundred *shekel*.” Immediately, Yakir took out his credit card and said, “Charge his bill to my card.” A week passed, and the fellow returned with payment on his account. The storekeeper told him, “It is not necessary. Your relative paid up your entire bill.” “What do you mean?” he asked. “I have no relatives here.” Yakir had paid the bill without fanfare, because he saw a young *ben Torah* straining under his debt. He was never heard from again, until his name and picture were posted in the paper as one of the victims of the deadly blaze. *Mi k’amcha Yisrael?*

A *rav* visited one of his students who was sitting *shivah* (seven-day mourning period) for his late mother. He asked his student to tell him something about his mother (whom he had heard was a special woman and who, although unable to attend a mainstream *Bais Yaakov*, grew up observant and raised a family of exemplary *bnei Torah*). “My mother would bake 24 *challo*s every Friday in honor of *Shabbos*. We lived with this custom, but never understood why she picked the number 24. When I grew up I asked her, ‘*Imma*, why do you bake 24 *challo*s?’ She explained that it was in honor of the 24 times its says *ki l’olam Chasdo*, ‘His mercy is for all eternity.’ ‘But *Imma*, it actually says this (*ki l’olam Chasdo*) 26 times.’ His mother answered, ‘I will not bake *challo*s for Sicho and Og (two pagan kings whom Hashem smote).’” This was a simple Jewish woman and the manner in which she paid tribute to Hashem.

Horav Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky, Shlita, relates that a Jew by the name of *Rav Goldstein* lived in Yerushalayim. He was a devout Jew who loved the Torah and was erudite in his teachings. While many Jews possess a love of Torah, his love was almost palpable. He was once asked who had inspired his extraordinary *ahavas Torah*. He related the following story.

“I was in Hungary at the outbreak of World War II. My father was taken from us during one of the early transports to the extermination camps, leaving my mother alone with all the children. One day the Nazi murderers came, rounded us up and threw us onto cattle cars; Auschwitz was our destination. For some reason, the engineer erred and took the wrong track, our destination miles away from Auschwitz. The Nazis jumped at the opportunity to degrade and persecute us more, making us walk the distance to Auschwitz. My mother lifted up one child in each arm and, without food or drink, broken in body but not in spirit, she began the long trek to Auschwitz.

“A gentile woman who lived along the road took pity on my mother trudging along carrying two children, and quickly ran over. She was about to place a few potatoes in my mother’s arms. The Nazi sensed this and screamed at the woman, ‘One more move, and I will shoot you!’ The woman pulled back the bag, but, nonetheless, kept on walking alongside my mother. Suddenly, she saw that the Nazi had averted his eyes, and she quickly put the bag in my mother’s arms and ran away. As soon as we stopped marching, we all begged for a bite of the raw potato. My mother raised her hand and said, ‘Not so fast. Do you see that man up front? That is *Horav Moshe Stern*, the *Rav* of Debrecyn. You know that a *talmid chacham* takes precedence.’ She walked over to the *Rav*, gave him a piece of potato, then returned and gave to the rest of us.

“From that day on, it was entrenched in my psyche that the apex of Judaism is the *talmid chacham*. He precedes everyone due to the Torah that is absorbed within him. Nothing – absolutely nothing – supersedes the Torah.”

Rav Goldstein’s mother was an *ishah peshutah*, ordinary woman, not learned, no degrees, who did not carry a briefcase. She was unsophisticated in matters of Jewish philosophy, ethics and law, but she was sincere, committed and filled with faith in the Almighty and love for His Torah. *Mi k’amcha Yisrael!*

והגבלת את העם סביב... כל הנוגע בהר מות יומת

You shall set boundaries for the people roundabout...Whoever will touch the mountain will surely die. (19:12)

Nogea means to touch inappropriately or to reach up/out. It is the act of going beyond one’s domain into that of another. One may extend himself indecorously or even correctly, but, in any event, he goes beyond himself into another otherwise inaccessible area. He reaches/touches elsewhere. The Jewish People were warned not to touch the mountain. It was off-limits to them. It was theoretically beyond their reach, out of the sphere of their purview. The *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, cited this *pasuk* in a letter admonishing the head of a medical conference against tampering with the Torah-study of *yeshivah* students. Apparently, a medical conference had been convened, with the primary issue on the agenda the poor health of *yeshivah* students. Rather than find ways to augment their situation by providing better, more nutritious food and living quarters, their goal was malicious: to diminish the amount of time devoted to Torah by assigning more time for recreation and physical exercise, anything that would remove them from the *bais hamedrash*. They sought to decrease the number of students per class, which would close the doors of the *yeshivah* to the many students who were cut from the student roster.

The *Chafetz Chaim* began his letter to the physician who led the conference, “Since I heard that a medical conference under his leadership is convening in Vilna, I am sending my blessing that the Healer of all flesh send you His Divine assistance and blessing from Above. I heard of your concern for the *yeshivah* students, and I would like to inform you that, *baruch Hashem*, the *yeshivos* are doing quite well, providing their students three nutritious meals daily. The young men take walks during the course of the day, thus availing themselves of the requisite exercise. They are all healthy, which I am certain you will be happy to hear.”

Following the *Chafetz Chaim’s* signature, he added a postscript. “I would like to remind your honor of a *pasuk* in the Torah, *Kol ha’nogea ba’har mos yumas*; ‘Whoever will touch the mountain will surely die.’ If just touching this will incur the penalty of death (and the mountain is merely the platform upon which the Torah was given), certainly one who touches (appends) the Torah itself will surely become subject to this punishment.”

The *Chafetz Chaim* gave *mussar*, admonished, in a subtle – almost respectful – manner. While he did not seek to offend the individual to whom he was speaking, he did not want to downplay the severity of the incursion. The Torah was off-limits. Anything that represented *negiah*, inappropriate touching, overreaching the boundaries of Jewish law, was playing with a fierce response from the Almighty.

Secular movements that have developed within Judaism have proposed that *mitzvos* be appended to conform to the spirit of the times. In nineteenth-century Germany, when the gates of the ghetto came crashing down and Jews were granted the right to participate fully in society, the desire to assimilate was (for some) overwhelming. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, who was the preeminent *Rav* and valiant fighter to preserve our *Mesorah*, Tradition, countered that only through traditional Jewish education and commitment to Torah observance will we survive as a nation. Otherwise, we will have nothing. Indeed, those who assimilate, renege Judaism, have never really been accepted by the gentile society. To them, we will always be Jews.

The Torah instructs us to set boundaries around the mountain, so that no one will touch it. *Horav S.R. Hirsch* explains the purpose of *Hagbalah*, establishing a perimeter, as the Torah’s way of teaching us that the Torah came (from Hashem) to the People. It neither developed from within the people, nor was it intuited by *Moshe Rabbeinu*. It, with the Oral Law, is Divine in origin, and Hashem is its Author. Thus, the Torah’s whole

character is eternal, immutable and inviolable. Indeed, the same *Hagbalah* was continued when *Klal Yisrael* encamped in the wilderness. *Machane Kehunah* and *Leviyah*, the encampment of the *Kohanim* and *Leviim* surrounded *Machaneh Shechinah*, where the *Mishkan*, Sanctuary, was, so that the people were kept at a distance from the Sanctuary. Thus, the superhuman origin and validity of the Torah as being independent of time and place were established for all time. The *Kohanim* and *Leviim* were to protect the Torah from the incursion of the earlier and ever-present deviant movements. Those movements have taken upon themselves the “responsibility” to transform the Torah and Orthodoxy to a “kinder,” more “attuned to the times,” form of Judaism – a religion that will tear down the perimeter established around the Torah, so that it will conform to the values and morals of the surrounding culture, Heaven forbid.

כבד את אביך ואת אמך למען יאריך ימך

Honor your father and mother so that your days shall be lengthened. (20:12)

Kibbud av v'eim is a difficult *mitzvah* to fulfill properly because there is no *shiuur*, measurement, to it. The *mitzvah* has no limits, because one can always do more. Indeed, the great *Amora*, Abaye, who was an orphan (his father died before he was born, and his mother died in childbirth), considered himself fortunate, since he never transgressed this *mitzvah* (*Kiddushin* 31b). Why is *arichas yamim*, longevity, the stated reward for *Kibbud av v'eim*? Each generation is a link in a continuum that goes on until the advent of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*. This link is as strong as the relationship one has with his past. By honoring one's parents, he forges and concretizes his relationship with the past, thus “lengthening” his days. We always think as “lengthening” as going forward to the future. We forget that, more importantly, we can lengthen our days by going backward and connecting to the past. Indeed, we have no present, because every moment that passes transforms the present into the past. Without a past, the future has no foundation and is destined to be short-lived.

The *Strikover Rebbe*, *zl*, was walking down the street when he chanced upon a young man pushing his wheelchair-bound father. It was a hot, humid day, and the sweat was dripping profusely from the young man's face. It was obvious that pushing his father's wheelchair was no easy task. The young man was demonstrating extraordinary *mesiras nefesh*, devotion, to the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av*. The *Rebbe* later remarked to the young man, “The Heavenly angels immerse themselves in the River of Dinor. (The river is comprised of fire, and it separates this world from the World-to-Come. A soul must pass through the River of Dinor in order to cleanse itself of any residue of this material world before it can gain access to *Olam Habba*. The Heavenly angels release spiritual sweat from their great fear of Hashem. This sweat is the source of the ‘water’ which makes up the River of Dinor.) *Chassidim* immerse themselves in a *mikvah* (a natural collection of water, a living spring or ground water well). Your *tevillah*, immersion (in the sweat produced in the performance of the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av*), finds greater favor in my eyes.”

Kibbud Av can take on a different form, one that, to the superficial observer, might be difficult to understand. (This is why he remains a superficial observer. His view of a subject or issue is perfunctory and lacks depth.) In the summer of 1942, the Nazi murderers were on the prowl for the *Bobover Rebbe*, *zl*, *Horav Shlomo*, who, with the aid of false papers, was able to cross the Hungarian border into Neimark. It was there that the *Rebbe* and his son, *Horav Naftali*, *zl*, were taken into captivity and subjected to cruel persecution. They spent *Shabbos Kodesh* together as captives, waiting to be executed. It was only a matter of time. It was at this point that the *Rebbe* embraced his son and said, “Naftali, my precious son, you know that the body of a Jew is nothing more than physical matter, comprised of earth from the ground. The body can be persecuted and even destroyed. The other component of the Jew, his *neshamah*, soul, cannot be touched. It is eternal, untouchable by these beasts.

“I am your father, and you are my son. You still have one more *mitzvah* which you can fulfill before they separate us: the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av*. I ask of you to fulfill the *mitzvah* of honoring your father. Please listen to what I am going to tell you. Tomorrow, they will take us out to be executed. It will be our opportunity to sanctify Hashem's Name. When the murderers kill us, remember to say, *Ki alecha horagnu kol ha'yom*; ‘For You, we will die every day.’ I have no doubt that the murderers will do everything to make me suffer as much as possible until that moment that my soul leaves my body. I will cry out loudly to Hashem, ‘*Shema Yisrael!* You, too, will cry out, *Shema Yisrael!* My last request of you, my dear son, is please do not cry when they torture me, because your weeping will befuddle me and restrict my *kavanah*, devotion.” (I want to give up my life for Hashem and need to remain completely focused on this *mitzvah*.)

At the last moment, just before they were about to be executed, they were miraculously saved. They survived the war, came to this country and were instrumental in changing its spiritual panorama. I relate this story to underscore how far the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av* can extend and to show what coursed through the mind of a saintly *Rebbe* minutes before he thought he would die.

I conclude with a powerful comment from *Horav Chaim Brim*, *zl*, concerning the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av v'eim*. “If you want to determine if a person possesses *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, watch to see how he shows respect for his parents.” My take on this is: One who does not go all out in his *Kibbud av v'eim* will not go all out in his fear of Hashem; alternatively, if he does manifest fear of Hashem, but does not act appropriately toward his parents, his fear of Hashem is a sham, because the two go hand in hand. We should honor our parents as a result of our sense of *yiraas Shomayim*. This is what Hashem asks of us.

וכל העם ראים את הקולות

The entire people saw the thunder. (20:15)

Thunder is a sound which one hears, not sees. Yet, the nation was able to see the thunder: *Ro'im es ha'nishma*, “They saw what is (ordinarily only) heard.” This indicates that during the Revelation, the nation transcended human/normal physical limitations, rising to the level of superhuman comprehension, whereby they could see what had otherwise only been heard. *Horav Tzvi Hirsch Ferber*, *zl*, writes (*Kerem HaTzvi*) that he came across an innovative satirical explanation of *ro'im es ha'nishma*. At that time (early 20th century England/Europe) Jewish observance was hemorrhaging, decreasing with each passing day. One of the obvious reasons for this sad development was inconsistency. The children experienced a marked discrepancy between what they were hearing in school and *shul* and what they were observing at home. They went to school, where they heard all about the importance of Jewish commitment and Jewish observance. They heard it in *shul*, and it was drummed into them at their *bnei mitzvah*. At the end of the day, however, these were mere words which were superficial expositions, without any examples in real life. What they heard in school and what they saw at home were incongruous with one another, total contradiction. When children grow up hearing one thing but seeing another, they will usually adhere to what they see.

At *Har Sinai*, things were quite different. The nation was committed. What *Klal Yisrael* heard on *Har Sinai* was evident in the way they lived day by day. In other words: They saw what they heard.

Va'ani Tefillah

שים שלום – Sim Shalom. Establish Peace.

When people gather together, it could be for one of two distinct reasons. They fear someone. Strength is in numbers. Perhaps, if they all combine and work with one another, they might together triumph over the adversity which would otherwise destroy them. A second type of gathering is for the purpose of peace. Enduring peace is established when all participating parties maintain their conviction, commit to the same positive purpose and values in life: *Va'yichan sham Yisrael*; “The nation camped there (*Shemos* 19:2), *k'ish echad b'lev echad*, “As one man with one heart”

(Rashi). The level of *achdus* realized by *Klal Yisrael* as they prepared to receive the Torah was unlike any form of previous unity. This time it was not out of fear or negative purpose, it was because they were all on the same page in their belief and trust in Hashem and their commitment to His Torah. They were in this together as one, because they all believed in it as one. This is what is meant by peace.

Sponsored in loving memory of Vivian Stone

חיה לאה בת שמעון ע"ה נפטרה ח"י שבת תשס"ט

*By her children Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family
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Weekly Parsha YITRO 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

One of the basic lessons learned from this week's Torah reading, though barely discussed by the commentators, is that there is no perfect system of justice if it involves human beings and judges. After the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, our teacher Moshe allows himself to become the sole judge regarding disputes that arise in the camp of the Israelites. He is besieged by claimants and litigants from early morning until sunset. Naturally, anyone who had the ability to appear before such a judge as Moshe would wish to take advantage of that opportunity.

Though Moshe possesses supernatural wisdom and insight, he is known to be incorruptible, fair, equitable and decisive. What other qualities can one expect or hope for in a human judge? None. Nevertheless, as his father-in-law Yitro points out to him, the judge may be as perfect as can be, but the judicial system that Moshe has instituted is far from perfection. Yitro warns that by being the sole judge and having everyone wait their turn to have their claims adjudicated by him alone, both Moshe and the people will eventually become exhausted and wither away. What is needed is a tiered system of judges, courts, police, and other officials of the judicial system that must be appointed and empowered.

This signifies the creation of a bureaucracy, with all the attendant fields that it contains and necessarily entails. But it is the only practical way of dealing with this issue of sustainability that will allow Moshe and the people of Israel to continue to function. In effect we are being taught that attempting to achieve perfection in this instance will lead to exhaustion and eventual destruction.

One of the great lessons of the Revelation at Sinai was and is a simple basic understanding of the true nature of human beings, both individually and in society. The Lord is perfection, while humans are doomed to operate within an imperfect and frustrating world. Sometimes better is the enemy of good, in the attempt to achieve perfection, and only leads to greater imperfection, frustration and even violence.

Moshe aspired to give every Jew who came before him a perfect answer, a judgment that would harmonize with ultimate truth and nobility. He realized that this could not be done through the establishment of a bureaucracy.

Within that system, there would be many cooks in the kitchen, and power would be diffuse. Personal interests could govern all decisions, no matter how noble the intent of the persons involved. His father-in-law agreed with Moshe's goal, but Yitro told Moshe, based upon his own life experience as being the chief executive priest of Midian, that Moshe's goal was unachievable in this world.

In this world one can only deal with practicalities, and practicalities always spell imperfection, compromise and the possibility for error and wrong decisions. But that is the human condition, and one must operate within that condition and accept imperfection as one of the basic tenets of human life and society.

Shabbat shalom

In My Opinion MUTATIONS

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Because of the Coronavirus pandemic, I am certain that all of us have become knowledgeable regarding the subject of mutations. It seems that all viruses regularly mutate in order to be able to survive. The efforts of epidemiologists are intended to stay ahead of the curve, anticipate the mutation, and make certain that the preventive vaccine is operative even against the new form of the virus after it has mutated.

In my opinion, mutations are not strictly limited to viruses. The truth is that all societies continually mutate, adapt, change and attempt to renew themselves. It seems that this is part of the natural law instilled within our world by its Creator. In thinking along this vein, we can view the effects of mutations in Jewish and Israeli society over the past half-century of our turbulent story.

Every section of Jewish society has mutated, so to speak, to meet the needs and demands of issues and problems that were not foreseen a half-century ago. Like all mutations, some of these have been very successful while others have been abject failures. Those that have failed become extinct and disappear. This is an inexorable law of nature. Nature is never forgiving of mistakes and wrong decisions. As such, it behooves us to look at the mutations that have occurred in Jewish society, and to attempt (to the extent that humans can) to assess current trends and future events.

The secular Jewish society in the United States has mutated in an unfortunate direction. Fifty or sixty years ago, a vast majority of that society still had connections to tradition and Jewish observance, even though they were not fully observant, and in their public and private life, they did not claim to be Orthodox Jews.

But both the Reform and Conservative sections of American Jewry have mutated further and further away from any connection with Jewish tradition and Torah observance. Influenced by the general trend of American academia, the media. With the drift towards the political left, they have become less and less Jewish, and more and more progressive. They demand to change society but are unwilling to change the individual Jew. Instead, there is almost herd instinct continuing down this path of assimilation, intermarriage, and eventual alienation from the Jewish people, and, certainly, from the State of Israel.

In Israel, the mutation has gone in a different direction. Israel, overall, is much more Jewish, if not completely observant in everyday life and values than it was when it was founded in the middle of the last century. There is an element of Jewish pride that exists amongst the Israeli population that I find lacking or at least nonassertive amongst Jews living in the Diaspora.

It is not that everyone in Israel has suddenly become observant – far from it. However, it is clear to those of us who have been here for several decades that Israeli society has mutated, and that the trend towards tradition is much stronger than it was at one time. The left in Israel no longer writes the script for the country, politically, diplomatically, or socially.

The Orthodox world has also undergone mutation. The norms of Orthodox society today are not the same ones that existed 60 or 70 years ago and are certainly not the norms that existed in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust. Though Orthodoxy always claims that it never has deviated from the practice and outlook of previous generations, the truth is that a great mutation has taken place.

There is a stress upon Talmudic study for the masses, and not just for the elite. Everyone should attend yeshiva or seminary, and be able to spend further years in study, even after marriage, with the expectation of being financially supported by the government or by family. There is a much greater emphasis upon externals, and upon the drive for wealth and luxury, that did not exist before. Expectations are high in the Orthodox world for financial success, home comforts, vacations and trips, large family events and extravagant weddings and other celebrations. Whether or not this type of mutation can be maintained is, in my mind, questionable. But perhaps such a mutation is necessary and is successful, specifically because it is what the times demand for Orthodoxy to survive. I believe this issue is beyond my ken of expertise. So, I leave it to you to decide for yourself about the nature of mutations in our Jewish world today.

Shabbat shalom

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Pulling Teeth

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Pulling Teeth

May I pull teeth on Shabbos?

Question #2: Clipping Fingernails

Does clipping fingernails on Shabbos involve a Torah prohibition?

Question #3: Digging Up

On Yom Tov, may I dig up earth to perform the mitzvah of kisuy hadam?

Introduction:

Each of our opening questions involves a complicated and often misunderstood concept of the laws of Shabbos, called melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. This topic is the subject of a machlokes between the tanna'im Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon, as to whether it is forbidden min haTorah or miderabbanan: Rabbi Yehudah contends that it is prohibited min haTorah, and Rabbi Shimon rules that it is prohibited only as a rabbinic decree. I deliberately did not yet translate the term melacha she'einah tzericha legufah, since this might bias the reader toward one interpretation over another.

What we do need to understand is that the laws of Shabbos and Yom Tov are qualitatively different from most other mitzvos and prohibitions of the Torah; regarding these laws the motive is a factor as to whether an action is prohibited.

At this stage, the basic questions we must resolve include:

- What is the definition of melacha she'einah tzericha legufah?
 - Since all opinions agree that melacha she'einah tzericha legufah is prohibited, what difference does it make whether the prohibition is min haTorah or miderabbanan?
- Some examples

As is typical, the Gemara does not define melacha she'einah tzericha legufah, but does provide numerous instances of the principle. This article will present some of the cases and endeavor to illustrate how some rishonim explain the concept. I will then explain some of the halachic differences that result.

Here are some cases that the Gemara cites of melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. In all of them, Rabbi Yehudah ruled that they are prohibited min haTorah, whereas Rabbi Shimon prohibited them only miderabbanan.

- Carrying a corpse out of a building so that a kohen may enter (see Mishnah Shabbos 93b).
- Extinguishing a fire to help someone fall asleep (Mishnah Shabbos 29b and Gemara Shabbos 30a). In modern times, we would talk about turning off a light for the same purpose.

There are also some cases that most, but not all, authorities consider to be cases of melacha she'einah tzericha legufah:

- Lancing an infection to allow the pus to drain (Shabbos 107a).
- Catching a snake to prevent it from biting someone (Shabbos 107a). All agree that this is permitted if it is a life-threatening emergency. The case in question is where the snake bite cannot kill, but may be very painful.

In the last two cases, some contend that these are permitted only in a life-threatening emergency, whereas others contend that the prohibition is only rabbinic, and therefore permit it. This is because, when the prohibition is only a rabbinic injunction, Chazal permit these measures for safety or medical reasons, even when the situation poses no threat to life.

Tosafos' definition

At this point, I will provide three approaches to explain melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. Tosafos (Shabbos 94a s.v. Rabbi Shimon; Chagigah 10b s.v. meleches) explains that melacha she'einah tzericha legufah means that the activity was performed for a purpose that is different from the purpose of this melacha when the Mishkan was built. For example, in the Mishkan, all carried items were transported because they were needed in the place to which they were brought. Thus, carrying an item in order to remove it from its current place, and not because you want it in its new location, qualifies as a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. Therefore, when you want a kohen to be able to enter a building and, to allow this, you carry the meis outdoors, that is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. Your reason for moving the meis is not so that it will be outdoors, but rather so that it will not be in the house.

Clipping fingernails

Clipping fingernails and all other cases of removing something from a living thing are prohibited on Shabbos because of the melacha of gozeiz, shearing sheep; building the Mishkan required wool. In the Mishkan, sheep were shorn in order to use the wool. Therefore, removing the horn of a rhinoceros or the tusks from an elephant, in order to use them, is prohibited min haTorah as a form of gozeiz. (There is discussion among halachic authorities whether gozeiz applies if the animal is dead. According to those who contend that it does not, you would be in violation of gozeiz only by removing horns or tusks from living rhinos or elephants -- probably not such a good idea, even on a weekday.)

In the case of clipping nails, the melacha "benefits" the body, not the nails, which is different from the melacha of gozeiz as performed in the Mishkan. Therefore, Tosafos explains that, according to Rabbi Shimon, clipping fingernails on Shabbos is prohibited only miderabbanan, but not min haTorah. (We should note that another rishon, the Rivosh, agrees with Tosafos' definition of melacha she'einah tzericha legufah, but disagrees with this application. He contends that clipping fingernails is prohibited min

haTorah, even according to Rabbi Shimon, because some cases of gozeiz in the Mishkan involved benefit to what is being shorn and not exclusively to the item being removed – Shu"t Harivosh #394.)

According to Tosafos, the words melacha she'einah tzericha legufah mean a melacha that was not for the purposes of the Mishkan.

Ramban's approach

Although some rishonim understand melacha she'einah tzericha legufah the way Tosafos does, most do not. The Ramban (Shabbos 94b) explains melacha she'einah tzericha legufah as: you are not interested in the specific result. In the case of carrying the meis out of the house, although you are carrying it from an enclosed area (a reshus hayachid) to an open area meant for public use (a reshus harabim), your goal is to remove the meis from the house. If you could have it disappear completely, your immediate needs would be addressed. You are carrying the meis into a reshus harabim only because this is the simplest way to resolve the issue, not because you have any interest in performing an act of carrying into a reshus harabim on Shabbos.

The subtle difference between Tosafos and the Ramban can perhaps best be explained by providing an example: According to the Ramban, clipping fingernails is prohibited min haTorah, even according to Rabbi Shimon, because your goal is to remove the nails from your fingers, and that is what you are doing. The fact that, in the Mishkan, this melacha was performed to use the item clipped off is not relevant. According to the Ramban, the words melacha she'einah tzericha legufah mean that the person doing the melacha she'einah tzericha legufah gains nothing from the result of the melacha activity. He is doing the act of the melacha to remove a problem, not because he has any need for the result.

Here is another case in which Tosafos and the Ramban would disagree: Let's say someone picks a fight with an enemy on Shabbos and mauls him with a mean uppercut, drawing blood. According to the Ramban, this is prohibited min haTorah, according to all opinions. The reason is that his goal when he punched was to draw blood, and he successfully accomplished his purpose. However, according to Tosafos, this is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah, since in the Mishkan the purpose of drawing blood was to make the animal into a useful "implement," which is a different intent from that of the puncher.

Here is a case where both Tosafos and the Ramban agree on the halacha, but disagree as to why this is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. Building a fire or burning wood, according to both of them, does not qualify as a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah; it is prohibited min haTorah, even according to Rabbi Shimon. The reasons Tosafos and the Ramban conclude this are slightly different. According to Tosafos, the reason is because kindling and burning were performed in the Mishkan in order to process the vat dyes that were used: techeiles, argaman, and tolaas shani. Therefore, burning wood to cook is a similar activity to what was performed in building the Mishkan. According to the Ramban, Rabbi Shimon considers this a melacha min haTorah because the goal when performing the melacha is to burn the wood, and that is the forbidden outcome.

Opinion of the Baal Hama'or

A third opinion, that of the Baal Hama'or (Shabbos 106a), is that melacha she'einah tzericha legufah means a melacha performed when the improvement occurs not to the item on which the melacha is performed, but to a different item. In his opinion, the words melacha she'einah tzericha legufah mean an act in which the item upon which the melacha is performed does not improve because of the action.

Thus, clipping one's nails is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah and, according to Rabbi Shimon, is not prohibited min haTorah, since the nails are not improved by the clipping. Thus, in this particular case, the Baal Hama'or agrees with Tosafos and disagrees with the Ramban.

On the other hand, here is a case that the Baal Hama'or and the Ramban agree that even Rabbi Shimon considers a violation of Shabbos min haTorah, whereas Tosafos disagrees. Among some populations, livestock are used for an interesting harvesting operation. The owners draw blood, which is a highly nourishing beverage, from their livestock, in a way similar to the method in which we humans donate blood. They then drink the blood, either straight or mixed with milk. (By the way, it is permitted for a non-Jew to harvest and drink blood this way, which is a topic for a different time.) Our question is whether this action would violate melacha on Shabbos min haTorah or only miderabbanan.

According to Tosafos, since blood was not drawn for this purpose in the Mishkan, it is prohibited miderabbanan, according to Rabbi Shimon. However, according to both the Baal Hama'or and the Ramban, this is prohibited min haTorah even according to Rabbi Shimon, although there is a subtle difference as to why. According to the Baal Hama'or, this is prohibited min haTorah because the melacha is performed on the blood, and this is a positive result (from a human perspective) because you now have access to the blood. According to the Ramban, this is also prohibited min haTorah, because the perpetrator's goal is to have blood at his disposal, and he has accomplished this. Bad odor

Here is an example where all the opinions quoted agree that it is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah: Moving an item that has a bad odor from a reshus hayachid, an enclosed area, into a reshus harabim, an open area meant for public use. Although moving something from a reshus hayachid into a reshus harabim constitutes the melacha of carrying, moving the foul-smelling item from a house to a reshus harabim does not constitute a melacha min haTorah, according to Rabbi Shimon, because the purpose of the carrying for the Mishkan was to move the item to an accessible location. However, when removing a foul-smelling item, there is no significance attached to the place to which the item is moved; one's goal is only to distance it from its current location. The public area does not constitute the goal of one's act, but rather a convenient place to deposit unwanted material. I note that although all three rishonim that I have quoted are in agreement regarding this ruling, there is at least one early authority, Rav Nissim Gaon (Shabbos 12a), who disagrees and considers this action to be a Torah prohibition even according to Rabbi Shimon.

Clipping fingernails

At this point, we can address one of our opening questions: Does clipping fingernails involve a Torah prohibition on Shabbos?

According to Tosafos' understanding of Rabbi Shimon's opinion, and also according to the Baal Hama'or, this is prohibited only midrabbanan. However, according to the other opinions we have mentioned, this is prohibited min haTorah, even according to Rabbi Shimon.

In practical halacha, the question is: When there is a pressing but not life-threatening need to clip or trim nails on Shabbos, is it permitted to have a non-Jew do so? (See Nekudos Hakesef, Yoreh Deah 198:21; Biur Halacha 340:1 s.v. vechayov.)

I am limiting this discussion about melacha she'einah tzericha legufah to these three approaches, notwithstanding that there are many opinions how to explain the concept, with many differences in halacha (see, for example, Rav Nissim Gaon, Shabbos 12a; Tosafos Rid, Shabbos 107b and 121b; Meginei Shelomoh, Shabbos 94a; Mirkeves Hamishneh, beginning of Hilchos Shabbos; Yeshu'os Yaakov, Orach Chayim 319:1). How do we rule?

Does the halachic conclusion follow Rabbi Yehudah or Rabbi Shimon? This, itself, is a major dispute among the rishonim. The Rambam and others rule that melacha she'einah tzericha legufah is prohibited min haTorah, following Rabbi Yehudah, while others rule that melacha she'einah tzericha legufah is prohibited only midrabbanan, following Rabbi Shimon. It is even unclear which way the Shulchan Aruch and the later poskim rule.

What difference does it make?

We find that Chazal were lenient in several halachic issues that involve melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. For example, under certain circumstances, because of pain or illness, they permitted performing a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. (Those who rule that melacha she'einah tzericha legufah violates a Torah law permit this only when the situation is life threatening, or because of a different halachic reason).

Here is another situation in which many halachic authorities are lenient. As we are aware, most food preparation activities are permitted on Yom Tov, at least min haTorah. We may find it strange, but it is permitted to shecht on Yom Tov. Prior to the discovery of refrigeration, this was the easiest way to supply fresh meat for Yom Tov. (Although this may sound a bit pessimistic, life is the world's best preservative.)

The halachic question we will address is the following: When shechting fowl or deer (or any other species of chayah), the halacha requires that we perform a mitzvah called kisuy hadam, which means covering the blood of the shechitah, both below and above, with earth or something similar, such as sawdust. The question is whether it is permitted to dig up earth, under certain circumstances, in order to perform kisuy hadam on Yom Tov.

If melacha she'einah tzericha legufah is prohibited min haTorah, as is the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah, or if the act does not qualify as a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah but is a regular melacha activity, it is prohibited to dig up earth in order to perform the mitzvah of kisuy hadam. However, if we rule according to Rabbi Shimon, one would be allowed to dig up earth (which is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah) to perform the mitzvah of kisuy hadam, at least under certain circumstances (Maharsha, Beitza 8a s.v. Tosafos ve'eino; Machatzis Hashekel 498:25; Nesiv Chayim ad loc.).

At this point, we can return to our opening question:

Pulling Teeth

May I pull teeth on Shabbos?

Let us first analyze whether this is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. According to Tosafos' opinion, the melacha in the Mishkan this would fall under is gozeiz, and gozeiz was performed only to use the item being shorn. In my experience, a tooth is never pulled in order to use it. Therefore, this is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah and prohibited only midrabbanan according to Rabbi Shimon. However, should the market price on tooth enamel go through the roof, and someone choose to remove his tooth for his huge resale value, pulling the tooth would be prohibited min haTorah.

According to the Ramban, the tooth is being pulled because it is painful, not because I want the tooth itself. If I could get the tooth to disappear, that would be even more helpful, since I would avoid the pain and risk of infection that pulling it entails. Thus, the Ramban also categorizes this as a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah.

According to the Baal Hama'or, no benefit is gained from the tooth, and so, just as we explained according to the Ramban, this is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. As mentioned above, should circumstances change such that the removal of the tooth is performed for financial benefit, the act would become Torah prohibited also according to the Ramban and the Baal Hama'or.

Thus, all three rishonim we quoted do not consider pulling a tooth on Shabbos to be a Torah violation. Therefore, in a situation where a dentist wants to pull a tooth and the patient is in intense pain, all three of these rishonim would agree that this is permitted, according to Rabbi Shimon, even if the dentist is Jewish.

We also need to deal with the bleeding that will, undoubtedly, result when pulling a tooth. Again, according to Tosafos, this bleeding is not comparable to the reason that this melacha was performed in the Mishkan. According to both the Baal Hama'or and the Ramban, this would also qualify as a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah.

Thus, it would seem that according to those rishonim who rule that melacha she'einah tzericha legufah is prohibited only midrabbanan, this should be permitted (Mishnah Berurah 316:30; Biur Halacha ad loc.; Nimla Tal, Shocheit #53; however, cf. Magen Avraham 328:3).

In conclusion

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (Shemos 20:10) notes that people mistakenly think that work is prohibited on Shabbos, in order for it to be a day of rest. He points out that the Torah does not prohibit doing avodah, which connotes hard work, but melacha, activities or actions that achieve purpose and accomplishment. The concept of melacha she'einah tzericha legufah bears this out. It is no harder to perform a melacha hatzericha legufah, which is prohibited min haTorah according to all opinions, than to perform a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. Yet, according to Rabbi Shimon, the latter is prohibited only because of a rabbinic injunction. This is because this action is not considered to provide "purpose," as explained above.

Shabbos is a day when we refrain from altering the world for our own purposes, and the melacha she'einah tzericha legufah type of activity is not considered our own purpose.

The goal of Shabbos is to allow Hashem's rule to be the focus of creation, by refraining from our own creative acts.
