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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON YISRO - 5763

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[from last year]

From jr@caldera.com Fri Feb 1 01:53:46 2002 To: mj-ravtorah@shamash.org

Date: Fri, 1 Feb 2002 01:48 EST

Subject: SHIUR HARAV SOLOVEICHIK ZTL ON PARSHAS YISRO

yisro.02

Shiur HarAv Soloveichik on Parshas Yisro

(Shiur date: 1969, tape #JJ available from M. Nordlicht)

Rashi comments on the verse Anochi Hashem Elokecha Asher Hotzasicha Mmitzrayim that at the Red Sea Hashem appeared as a great warrior and at Sinai He appeared as a wise old teacher. Rashi continues, don't say that there are two deities. The Rav commented on the use of the term Anochi that it identifies one, to the exclusion of all others. One refers to himself as Anochi to single out his personality in time of crisis or difficulty. For example, Hashem told Abraham that his reward will be great. Abraham replied "Hashem Elokim Mah Titen Li Vanochi Holech Ariri". He immediately said Anochi, not Ani. Abraham said that I am singled out, I am your one true Servant to whom You promised great rewards. Yet that same person, Anochi, is in great despair. Moshe said "Mi Anochi Ki Aylech El Paroh", the emphasis is on the Anochi, I, who am I that You selected me to be Your representative to Paroh. On the other hand, when the Torah says Ani Hashem Elokaychem Asher Hotzaysi the emphasis is not on the Ani but rather on the Hotzaysi, you are beholden to Me because I took you out of Egypt. Hashem tells Bnay Yisrael that Anochi, I am the same one that took you out of Egypt. There is only One. Indeed I am your G-d, to the exclusion of all else. Similarly, Anochi Anochi Menachemchem, I, to the exclusion of all others, am your comforter.

Why did the Jews raise any doubt at all regarding the identity of Hashem? Because Hashem's appearance was not uniform. He appeared to them in Egypt differently than at the Red Sea. In reality, one does not see G-d, rather one experiences G-d through His actions. Hashem acts according to the needs, for example the situation in Egypt was different than the one at Sinai.

In Egypt they needed a defender while at Sinai they needed a teacher. This is a Mussar Haskel that the Jew can't be rigid and act the same way in each situation. One must act in a manner that is appropriate to the situation at hand; sometimes rigid while other times flexible. Hashem is the archetype of moral action, just as G-d acts commensurate to the situation, so must the Jew. There is no uniform action for all situations. The modern Jew must know how to act. He can't simply become hysterical or look for anti-Semites in every corner. There should be a certain flexibility to his speech and diplomacy. Jews sometimes become hysterical and lose perspective.

The doubts regarding the number of deities arose in their minds because of the incongruous or inconsistent ways they experienced Hashem. Also, they heard many voices, as it says "And the entire nation saw the voices", Kolos, in plural form. Voices emanated from all 4 corners of the world, from the heaven above and the ground below. Chazal tell us that we should not say that many deities spoke at the same time. There is only one Hashem, His voice is all encompassing.

Why did Hashem direct His voice from all sides? The Rav said that it demonstrated the universality of Jewish Law. Halacha is not bound to one geographical location. It is obligatory all over the world. Don't say that it applies in the desert but not in a civilized, economically advanced community. The Jewish destiny of Diaspora, that Jews would find themselves dispersed throughout the four corners of the world, was already reflected at Sinai. Halacha is to accompany them wherever they may find themselves.

Sometimes man wishes to lead a life that revolves completely around spiritual values. The Torah can help and guide to this end. The Torah did not advocate such a life of Nzirus, of separation, yet the Torah can accommodate it. This is the voice that was heard from above, from heaven. On the other hand the Torah can accommodate a life where one wishes to enjoy the benefits of this world within moderation. Each of the Mitzvos are flexible and can be fit into a certain frame of reference and pattern according to the life one wishes to lead. This was the voice that emanated from the ground.

The Rav remarked that his forebears led a spiritual existence, lives that were totally dedicated to Hashem, a saintly life in every respect. They renounced the pleasures of this world, they did not care about public opinion, they were defiant of society when it adopted an immoral and contemptible position. Similar to Moshe, who was raised in the house of Paroh, yet renounced the pleasures of the palace in order to lead a moral life. However it is also possible to live a conventional life within society, accepting moral values that society cherishes and still live within the Torah. Chazal say that sometimes there are 2 verses that appear to be contradictory. One verse appears to emphasize the heavenly character of the Torah, that Hashem wants to raise man to great heights, so the Torah says that Hashem made us hear from the heavens above. Another verse says that Hashem descended onto the mountain. Chazal resolve this saying that the Torah recognizes that man is frail and has shortcomings. Man can rise to great heights or he can live a normal life within the law. Both paths lead to the attainment of sanctity.

That's why at Sinai the voice crowded them from all locations.

There are many choices and possibilities and they are not mutually exclusive. There are many approaches to Hashem. The Vilna Gaon's opinion was that G-d can only be approached through the development of the intellect. The greater the intellect and knowledge, the closer man can come to Hashem. The Rambam had the same opinion: the greater the knowledge, the greater the love of Hashem. The Gaon transmitted this approach to Reb Chaim Volozoner and it made its way into the House of Brisk and the Rav's family. In the time of the Gaon this was a difficult view to defend. The intellect was not as prized then as the decisive factor in human advancement nor was it appreciated by society. Societal position was based on lineage. However, modern man has rediscovered the intellect. Judaism always was interested in the intellect. The Rambam explains that Tzelem Elokim is expressed through intellectual pursuits.

On the other hand there are those that reach out to G-d through their hearts. Many generations of Jews put on Tfillin, but how many really understood the meaning behind the Mitzvah? How many have observed the Shabbos, but how few have

appreciated the sanctity of the day? Yet the tradition is passed on from generation to generation. Chasidim had a different approach than that of the Gaon. They argued why should a person be excluded from the experience and ecstasy of Avodas Hashem if Hashem did not bestow upon him the mental capabilities to study? Chasidim developed an alternate approach to serving Hashem. Both share the obligation to follow the laws. But each approaches Hashem differently. In the final analysis, they worship the same Anochi, the same Hashem.

The Decalogue according to Chazal was given 3 times, in Yisro, Vaeschanan and Kdoshim. If one looks through the first section of Kdoshim, one finds the entire context of the Decalogue. The main distinction between Kdoshim and Yisro/Vaeschanan, is that in Kdoshim the plural formulation is used while in the other two, the singular form is used. It is readily understandable that the Decalogue should be formulated in plural. Yet it is presented twice in singular form. There are many examples where the Torah intermixes plural and singular. For example, in the chapter of V'Haya Im Shamo, the Torah switches back and forth between singular and plural. It is natural in the Hebrew language to switch back and forth between singular and plural (e.g. Asher Pakad Moshe V'Aharon).

Rashi asks why was the Decalogue formulated only in the singular? Let us first examine the Ramban's approach to this problem. He says that all the commandments were formulated in the singular form in order to warn the people that any individual that transgresses the commandments will be punished. Hashem addresses Himself to each individual and warns him not be misled to follow the majority in sin. The individual can never claim that he was just following the crowd, that he was overpowered by society that surrounds him. Many Jews would like to be observant even though they find themselves caught up in a senseless secular life. They would observe Mitzvos if they could resist social pressures. It is difficult to be an outcast from society, be it a society that shuns a religious, spiritual existence or one that is corrupt and amoral.

The Torah emphasizes the importance of the individual. In times of catastrophe we find many situations where the community at large felt that all hope for survival was gone, they simply gave up. It was the select individuals that saved the community in the face of adversity. Chazal say that Lo M'astim refers to the time that Hashem sent Ezra and Nehemiah, that Hashem gave the people 2 leaders Ezra and Nechemia. Lo G'altim refers to Mordechai and Esther. L'chalosam refers to Matisyahu and his five sons. L'hafer Brisi Itam refers to Antoninus and Rebbe. The Rav noted that the Maamar Chazal is noteworthy in that it does not mention the fact that Hashem rescued them in each of those generations. Why does it say that Hashem "gave" the generation these heroes and leaders? The Rav explained that at times when the whole nation reaches the edge of despair and national suicide, when Judaism can no longer survive, at times of such adversity Hashem bestows on the community a couple of individuals that change the destiny of the Jewish nation. They are the redeemers. Without Mordechai and Esther the Jewish community would have been obliterated. The courage of the individuals saved the people. Judaism believes in the capabilities of the individual to bring about change in Jewish history. Such an individual is capable of understanding the suffering of the individual and the community. Hashem addressed the Decalogue to such an individual.

Rashi answers the question of why did the Torah use the singular form in a different way. Chazal say that it was in order to afford Moshe the opportunity to defend and rescue the people at the episode of the golden calf by claiming that the Decalogue was given to him alone, as evidenced by the fact that they were

presented in the singular form. Since Bnai Yisrael were never given the commandments, they did not transgress. The Rav asked how did Rashi derive that Moshe argued that the Decalogue was given only to him? Because of the way that Moshe phrased the statement. Moshe asked how could Hashem indict Bnai Yisrael? After all, until recently they were slaves. The answer was that they had been given the Decalogue that outlawed idolatry. So Moshe jumps to their defense, asking Hashem to forgive them. Why didn't Moshe accept their guilt? He knew that they made an idol yet he pleaded for them. Apparently Moshe said that Hashem did not address Himself to the nation, but rather to Moshe alone, so the law is not yet binding upon them.

When Moshe descended the mountain and saw the Jews celebrating around the idol, his first reaction was to break the Luchos. Chazal say that Hashem congratulated Moshe for breaking the Luchos. Chazal say that at Sinai, Bnai Yisrael were the bride, Hashem Kvatayachol, the groom and the Luchos were to be the Kesef Kidushin. Sometimes a contract is created through the instrument of money, other times it is done through a document. If a man wants to marry, he can appoint an agent to turn over the instrument for him to his prospective bride. So Moshe was the agent who was given the task to hand over the instrument of contract, the Luchos. Moshe was to teach them what Hashem commanded at Sinai, how to live a moral life. When he decided to break the instrument, he broke the contract and the people were no longer bound. Indeed, in this way, Moshe prevented the contract from taking effect. Hashem appreciated the difficulty inherent with taking slaves out of bondage and turning them into a holy people. To become a holy nation, they must be trained and educated. At Sinai when Hashem gave Moshe the Decalogue, He told Moshe that he alone understands Hashem now, the people are still focused on the fleshpots of Egypt. Hashem tells Moshe that He will give the Decalogue to him and he will transmit it to the people over time. Moshe descends the mountain and recognizes the dire situation facing the people. In order to save them from the impending harsh punishment, Moshe destroyed the Luchos.

It is interesting to note that the third time Moshe ascended Sinai, he was told to carve out tablets and carry them up the mountain. Why did Hashem change the process for the second set of Luchos and require Moshe to make the extra effort of carving and dragging stones up the mountain? The Rav explained that there are 2 different types of agents with regards to betrothal: Sholiach L'holacha (agent to deliver, sent by the man) and Sholiach L'kaballa (agent to receive, sent by the woman). The difference between them is that Sholiach L'kabalah creates the Kidushin once the instrument is delivered to the agent of the woman. However a Sholiach L'holacha retains the same power as the sender. Had the husband himself been delivering the Kidushin, the Kidushin would not take effect until he completes the delivery. His emissary is bound by the same requirement to deliver before the Kidushintake effect.

Moshe was a Sholiach L'holacha for the first Luchos. The marriage did not take effect until he delivered the Kidushin to the people. Since the delivery never took place, there was no marriage. Hashem told Moshe that with the second Luchos his role will change. In order to prevent a recurrence of the same episode, this time Moshe you must be a Sholiach L'kabalah. We see this from the fact that Moshe informed the people that he was going to meet with Hashem to attempt to atone for their sin. Why was it necessary to inform the people of his plans to ascend the mountain again? After all, Moshe met many times with Hashem without advising the people of his plans. The reason is that now Moshe had to go up as a Sholiach L'kabalah, he

informed the people that the Kidushsin will apply immediately. They will be bound immediately by the Decalogue and he will not be able to employ the same defense he used last time. Before he could become a Sholiach L'kaballah he had to ask their permission.

The Torah says that Hashem is the One who took us out of the "house of slaves". Why the emphasis on the house of slaves? According to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch there are 2 types of slaves. The first is a free man who is defeated in war and becomes a slave. He hates slavery as it contradicts everything he knew as a free man. He can't wait to throw off the yoke of slavery and be free again. Another type of slave is one whose ancestors were slaves for many generations. Such a slave cannot appreciate freedom. The Jews were enslaved for many years in Egypt. The Torah tells us that after Paroh became sick, the people cried out to Hashem. Why didn't they cry out to Hashem earlier? They did not pray before under intolerable conditions because slavery was so ingrained in them.

The Torah tells us that Bnay Yisrael were redeemed from the house of Paroh. Some slaves were forced to work for the state. Other slaves were graciously given by the state to deserving citizens, who were Paroh's subjects. A slave in a private home who works for cruel masters has a very difficult life. However sometimes a slave may have a master with some compassion and be treated nicely. However when one is a slave to the state, his masters are invariably sadists who find delight in torturing others. The Torah tells us that the Jews were not only slaves in private homes. Some were treated better while others were terribly abused. However, the worst position was to be a slave to the state, to Paroh. During the Holocaust, the concentration camps were the most brutal and sadistic places for the inmates because the people selected to run those camps were the most sadistic of all. The same was true in Egypt as it was in Nazi Germany.

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TorahWeb [from last year]

RABBI MICHAEL ROSENSWEIG
LO TACHMOD: THE PERFECT CULMINATION OF THE
ASSERET HA-DIBROT

The centerpiece of Parshat Yitro is the Asseret ha-Dibrot. The special significance of these ten themes, the content of the direct Divine Revelation, is axiomatic. The unique stature of the Asseret ha-Dibrot is further highlighted by the perspective articulated by R. Saadiah Gaon, Ramban and others who argue that these ten commandments succinctly encapsulate the totality of the 613 mitzvot! This view might also justify the controversial custom to stand during the reading of this section. Rambam (Teshuvot, no. 60) vehemently opposed this practice, arguing that it implied an unacceptable axiological hierarchy in the text or mitzvot of the Torah. If the Asseret ha-Dibrot embody the totality of the mitzvot, rising for its recitation is hardly problematic. (For another approach to this issue, see Mesorah I, 17-18)

At first glance, however, the fact that this crucial series of mitzvot concludes with the prohibition of Lo Tachmod is puzzling. One would anticipate that a list of this magnitude would begin with a mitzvah that would set the tone for the entire unit, and culminate with a theme that powerfully conveys the spiritually ambitious agenda of Torah life. The inaugural mitzvah fits this expectation,

as it focuses on belief in Hashem, the "foundation of foundations (yesod ha-yesodot)"- Rambam, Hil. Yesodei Ha-Torah 1:1). Indeed, Ramban (Sefer Ha-Mizvot, Aseh 1) explains that Behag omitted this principle from the list of 613 mitzvot because it transcends the status of a mitzvah, as it is the foundation of all mitzvot. The conclusion of Lo Tachmod, on the other hand, does not seem to conform with the anticipated pattern. The prohibition against coveting one's neighbors belongings, focusing also on homes, slaves, various animals, and finally "kol asher le-reiechah" hardly seems inspirational or climactic.

There are other difficulties associated with this final dibrah. The term "chimud", as Ibn Ezra (Devarim 5:17) notes, is ambiguous. In some contexts, it signifies the action of theft, while in other circumstances it refers to thought alone. Why would the Torah utilize such confusing terminology in such a crucial context? The relationship between Lo Tachmod and robbery is examined by Ramban, R. Behai and other commentators. Although they suggest that Lo Tachmod represents gezel in the Asseret ha-Dibrot, they do not fully explain why this more ambiguous concept is preferable to the more concrete gezel!

However, upon further examination, we can perhaps appreciate more fully the Torah's choice, and the symmetry between the beginning and end of this transcendent list of mitzvot. Both the first and concluding mitzvot of the Asseret ha-Dibrot engender significant discussion among the commentators inasmuch as each is inherently an attitudinal demand, constituting legislation in the realm of emotions/belief. Herein precisely lies the unique ambition of the Torah as a value system that seeks to transform and define the human personality. The Torah insists that man's perspective can and must be shaped by the spiritual-halachic values that give life its purpose. This is true not only with respect to belief in Hashem, without which life would cease to have meaning, but is also true with regard to the equally indispensable value of a proper approach to material goods.

The Torah intentionally bypasses "gezel" for "chimud" precisely because the term "chimud" refers also to planning for or obsessing about attaining someone else's property. There is much evidence to indicate that the improper focus upon another's property constitutes the root of this prohibition even according to those authorities who demand that the planning be implemented, as well. Rambam (Hil. Gezeilah 1:9), for example, insists that this violation cannot occur without the attainment of the object in question, yet he characterizes the prohibition as one lacking in action - "lav she-ein bo masseh"- with respect to the absence of malkot! (See Raavad's gloss on this point!) R. Yonah and Ibn Ezra, in their Torah commentaries, explain that this prohibition seeks to inculcate the halachic approach to the material world by projecting the ideal of "sameach be-chelko" (satisfaction with one's material lot in life), thereby also guaranteeing mutual respect and limiting friction between individuals. Ramban (Kedoshim) posits that Lo Tachmod is the analogue to the obligation to love one's neighbor ("ve-ahavta le-reiachah kamochah"), perceived by Chazal as a major tenet (kelal gadol) of the Torah. The fact that such apparently mundane items as slaves, animals and "kol asher le-reiechah" round out the list of Lo Tachmod objects actually reinforces the ambition and pervasiveness of this ideal.

Ibn Ezra (Shemot 20:13) explains that one can condition his thoughts and desires in accordance with halachic principles and ideals as long as one perceives halachic norms as absolute values. He argues that one who is truly committed to Torah observance cannot conceive of violating its principles any more than a simple commoner can realistically dream of marrying into the royal family. Just as a sane individual does not seriously entertain the possibility that he will sprout wings and ascend to

the heavens, a committed halachic observer is incapable of becoming seriously obsessed with the inappropriate attainment of his fellow's belonging. Thus, Lo Tachmod constitutes an extraordinarily ambitious agenda that is rooted in a pervasive commitment to the notion of a " halachic reality".

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch notes that while the first group of the Asseret ha-Dibrot begins with theological commitment and then shifts to obligations of actions, the second half of the Dibrot commence with a focus on actions but conclude with values that are critical to an ideological commitment. Values and a commitment to principle is the foundation of the Torah, but the Torah's special approach to life demands that these be concretized in activities and norms. At the same time, the focus on actions and norms would be insufficient if it did not, in turn, produce and generate a more intricate halachic value system to govern the spiritual life of the committed Torah Jew. The process that begins with a commitment to faith - "Anochi Hashem Elokechah"- culminates with the profound impact of halachic reality manifested in Lo Tachmod, as the reciprocal interaction of thought and deed shape and define the halachic personality. Properly understood, Lo Tachmod is indeed the appropriate culmination and climax for the ambitious program of avodat Hashem outlined in the Asseret ha-Dibrot and elaborated in Taryag Mizvot.

http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2003/parsha/rhab_yisro.html
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RABBI YAAKOV HABER

THE TOTALITY OF THE ASERES HADIB'ROS

"Vay'dabeir Elokim es kol had'varim ha'eileh laimor" -- "And G-d spoke all of these words, saying (Yisro 20:1)." With this verse, the Torah introduces the Decalogue, the 'Aseret HaDib'ros. Rashi, quoting the Midrash, writes that all the commandments were miraculously stated in one utterance by G-d. Commenting on the textual source for this tradition, Rav Yosef Dov Haleivi Soloveitchik zt"l noted that the Hebrew word for all -- "kol" -- has two meanings: 1) the collective aggregate of many units or 2) the totality of an item or concept. Here, Chazal taught, the word "kol" cannot carry the first meaning as that would be obvious; of course, G-d uttered all of the dib'rot following the introductory phrase. Therefore, it must mean the totality of the dib'rot, and hence the tradition that all these commandments were uttered as one whole.

Rav Soloveitchik continued to explain in light of the observation by many of the commentaries that each of the two luchos focuses on different types of mitzvot -- the first on Mitzvot Bein Adam LaMakom, the second on Mitzvot Bein Adam LaChaveiro -- that these two luchot comprise one indivisible entity. Allegiance to one half only is not only a corruption of the Divine message but inevitably leads to disaster. Social Morality, or an ethical system of thought not based on the "I am G-d" legislator of the first tablet, is at best subject to many whimsical, immoral judgments and at worst to self-destruction. The Rav quoted the example of the Soviet Union, which, although founded on a basically "moral" doctrine of Marxism (">From each according to his ability, to each according to his need"), but, being atheistic in its very foundation, inevitably would and did lead to the totalitarian, brutal, murderous state that, under various leaders, the Soviet Union became. An interesting insight of R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (NeTzIV) drives this point home as well. When Avraham is confronted by Avimelech about his trying to pass off his wife as his sister leading to Avimelech almost committing an adulterous affair with her if not for direct Divine intervention, Avimelech states: "For you

have brought on my kingdom a great sin (VaYeira 20:9)." We find no parallel statement in the words of Pharaoh when a similar incident occurred with him and Sarah in Parshat Lech Lecha. Pharaoh merely blames (then) Avram for not informing him that she was his wife; he does not mention anything about sin. Apparently, Philistia was a more moral country than Egypt, and as such, Avimelech was concerned about the great transgression involved. This is also evidenced by the fact that after the episode with Pharaoh, Avram is chased out of Egypt to avoid any possible repeat of Sarah being taken away because the Egyptians were immersed in immorality (see Rashi (12:19)). After the incident with Avimelech, Avraham is allowed to stay in Philistia because no such fear existed in light of the moral chastity prevailing in the land. In light of all this, it comes as a surprise when Avraham responds to Avimelech's accusations: "For I said, but there is no fear of G-d in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife (20:11)." Why is Avraham concerned that in such a moral climate, that murder would be considered an alternative? Furthermore, if adulterous acts were not considered reprehensible, why would Avimelech bother killing Avraham instead of just sinning with Sarah? The Netziv answers (in his commentary Ha'amek Davar) that human morality -- no matter how seemingly just, no matter how well-kept and widespread -- is flexible. The creators of the morality can create loopholes at will. It can immediately become moral for a king to take women as he wishes or kill as he wishes. One could even justify this based on "Divine right" or some other catchy phrase bolstering the right of monarchs to rule as they wish. It is this problem that Avraham addresses. In effect, he tells Avimelech: "If your sense of right and wrong is dictated by your own senses -- whether it be based on your logic, your emotions, your drives, or your feelings -- and not based on a G-d given, fixed, rigid, unwavering system of Absolute Right and Wrong, then I can have no confidence in you or your system of laws." What emerges crystal-clear is that we cannot allow our own feelings or logic to dictate right or wrong. This leads to confusion and disaster. Our only measuring-stick of Right and Wrong must perforce be the Torah, the Revelation of the Divine Will. (See Chazon Ish in his Emunah U'Bitachon for further elaboration on this point.)

Rambam (Hilchos M'lachim) rules conclusively that the Seven Noahide Laws, of which at least three focus on interpersonal laws (murder, theft, adultery), must all be kept as a result of Divine command and not just human reason. This is true even though the interpersonal laws are mishpatim, or mitzvot which Man could have intuited on his own. Nonetheless, the Legislator, the Authority, and the Cause of their binding nature, and the One who determines their scope are all one and the same: G-d Himself. Only one who recognizes this and fulfills them with this truth in mind will receive Eternal Life for adherence to them.

Malbim, in his commentary to Tehillim makes a similar observation. There the Psalmist writes: "He tells His words to Jacob, His statutes (chukav) and His laws (mishpatav) to Israel. He did not do so to any [other] nation, and laws (mishpatim) they do not know, praise G-d!" (147:19-20). Noting the difference between "mishpatim" which generally refer to social laws able to be arrived at by human minds and chukim, laws only known by Divine command, Malbim comments on the latter verse, that, not only don't the nations of the world know G-d's chukim, since they were not dictated to them, but even the mishpatim are not kept by the majority of Nations as a result of Divine command and therefore cannot serve as a source of Eternity for them.

In a world of moral relativism, spiritual confusion, and rancorous debates about crucial issues of morality, the Torah continues to serve as the bedrock of Divine Truth waiting for the Jewish people

and all of Mankind by extension to drink from its Wisdom to provide guidance and enlighten all of life's dilemmas.

From: Eretz Hemdah [eretzhem@netvision.net.il]
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To: eretzhem@netvision.net.il
Subject: Parshat Yitro 22 Shevat 5763
Hemdat Yamim

This edition of Hemdat Yamim is dedicated to the memory of R' Meir ben Yechezkel Shraga Brachfeld o.b.m.

Eretz Hemdah is the premier institution for training young rabbis to take the Israeli Rabbinates' rigorous Yadin Yadin examinations. Eretz Hemdah, with its distinctive blend of Religious Zionist philosophy and scholarship combined with community service, ensures that its graduates emerge with the finest training, the noblest motivations resulting in an exceptionally strong connection to Jewish communities worldwide.

STEADILY AND SURELY RABBI MACY GORDON

In the dramatic description of the historic events at Mt. Sinai, lies hidden away in the very last pasuk of this week's Reading (Shemot 20:23) a rather banal and seemingly irrelevant commandment. It teaches that when Israel builds a sanctuary and its furnishings, there is to be an altar for sacrifice. The commandment specifies that the altar may not be ascended by stairs, but by a ramp. Many of our readers, who have seen museum models of the appurtenances of the Mishkan or of the Temples, will have noticed that a long ramp leads up to the altar, which was much taller than a person's height. The reason given in the pasuk is so that nakedness not be exposed to the altar. The priestly vestments were such that a kohen spreading his legs to take a big step up on stairs would breach the proper level of tzeniut in regard to the altar.

The late Israeli scholar, Rabbi S.Y. Zevin, gave an additional, deep reason for the choice of a ramp rather than stairs. What is the difference between steps and a ramp as means of ascent? There is more to it than speed of ascent or accessibility to the handicapped. Stairs are level. Although each step takes more effort, one can ascend a few stairs, and if one tires, one can comfortably stop and rest before continuing the journey upwards. On a ramp one need not take big steps, but one's feet must always be tensed to maintain balance on the slope. There is no "resting" on a ramp without exerting effort. If you place a ball on a stair it will stay exactly where it is. If you place a ball on a ramp, it will roll down unless it is constantly being pushed upward. This idea is particularly significant when one climbs the altar of G-d, sacrificing certain comforts or ideas to fulfill His mitzvot. We have been blessed in our day with many who have sought out G-d, coming to Torah Judaism on their own, by climbing a very steep incline in their personal lives. The altar teaches us that there is no stairway to Heaven. There is no place to rest even if one has taken big steps. While one doesn't have to take giant steps or leaps at once, one cannot rest on some plateau in religious life or in Torah observance. As on a ramp, one ascends by steps suited to one's individual ability, but the tension to move up must always be there. One who takes too long a rest or tries to stay stationary will inevitably fall back.

"Becoming observant" is a difficult life's work. There is no better example than Yitro, for whom this week's Reading is named. But the final lesson in this Reading is, "Don't go for big leaps and try for everything all at once; don't use stairs, and certainly not two or three stairs at a time. A ramp is better. But at the same time, no rest stops. Your direction should always be upwards or you will

find yourself falling back." It is a beautiful message for the chozer b'teshuvah, but it shouldn't be lost on those who were raised religiously, as well.

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From: Ohr Somayach [ohr@ohr.edu] To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Yitro
* TORAH WEEKLY * from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
Highlights of the weekly Torah portion
Parshat Yitro For the week ending 25 January 2003 / 22 Shevat 5763
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Going From The Gold "And Yitro, the priest of Midian..." (18:1)

I always wanted a spectacular view from my living room window: the Jerusalem hills, or the tomb of Shmuel HaNavi or even, at a pinch, the French Alps. Somehow, I ended up with the clothes lines of Arzei HaBira. Not that I'm complaining. I don't really see them anymore. Come to think of it, anytime I visited someone who did have a spectacular view, they told me that they don't really notice it much after a while.

Our nature is to take what we have for granted. Sometimes we need an outsider's view to get us to appreciate with what we have been blessed. In this week's Torah portion, the central and culminating event of Jewish nationhood takes place. G-d gives the Torah to the Jewish People on Mount Sinai. One would think that of all the possible names for this week's Parsha, the least likely would be that of a non-Jewish priest who had tried every form of idol worship in the world. And yet there it is in black and white: "Yitro - priest of Midian."

Why was this central Parsha of the Torah named after Yitro?

When Yitro heard of the Exodus and the miracles that were performed for the Jewish People his happiness was so great that he felt physically elated, like someone who weeps or faints through being overwhelmed with the emotion of unexpected joy. Literally, his flesh started to prickle. He had gooseflesh. (18:9) No such extreme reaction characterizes the response of the Jewish People. They believed in G-d and Moshe, His servant, sure, but there is no mention of a similar visceral reaction like that of Yitro.

Sometimes it takes a foreign eye to see exactly what you have. The following is a true story:

I come from a totally secular Israeli home. By secular I mean atheist. We held no religious beliefs at all, and no Jewish traditions and practices were kept. Yom Kippur was ignored, and I didn't even celebrate my bar mitzvah. When I was 16 I began to search for some kind of meaning to life, although at the time I didn't call it that since I didn't realize what I was doing. I liked rebels and I started hanging out with all kinds of different people. I dressed and acted like a kind of hippie, and caused no end of embarrassment to my parents. I didn't believe in anything. I roamed around the country with all the strange characters who were my friends. I could fill a book with my adventures from then.

At the age of 21, I packed my bags and set off for India to look for truth. In my quest for meaning, there was no commune or ashram that I did not visit. I got to know many gurus personally. Only someone who has spent time in India can really understand the magnetic force of these communes.

My roaming and searching continued and eventually I went to visit the Dalai Lama himself. I was captivated by the Dalai Lama's personality, by his wisdom and intelligence. I would rise early each morning and attend his daily sermon at 4:30am. As far as I was concerned, he was a human being without any blemishes.

Back home in Israel, my parents were worried about me. My father sent me a letter saying he had heard that I had "freaked out," afraid that I'd really gone crazy. I sent a polite letter back assuring him that I wasn't crazy but that I was now at a major crossroads in my life. As I mailed the letter I realized that the very wording of my letter would convince my father that I had indeed gone crazy!

The same evening I approached one of the Dalai Lama's assistants and asked for a private audience with the Dalai Lama the next morning after his sermon. The following morning I entered his chambers. He was a gentleman who greeted everyone who came to see him. He bowed to me

and offered me a seat. My words poured forth as I told him that I saw truth and meaning in his religion and that I decided to adopt it if he would accept me.

"Where are you from," he asked me.

"Israel."

He looked at me. "Are you Jewish?"

"Yes," I replied.

His reaction surprised me. His expression turned from friendly to puzzled, with even a tinge of anger. He told me that he did not understand my decision, and that he would not permit me to carry it out.

I was stunned. What did he mean?

"All religions are an imitation of Judaism," he stated. "I am sure that when you lived in Israel, your eyes were closed. Please take the first plane back to Israel and open your eyes. Why settle for an imitation when you can have the real thing?"

His words spun around in my head the whole day. I thought to myself: I am a Jew and an Israeli, but I know nothing about my own religion. Did I have to search and wander the whole world only to be told that I was blind and that the answers I was seeking were to be found on my own doorstep?

I did what the Dalai Lama told me to do. I immediately flew back to Israel and entered a yeshiva. And, as he told me to do, I opened my eyes. I began to see the Dalai Lama had indeed been correct. I discovered Judaism and its vitality, and that it encompassed everything in life. I embraced its laws and found many reasons to live - at least 613 reasons! And I found joy.

Two years later someone suggested a shidduch (arranged meeting). Anat was a young woman of my age who was also a ba'alat teshuvah, a returnee to traditional Judaism. She too had been to Goa and other places in India to search for answers, and she too had found them back in Israel, in the religion of Israel. We clicked immediately. We had gone through the same search for meaning, and the same return to our roots. Eventually, Anat and I got engaged.

When I went to offer a gift to the matchmaker, she refused to accept anything, saying that she didn't deserve it.

"But it's customary to give the matchmaker a gift -- and I want to do it."

"You are quite right, but in this case I am not the matchmaker," she replied simply.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. Anat came to me and showed me a piece of paper with a name in it. She asked me to introduce her to the person whose name was written there. She knew nothing at all about that person, but said that she had been given his name by someone she trusts completely... It was your name."

After the engagement party, Anat and I went for a walk.

"Tell me," I said, "how did this shidduch come about? I want to know who gave you my name, so that I can pay him."

Anat said "I haven't told you yet that at the end of my wandering, I went to the Dalai Lama. I was very impressed by him and all he embodied and I decided to join his religion. When I told him he said, 'Anat, since you are Jewish you should not settle for silver if you can have gold.' He told me to return to my roots and then in a whisper, he asked one of his assistants to bring him a piece of paper. The Dalai Lama then copied the name that was there onto another piece of paper, and handed it to me. 'This is your soul mate,' he told me.

With a smile, Anat said to me, "So you will have to travel to India to pay the shadchan."

Anat and I have been married for three years now and we have been blessed with two wonderful children. I am immersed in Torah study, and Anat is a wonderful wife and mother. And our parents, you may be wondering, how did they accept all this? Our parents are educated, well-to-do people whose way of life is very different from ours, but they are impressed by our lifestyle and the close relationship between us. And they know the role the Dalai Lama had in all of this."

Sometimes it takes a "priest of Midian" to remind us that we have the gold.

Sources: Ohr HaChaim; adapted from "People Speak About Themselves" by Rabbi Chaim Walder, Feldheim Publishers
www.Feldheim.com

Written and compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

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From: Rabbi Riskin's Shabbat Shalom List [parsha@ohrtorahstone.org.il]
Sent: January 22, 2003 To: Shabbat_Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il
Subject: SHABBAT SHALOM: PARSHAT YITRO BY RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

(Exodus 18:1-20:23)

Efrat, Israel - Undoubtedly, the most stirring, supernatural and significant event in the entire Bible is the Divine Revelation at Sinai, the Ten Commandments which provided Israel and the world with a quintessential message of morality necessary for the transformation - and salvation - of humanity. When we attempt to analyze the content of these ten commandments, the first three speak of G-d (the Lord who took the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, Who shall have no other gods before Him, and whose name shall not be taken in vain), the fourth commands us to remember the Sabbath to sanctify it, the fifth enjoins honoring our parents, and the next five deal with universally accepted ethical principles: Thou shall not murder, Thou shall not commit adultery, Thou shall not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet (Exodus 20:1-4). One could not imagine a more finely crafted and relevant moral code for our post-modern, ethically perplexed, nuclear empowered era - and we can only stand back in amazement to think that these words were uttered close to 4,000 years ago!

If we understand that the G-d in whom we are enjoined to believe - to the exclusion of false idols idealizing materialistic and even bestial end goals - is a G-d of love, compassion, graciousness, patient tolerance, loving-kindness and truth, then nine of these commandments deal with ethics and morality. After all, our religion is not only monotheism; it is ethical monotheism, believing in a G-d who demands justice, mercy and peace! But then the one commandment of the ten which stands out as being different is the fourth command, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; the Sabbath is a day dedicated to ritual, to prayer and Torah study. It seems to be an exclusively Jewish religious expression, devoid of universalistic or even moralistic messages. How does the Sabbath fit into the universal design of the decalogue?

I would like to even compound the question. The Decalogue was given barely six weeks after the splitting of the Reed Sea following the exodus from Egypt; and when the Torah tells us that G-d gave the Israelites at Mara a fore-taste of the Divine commandments, our Sages teach that this Biblical introduction consisted of the Sabbath laws, parental respect, and civil laws of business and neighborliness (Exodus 15:25, B.T. Sanhedrin 56b and Rashi to the Bible, ad loc). Moreover, the Bible then records how the Israelites complain about the lack of food in the desert, and receive the special heavenly supply of manna: one sufficient portion each day for every family member, with a double portion for each on Friday in order that no one would have to gather the manna on the Sabbath. As the Bible expresses it, See that the Lord has given to you the Sabbath; therefore He gives to you on Friday a sufficient portion for two days. Let every person dwell under him (under himself , within his own four cubits, - Rashi - or within his own tent - Ibn Ezra). Let no individual go out (or take out) from his place on the seventh day (Exodus 16:29). Why this emphasis on the Sabbath only weeks before the central commandment will be given to the Israelites at Sinai as the fourth commandment? And what is the literal meaning of the rather difficult verse just cited?

I would argue that the single most revolutionary concept in the entire Torah is the concept of the Sabbath. After all, every totalitarian ruler, every slaveholder, insists that he controls - nay, owns - his citizenry or his slaves. As a result, it is the ruler or slave owner who determines the hours and output of his servants. As a result, the Israelites worked in the slave-labor camps of Pharaoh building Pitome and Raamses for 210 years - and could not even get three days off for a religious celebration in the desert. Comes the Almighty and demands that every Israelite refrain from any kind of servile work on the Sabbath. In effect, G-d is insisting that He, and not Pharaoh, is the Employer! Indeed, G-d is teaching that He is the Ultimate Employer because He - and not Pharaoh - owns the Israelites. He owns us because He created us, as the fourth commandment in the Decalogue teaches (Exodus 70: 10,11 The seventh days is the day of rest before the Lord your G-d... For in six days G-d created the heavens and the earth.. And He rested on the seventh day). And since G-d created all of humanity, He owns everyone. Hence, no human being dare enslave any other human being; we are, all of us, owned only by G-d, and therefore only He can determine when, and how, we are to work! The G-d of the Sabbath is the G-d of human freedom.

Therefore, immediately following the exodus from Egypt, we are already commanded at Mara the laws of the Sabbath, the consummate expression of the lesson of human freedom from enslavement which the Almighty taught in Egypt. Even Pharaoh himself learned this costly lesson at long last. When he summons his charioteers to overtake the fleeing Israelites, the text reads, "And he (Pharaoh) harnessed his chariot, and he took his nation with him (Exodus 14:6) Rashi explains the sea-change in Pharaoh's mentality: he, himself harnesses his own chariot, he is willing to lead his soldiers in the charge, endangering his own life first, and he even agrees to share the spoils of victory evenly with them Rashi ad loc. And the manna continues to emphasize this important lesson. Sustenance ultimately comes from G-d; no self-appointed patron has the right to demand enslavement in return for providing food. Since G-d is the ultimate employer (as well as benefactor), no human being - even if he be under orders from another human being, - may leave his four cubits to gather food on the Sabbath day. The sacred Zohar even understands the phrase "Let every person dwell under him" to mean "Let every person dwell under Him," that is only in fealty to the Divine Presence. Then he will not go out to work on the Sabbath day. Then he will not even carry an object from place to place on the Sabbath day. After all, such transporting of objects connotes transference of ownership according to Talmudic law - and the Sabbath teaches that the only true owner of the entire universe is the Almighty G-d.

The Decalogue opens, "I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt, the House of bondage." No law in any Book of Statutes expresses this revolutionary and universal truth with greater clarity than does the Sabbath, the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. Shabbat Shalom.

You can find Rabbi Riskin's parshiot on the web at:
<http://www.ohrtorahstone.org.il/parsha/index.htm>

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From: Jeffrey Gross [jgross@torah.org] To: weekly-halacha@torah.org
Subject: Weekly Halacha - Parshas Yisro

WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5763

By RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights
A discussion of Halachic topics. For final rulings, consult your Rav
TALKING IN SHUL

One of the serious flaws in our society today is the lack of proper decorum in shul, especially on Shabbos and Yom Tov. While socializing in shul is not a new problem(1) and certainly most, if not all people who go to shul are aware of the prohibition against talking during davening, still a great deal of talking goes on anyway, either from force of habit or out of disregard for the Halachah. Today, when the power of prayer is needed more than ever, we must find new ways to eradicate this scourge from our midst.

Ideally, there should be no talking in shul from the beginning to the end of davening. This should be the long term goal of every congregation. There are a number of halachic reasons for this:

Shulchan Aruch rules that idle talk is forbidden in shul even when prayers are not being recited.(2) Idle talk includes conversation about one's livelihood or other essential needs.(3) Nowadays there is some room for leniency concerning such talk, since some Rishonim rule that shuls are generally built with a "precondition" allowing them to be used for essential matters other than davening.(4) During a scheduled prayer session one may not separate himself from the tzibbur and engage in idle talk.(5)

Talking during davening causes a chillul Hashem, since it unfortunately lends support to the widely held perception that non-Jews are more careful than Jews to maintain proper decorum in their house of worship.(6) When one is wearing his Tefillin, he should refrain from idle talk.(7) During certain portions of davening, talking is prohibited for additional reasons as well. Sometimes talking is considered a hefsek, an "interruption" which may invalidate the portion which is being interrupted, while at other times talking is prohibited because the congregation must give its undivided attention to that portion of the service. In the following paragraphs we will discuss the various sections of davening, the degree of the prohibition against talking in each section, and the reasons behind the prohibition. We will follow the order of the davening:

(Note: During certain sections of davening, as will be noted, there is no specific prohibition against talking. However, the aforementioned reasons for prohibiting talking in general apply to these sections as well.)
BETWEEN BIRCHOS HA-SHACHAR and BARUCH SHEAMAR - There is no specific halachah which prohibits talking.
DURING KADDISH - Talking is strictly forbidden, as one must pay full attention so that he can answer amen, etc. properly.(8)
DURING PESUKEI D'ZIMRAH - Unless there is an emergency, it is forbidden to talk during this time as it would constitute an interruption between the blessing of Baruch Sheamar and the blessing of Yishtabach.(9)
BETWEEN YISHTABACH and BARUCH - It is permitted to talk for a pressing mitzvah need only.(10)
BETWEEN BARUCH and YOTZER OHR or Ha-MA'ARIV ARAVIM - It is strictly forbidden to talk.(11)
DURING BIRCHOS KERIAS SHEMA and SHEMA - It is strictly forbidden to talk, as it would be considered an interruption in the middle of a blessing, which may invalidate the blessing.(12)
BETWEEN GA'AL YISRAEL and SHEMONEH ESREI - It is strictly forbidden to talk, since it would interrupt the all-important connection between Geulah and Tefillah.(13)
DURING SHEMONEH ESREI - It is strictly forbidden to talk, as it constitutes an interruption in davening.(14) If one spoke inadvertently during one of the blessings of Shemoneh Esrei, he must repeat the blessing.(15)
AFTER SHEMONEH ESREI - It is forbidden to talk if it will disturb the concentration of others who are still davening.(16)
DURING CHAZARAS HA-SHATZ - It is strictly forbidden to talk,(17) since one must pay full attention so that he can answer amen properly. One who talks during chazaras ha-shatz is called "a sinner whose sin is too great to be forgiven.(18) The poskim report that several shuls were destroyed on account of this sin.(19)
DURING KEDUSHAH - It is strictly forbidden to talk. Total concentration is mandatory.(20)
DURING NESIAS KAPAYIM - It is forbidden to talk, as complete attention must be paid to the kohanim.(21)
BETWEEN CHAZARAS HA SHATZ and TACHANUN - It is inappropriate to talk, since l'chatchilah there should be no interruption between Shemoneh Esrei and Tachanun.(22)
BETWEEN TACHANUN and KERIAS HA-TORAH - There is no specific prohibition against talking.
DURING KERIAS HA-TORAH - It is strictly forbidden to engage in either idle talk or divrei Torah during Kerias ha-Torah.(23) One who speaks at that time is called "a sinner whose sin is too great to be forgiven.(24) Some poskim prohibit talking as soon as the Torah scroll is unrolled.(25)
BETWEEN ALIYOS - There are several views: Some poskim prohibit talking totally,(26) others permit discussing divrei Torah only,(27) while others are even more lenient.(28)
DURING HAFTARAH and ITS BLESSINGS - It is forbidden to talk, as one must pay undivided attention.(29)
BETWEEN KERIAS HATORAH and THE END OF DAVENING - There is no specific prohibition against talking.
DURING HALLEL - It is forbidden to talk. Doing so constitutes an interruption of Hallel.(30)
KABBOLAS SHABBOS - There is no specific prohibition against talking.
DURING VAYECHULU and MAGEN AVOS - It is forbidden to talk(31).
Note: From an halachic point of view, it is important to distinguish between those portions of the davening where talking is prohibited because of hefsek (e.g. Birchos Kerias Shema and Shema, Shemoneh Esrei, Kedushah, Hallel), where not even a single word is permitted to be uttered regardless of "need," and those portions where the prohibition against talking is based on the requirement of paying attention to the davening or because of shul decorum (e.g. Kaddish, chazaras ha-shatz), where an exception can be made when a special need arises, allowing one to quietly utter a few words.(32) The following statement, authored by Harav Shimon Schwab,(33) sums up the Torah viewpoint on this subject: "For Hashem's sake - let us be quiet in the Beis Haknesses. Our reverent silence during the Tefillah will speak very loudly to Him Who holds our fate in His hands. Communicating with Hashem is our only recourse in this era of trial and tribulations. There is too much ugly noise in our world today. Let us find peace and tranquility while we stand before Hashem in prayer!"
FOOTNOTES: 1 R' Avraham ben Rambam reports that this problem was so widespread in Egypt during his father's time that he decided to eliminate chazaras ha-shatz altogether; See Yechaveh Da'as 5:12. 2 O.C. 151:1. 3 Mishnah Berurah 151:2.

4 Aruch ha-Shulchan 151:5. 5 Rama O.C. 68:1; 90:18. See Shulchan Aruch Harav 124:10 who writes that talking while the congregation is praising Hashem is a form of blasphemy. 6 Aruch ha-Shulchan 124:12. 7 Mishnah Berurah 44:3. 8 Mishnah Berurah 56:1. 9 O.C. 51:4 and Mishnah Berurah 6 and 7. 10 Mishnah Berurah 54:6. 11 O.C. 57:2; Mishnah Berurah 236:2. 12 O.C. 65:1 and 66:1 and Mishnah Berurah. 13 O.C. 66:7. 14 O.C. 104:1. 15 Mishnah Berurah 104:25. 16 O.C. 123:2. 17 It is permitted, however, for a rav to answer an halachic question that is posed to him during chazaras ha-shatz; Aruch ha-Shulchan 124:12. 18 O.C. 124:7. 19 Mishnah Berurah 124:27. 20 Rama O.C. 123:2; Mishnah Berurah 56:1. 21 O.C. 128:26, Be'er Heitev 46 and Mishnah Berurah 102. 22 See Mishnah Berurah 51:9 and 131:1. 23 O.C. 146:2. and Mishnah Berurah 5. 24 Beur Halachah 146:2 (s.v. v'hanachon), who roundly condemns such people. 25 Mishnah Berurah 146:4. See, however, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 23:8 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 146:3 who disagree. 26 O.C. 146:2; Mishnah Berurah 2 quoting Eliyahu Rabbah; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 23:8. 27 Bach, as understood by Mishnah Berurah 146:6 and many poskim. 28 Machatzis ha-Shekel, Aruch ha-Shulchan, and Shulchan ha-Tahor maintain that the Bach permits even idle talk between aliyyos. See also Pri Chadash who permits conversing bein gavra l'gavra. Obviously, they refer to the type of talk which is permitted in shul and on Shabbos. 29 O.C. 146:3; 284:3. 30 O.C. 422:4 and Beur Halachah (s.v. aval). 31 O.C. 268:12; Mishnah Berurah 56:1. 32 See Salmas Chayim 38 and written responsim by Harav C. Kanievsky (Ishei Yisrael #206), based on Mishnah Berurah 125:9. 33 Selected Writings, page 230.

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THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [<http://www.tanach.org/>] In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag RABBI MENACHEM LEIBTAG PARSHAT YITRO - Ma'amad Har Sinai

A wedding ceremony? Well, not exactly; but many sources in Chazal compare the events at Ma'amad Har Sinai to a marriage between G-d (the groom) and Am Yisrael (the bride). [See for example the last Mishna in Masechet Ta'anit!] In this week's shiur, as we study the numerous ambiguities in Shmot chapter 19, we attempt to explain the deeper meaning of this analogy, as well as the underlying reason for those ambiguities.

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

Therefore, the primary purpose of Bnei Yisrael's arrival at Har Sinai was to receive G-d's laws. Nevertheless, the Torah describes in no less detail the 'experience' of how those laws were given. In this shiur, we undertake a careful reading of Shmot chapter 19 (i.e. the events that precede the Ten Commandments), highlighting its complexities, in an attempt to better appreciate Chazal's understanding of Ma'amad Har Sinai. [Before you continue, it is highly recommended that you quickly review chapters 19 and 20 to refresh your memory, noting its flow of topics. (While doing so, try to notice how many psukim are difficult to translate.) For a more comprehensive preparation, see the Questions for self-study (sent earlier this week).]

THE 'PROPOSAL' Shmot chapter 19 opens as Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai (see 19:1-2) - presumably, to receive the Torah. However, before the Torah is given, G-d first summons Moshe to the mountain, instructing him to relay a certain message to the people. As you review these psukim (19:3-6), note how they form a 'proposal': "Thus shall you say to Beit Yaakov and tell Bnei Yisrael: You have seen what I have done to Egypt... so now: IF - you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant...and be my treasured nation, for all the Land is Mine. THEN: You shall be for Me a 'mamlachet kohanim ve-goy kadosh' [a kingdom of priests and a holy nation]..." (19:4- 6).

The 'if / then' clause proves that these instructions constitute a proposal (and not just a decree) - to which Bnei Yisrael must answer either 'yes' or 'no'. And that's exactly what we find: "And the people answered together

and said, 'Everything that G-d has spoken we shall keep,' and Moshe brought the people's answer back to G-d" (see 19:7-8).

Clearly, Moshe Rabeinu acts as the 'middle-man' who must relay the people's answer to this 'proposal' back to G-d. [In regard to what would have happened had Bnei Yisrael answered 'no', see the Further Iyun section.] Let's take a minute to discuss the meaning of the two sides of this 'proposition'. The first part of the 'IF' clause - "if you will obey Me" - makes sense, as G-d must first clarify if Bnei Yisrael are indeed now ready to follow His laws; in contrast to their previous 'refusals' (see Yechezkel 20:5-9, Shmot 6:9 & 15:26). However, the precise meaning of the second clause - "and if you will keep My covenant" is uncertain, for it is not clear if this 'covenant' refers to something old - i.e. 'brit avot'; or something new - i.e. 'brit Sinai'. SOMETHING 'OLD' or SOMETHING 'NEW' It would be difficult to explain that the word 'covenant' in this pasuk refers to 'brit avot', for brit avot doesn't seem to include any specific action that Bnei Yisrael must keep. More likely, it refers to 'brit Sinai' - whose details will soon be revealed, should Bnei Yisrael accept this proposal. However, this ambiguity may be intentional, for this forthcoming 'brit Sinai' could be understood as an 'upgrade' of 'brit avot'. In other words, 'brit avot' discusses the very basic framework of a relationship (see Breishit 17:7-8), while 'brit Sinai' will contain the detailed laws which will make that original covenant more meaningful. If so, then the proposition could be understood as follows: Should Bnei Yisrael agree to obey whatever G-d may command, and to remain faithful to this covenant, and act as His treasured nation (see 19:5) - THEN, the result will be that Bnei Yisrael will serve as G-d's 'model' nation, representing Him before all other nations [a 'mamlachet kohanim ve-goy kadosh' / see 19:6]. As a prerequisite for Matan Torah, Bnei Yisrael must both confirm their readiness to obey G-d's commandments while recognizing that these mitzvot will facilitate their achievement of the very purpose of G-d's covenant with them. Whereas a covenant requires the willful consent of both sides, this section concludes with Bnei Yisrael's collective acceptance of these terms (see again 19:7-8). MAKING PLANS (and changing them) Now that Bnei Yisrael had accepted G-d's proposal, the next step should be for them to receive the specific mitzvot (i.e. the laws that they just agreed to observe). However, before those laws can be given, there are some technical details that must be ironed out, concerning HOW Bnei Yisrael will receive these laws. Note how the next pasuk describes G-d's plan for how these mitzvot will be conveyed: "And G-d said to Moshe, 'I will come to you in the thickness of a cloud, in order that the people hear when I speak with you, and in order that they believe in you [i.e. that you are My spokesman] forever...' (19:9)

It appears from this pasuk that G-d plans to use Moshe Rabeinu as an intermediary to convey His laws to Bnei Yisrael, consistent with Moshe's role as liaison heretofore. Nonetheless, G-d insists that the people 'overhear' His communication with Moshe, so that they believe that these laws truly originate from G-d, and not from Moshe. At this point, in the middle of pasuk 9, we encounter our first major difficulty in following the flow of events. Note that G-d has just informed Moshe of how He plans to convey His laws. Hence, we would expect Moshe to convey this message to Bnei Yisrael (just as he did in 19:7). However, when we continue our reading of 19:9, something very strange takes place: "...Then Moshe reported the people's words to G-d" (19:9).

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

BE PREPARED! This question is so glaring (and obvious) that Rashi, taking for granted that the reader realized this problem, provides an answer based on the Midrash that fills in the 'missing details'. "Et divrei ha-am" [the words of the people]... The people responded: 'We want to hear from You [G-d] directly, for one cannot compare hearing from a 'shaliach' (a messenger) to hearing from the King himself, [or they said,] We want to see our King!' (see Rashi on 19:9). Note how Rashi adds an entire line to this narrative. According to his interpretation, Bnei Yisrael don't accept G-d's original plan that they would hear the mitzvot via Moshe.

Instead, they demand to hear them directly - from G-d Himself! What allows Rashi to offer such a bold interpretation? Rashi's interpretation is based on an apparent contradiction (to 19:9) in the two psukim that follow that include G-d response (to whatever it was that Moshe relayed to Him in 19:9): "And G-d told Moshe, 'Go to the people and get them ready... for on the third day G-d will reveal Himself in view of all the people on Har Sinai' (see 19:10-11).

Note how G-d commands Bnei Yisrael to ready themselves, for in three days time they will actually see G-d. This declaration that He plans to reveal himself before the 'eyes of the entire nation' suggests that G-d now plans to convey His mitzvot directly to the people. These instructions appear to describe a new plan for Matan Torah (in contrast to His original plan that Moshe will act as an intermediary - as described in 19:9). For the sake of clarity, from now on, we refer to the G-d's original plan (dibrot via Moshe) as Plan 'A', and to the new plan (dibrot direct) as Plan 'B'. Rashi claims that G-d's suggestion of Plan 'B' stems from the people's unwillingness to accept Plan 'A' - for Bnei Yisrael want to hear the Commandments directly. This 'change of plan' can explain why the people now require three days of preparation. In order to prepare for this direct encounter, Bnei Yisrael must first attain a higher level of spiritual readiness, as reflected in the three-day preparation period. Note how the details of this 'preparation' continue until 19:15. In 19:12-13, Moshe is commanded to cordon off the entire area surrounding the mountain. In 19:14-15, Moshe relays these commands to the people. Hence, from now on, we refer to this section (i.e. 19:9-15) as 'preparation'.

Are Bnei Yisrael capable of reaching this level? Are they truly ready to receive the dibrot directly from G-d? If so, why did G-d not suggest this direct encounter in the first place? If not, why does G-d now agree to their request? [As you may have guessed, we've found a 'dialectic'.]

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

RUNAWAY BRIDE According to the new plan, on 'day three' G-d should reveal Himself on Mount Sinai and speak the dibrot directly to the entire nation. Let's continue now in chapter 19 and see what happens: "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, and there were loud sounds and lightning, and a thick cloud on the mountain, and the shofar sounded very strong, and the people in the camp all became frightened" (19:16).

If you read this pasuk carefully, you will most probably be startled by the fact that Bnei Yisrael never came to Har Sinai that morning! Instead, they were so frightened of G-d's 'hitgalut' [revelation] that they remained in the camp. [Our minhag to stay up (and learn Torah) the entire night of Shavuot is based on the Midrash that Bnei Yisrael 'slept in' on that morning. Note how that Midrash is based on this pasuk.]

This background explains the next pasuk, where Moshe goes back to the camp, and brings everyone back to the foot of the mountain (see 19:17). Now it's time to 'try it again'. Let's see what happens: "And Har Sinai was full of smoke, for G-d had descended upon it in fire, and its smoke was like a furnace, and the entire mountain shook violently..." (see 19:18).

This pasuk certainly describes G-d's 'hitgalut', and it appears to follow according to Plan 'B'). Note how G-d's descends onto the mountain (note the word 'va-yered' in both 19:11 and 19:18). Nevertheless, one could also understand the intense smoke as reflective of the protective 'cloud' described in 19:9 (Plan 'A'). The stage has now been set for Matan Torah. The people are standing at the foot of Har Sinai and G-d has revealed Himself - He has descended upon Har Sinai. Therefore, the next pasuk should describe G-d's proclamation of the Ten Commandments. Let's examine that pasuk (19:19) carefully: "The sound of the shofar grew louder and louder; as Moshe would speak, G-d would answer him with a kol" (19:19).

This pasuk is quite ambiguous, for it does not give us even a clue as to what Moshe was saying or what G-d was answering. It is not even clear as to whom Moshe is speaking, to G-d or to the people! If Moshe is speaking to the people, then this pasuk would be describing how he conveyed the dibrot. If so, then Moshe speaking and G-d responding with 'kol' - implies that the dibrot were given according to Plan 'A', as Moshe serves as the intermediary. [Compare with 19:9!] However, if "Moshe yedaber" (in 19:19) refers to Moshe speaking to G-d, then it not at all clear what their conversation is about; nor can we make any deduction in regard to how the dibrot were given! [Note the range of opinion among the commentators on this pasuk!]

PLAN 'B' - MYSTERIOUSLY MISSING! Rashi's commentary on this pasuk is simply amazing. Again quoting the Midrash, Rashi claims that Moshe is speaking to the people, telling them the dibrot! However, what's amazing is Rashi's explanation that the clause "Moshe yedaber..." describes the transmission of the last eight Commandments, but not the first two. This is because Rashi understands that the first two dibrot were given directly from G-d - in accordance with Plan 'B' - while the last eight were given via Moshe - in accordance with Plan 'A'. As this pasuk (19:19) describes Plan 'A' it could only be referring to the transmission of the last

eight dibrot! [See also Ramban in Moreh Nevuchim II, chapter 33.] Note that according to Rashi, chapter 19 intentionally omits two key events relating to Plan B: 1) Bnei Yisrael's original request for Plan B (in 19:9), & 2) The story of the two dibrot given at the level of Plan 'B'.

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

Ramban rejects Rashi's interpretation of 19:19 (as do many other commentators), arguing that 19:19 does not describe how the dibrot were given. Instead, Ramban explains that "Moshe yedaber..." describes the conversation between G-d and Moshe that immediately follows in 19:20-25. [As usual, Ramban prefers to keep the sequence of events according to the order of the psukim, while Rashi is willing to 'change' the order for thematic considerations.]

LIMITATION/ A FINAL WARNING To better appreciate this 'machloket' between Rashi and Ramban, we must examine the last set of psukim in chapter 19 (i.e. 19:20-25). "G-d descended upon Mount Sinai to the top of the Mountain and summoned Moshe to the top of the Mountain, and Moshe ascended... Then G-d told Moshe: Go down and warn the people lest they break through toward G-d to see, and many of them will perish. And even the kohanim who are permitted to come closer must prepare themselves..." (19:20-22). [Btw, note that 20:25 refers to Moshe's conveying this warning to the people, not to his conveying the 'dibrot', as is commonly misunderstood. See Rashi!] According to Ramban, this additional 'warning' is given before Matan Torah, and serves as the final preparation before the dibrot are given. However, according to Rashi's interpretation, it remains unclear when, where, and why this conversation (in 19:20-25) takes place. [Even though Rashi explains 19:19 as depicting the presentation of the dibrot, he maintains that 19:20-25 takes place beforehand - for it relates to the ceremony described in 24:3-11, which Rashi himself claims to have occurred before the dibrot. This 'sugya' lies beyond the scope of our shiur.] In any case, this final 'warning' clearly reflects the mode of transmission of the dibrot that we have referred to as Plan 'A' - G-d will appear only to Moshe (at the top of the mountain), while everyone else must keep their distance down below. Only Moshe will be privy to witness the descent of the 'shechina' onto the top of the mountain, while Bnei Yisrael are prohibited from ascending to see, 'lest they die'. As this section describes how G-d is now limiting His revelation to the top of the Mountain, we refer from now on to this section (19:20-25) as 'limitation'. Note how chapter 19 now divides into four distinct sections: I. Proposition (19:1-8) II. Preparation (19:9-15) III. Revelation (19:16-19) IV. Limitation (19:20-25)]

So what happened? Has G-d reverted to Plan 'A' (that Moshe is to act as an intermediary)? If so, why? On the other hand, if Plan 'B' remains in operation, why does G-d restrict His revelation to the top of the mountain? Could this be considered some sort of 'compromise'? There appears to have been a change in plans, but why? Even though chapter 19 does not seem to provide any explanation for what motivated this change, a story found later in chapter 20 seems to provide us with all the 'missing details'.

TREPIDATION [or 'FEAR' STORY ONE] Towards the end of chapter 20, immediately after the Torah records the dibrot, we find yet another story concerning what transpired at Har Sinai: "And the people all saw the kolot, the torches, the sound of the shofar and the mountain smoking; the people saw and moved back and stood at a distance. And they told Moshe: 'Why don't you speak to us, and we will listen to you, but G-d should not speak to us, lest we die.'" "Moshe responded saying: 'do not be fearful, for G-d is coming to 'test' you and instill fear within you so that you will not sin.'" "But the people stood at a distance, and Moshe [alone] entered the cloud where G-d was" (see 20:15-18).

This short narrative provides us with a perfect explanation for why G-d chooses to revert from Plan 'B' back to Plan 'A'. Here, the reason is stated explicitly: the people changed their mind because they were frightened and overwhelmed by this intense experience of 'hitgalut'. But why is this story recorded in chapter 20? Should it not have been recorded in chapter 19?

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

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

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

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS - FIRST OR THIRD PERSON In fact, this creative solution solves yet another problem. It explains why the text of the Ten Commandments shifts from first to third person after the second commandment. Whereas the first two commandments (20:2-5) are written in first person, indicating that G-d conveyed them directly to the people [reflective of Plan 'B'], the last eight commandments (20:6-14) are written in third person, suggesting a less direct form of communication [reflective of Plan 'A']. This reflects Chazal's explanation that: "Anochi ve-Lo yihiyeh Lachem, mi-pi ha-gvura shma'num" - the first two commandments were heard directly from G-d (Makkot 24a); see also Chizkuni 20:2 and 20:15.]

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

Therefore, the Torah records this 'fear story' as a type of 'appendix' to the Ten Commandments, explaining afterward what happened while they were given. To summarize, in chapter 19, it was unclear whether or not Bnei Yisrael would hear the dibrot according to Plan 'A' (as G-d originally had planned) or at the higher level of Plan 'B' (as Bnei Yisrael requested).

Later, in chapter 20, the Torah describes how Bnei Yisrael were frightened and requested to revert back to Plan 'A'. Ramban claims that this 'fear story' took place before Matan Torah, and hence the people heard all Ten Commandments through Moshe (Plan 'A'). Rashi maintains that this story took place during the dibrot; hence the first two dibrot were transmitted according to Plan 'B', while the remainder were heard according to Plan 'A'. [Ibn Ezra (see 20:15) takes the opposite approach, maintaining that the fear story is recorded right where it belongs; it took place only after Matan Torah. Therefore, the people heard all Ten Commandments directly from G-d, as mandated by Plan 'B'.]

A PROOF FROM SEFER DEVARIM Based on our discussion, we can resolve two adjacent yet seemingly contradictory psukim in the description of Matan Torah in Sefer Devarim: "Face to face G-d spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire [Plan 'B']. I stood between G-d and you at that time to convey G-d's words to you [Plan 'A'], for you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain..." (see Devarim 5:4-5). Once again, the Torah incorporates both plans in its description of Matan Torah. Evidently, both plans were in fact carried out, as we explained. Although we have suggested several solutions to problems raised by chapters 19-20, a much more basic question arises: why can't the Torah be more precise? Why does the Torah appear to intentionally obscure the details of such an important event in our history?

AHAVA and YIR'A One could suggest that this ambiguity is intentional, as it reflects the dialectic nature of man's encounter with G-d. Man, in search of G-d, constantly faces a dialectic. On the one hand, he must constantly strive to come as close to G-d as possible ('ahava' - the love of G-d). On the other hand, he must constantly retain an awareness of G-d's greatness and recognize his own shortcomings and unworthiness ('yir'a' - the fear of G-d). Awed by G-d's infinity and humbled by his own imperfection, man must keep his distance (see Devarim 5:25-26!). G-d's original plan for Matan Torah was 'realistic'. Recognizing man's inability to directly confront the 'Shechina' G-d intends to use Moshe as an intermediary (Plan 'A'). Bnei Yisrael, eager to become active covenantal partners, express their desire to come as close as possible to G-d. They want to encounter the 'Shechina' directly, without any mediating agent (Plan 'B'). Could G-d say no to this sincere expression of 'ahavat Hashem'? Of course not! Yet, on the other hand, answering yes could place the people in tremendous danger, as they must rise to the highest levels of spirituality to deserve such a direct, unmediated manifestation of G-d. While Plan 'B' may reflect a more 'ideal' encounter, Plan 'A' reflects a more realistic one. One could suggest that by presenting the details with

such ambiguity, the Torah emphasizes the need to find the proper balance between this realism as well as idealism when serving G-d.

GOD KNOWS BEST Although G-d knows full well that Bnei Yisrael cannot possibly sustain a direct encounter, He nonetheless concedes to their request to hear the Commandments directly. Why? One could compare this Divine encounter to a parent-child relationship. As a child grows up, there are times when he wishes to do things on his own. Despite his clear incapability to perform the given task, his desire to accomplish is the key to his growth. A wise parent will allow his child to try, even though he knows that the child may fail - for it is better that one recognize his shortcomings on his own, rather than be told by others that he cannot accomplish. On the other hand, although a child's desire to grow should not be inhibited by an overprotective parent, a responsible parent must also know when to tell his child Stop. Similarly, G-d is well aware of Bnei Yisrael's unworthiness to encounter the Divine at the highest level. Nevertheless, He encourages them to aspire to their highest potential. As Bnei Yisrael struggle to maintain the proper balance between 'ahava' and 'yir'a', G-d must guide and they must strive. Our study of Parshat Yitro has shown us that what actually happened at Ma'amad Har Sinai remains unclear. However, what 'could have happened' remains man's eternal challenge. shabbat shalom, menachem