

## Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

Yisro 5776

שבת פרשת יתרו

Since the inception of “*the sheets*” Mickey enjoyed reading the eclectic collections of hashkafic essays and opinions; Friday nights & Shabbos mornings (before going down to set up Kiddush of course) he would pour over the contents commenting and sharing his thoughts with all at the table and beyond.

We all miss him, his unconditional friendship, flair, advice, insights and witticisms.

יהי זכרונו ברוך

### Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

#### *Rivalries*

Being raised as an only child in my parents' home I was spared the experiences and challenges of sibling rivalries. Not having anyone to compete with I was blissfully unaware that there were others who felt that they were also entitled to parental love, weekly allowances and unlimited bathroom privileges. No one ever dared to wear my clothing, play with my toys or read my books without my permission.

Naturally, in school and yeshiva there were constant rivalries but in the main they were never really personal or long lasting. Yet, as all of the biblical commentators point out to us, the book of Bereshith, which we have recently completed in the yearly cycle of Torah readings, is really the book of sibling rivalries. Cain and Abel, Avraham and Lot, Ishmael and Yitzchak, Yaakov and Eisav, Rochel and Leah, Yosef and his brothers are all examples of the intensity of emotion and of the sometime dire consequences of sibling and familial rivalries.

And the consequences and results of these rivalries, over the span of human history and millennia have been great, often tragic and of unending influence. The current turmoil in the Middle East of Sunni versus Shiite, Moslems versus Christians and Jews, and the Arab world against Israel are all basically products of ancient sibling rivalries perpetuated through the ages by familial traditions and the inherent evil nature of human beings.

Currently in USA, I am witness to the interaction of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren, I am happy to report that sibling rivalry is thriving and certainly is alive and well. This is pretty sobering for the old patriarch of the family who firmly believes that all of his offspring are pious, perfect, peaceful and generous to a fault. But as the old Yiddish aphorism goes: “In a time of plague, my goat apparently is also an animal.”

So what is to be done to try and ameliorate the situation? In many if not most cases, sibling rivalries are outgrown. Many situations in life are resolved simply by benign neglect – not doing anything and letting time and life experiences work their magic. The prophets of Israel seem to indicate that this is what will happen regarding the internal squabbles that plague the Jewish world. “What logic cannot heal, time will.”

Unfortunately, patience, silence and waiting are not primarily Jewish traits in our time. But many a serious and even bloody rivalry between families, countries and even religions has dissipated over time. In spite of all of the stabbings, incitement and terrorism that are currently our daily fare, I believe that it is possible for Israel to live in peace, albeit a cold one perhaps, in our ancient homeland.

If we persist in the fatalistic approach that none of our rivalries can ever be overcome, that will certainly fall into the realm of a self-perpetuating prophecy. I regret that I have no plan to recommend as to how to actualize my hopes in this matter. But I am willing to let time run its course and then to see what actually happens.

There is an essential difference between the concept of competitiveness and that of rivalry. Competitiveness presupposes a goal, that if reached, is beneficial to all concerned and is not predicated on the destruction of the “other.” Rivalries have less to do with achieving anything but rather concentrate on depriving others of any gain, even trying to destroy that “other.”

The rabbis of the Talmud proclaimed that “competitiveness amongst Torah scholars increase wisdom (for all concerned.)” Throughout the Talmud we are aware of the differing and competing opinions and personalities of the great men of Jewish tradition. Yet they are in no way viewed as being rivals. In a strange way, their differences of opinion and even of behavior are blended together into the Talmudic way of life and have shaped Jewish tradition until our very day.

The Talmud records for us the competing views of great scholars without passionate rancor or personal insult. Therefore, there are really no rivalries present on its pages. The lessons of the damaging rivalries narrated to us in the Bible were apparently well learned by the men of the Talmud. They attributed the destruction of the Second Temple to the unreasoning climate of hatred generated by the political, religious and social rivalries of the time.

Better to destroy one's rival than to work with him and compete with him for the common good. The rivalry that remains with us today is a sure recipe for societal sadness, social turmoil and foolish policies. Just look around at our current world of rivalries and dangers.

Shabbat shalom

### Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein

#### *Yitro*

The mores present in today's Western world seem to suggest that the Ten Commandments are, at best, recommendations but certainly not legal or moral mandatory obligations. The commandments that relate to money and to sexual probity are publicly violated, almost with impunity, on a seemingly daily basis. This is true with regard to all religious groups, including ours as well.

One would have thought that after more than thirty-three hundred years of human experience regarding these matters, the message of Sinai would have finally taken root in the Jewish and human soul. But apparently we are still standing before that desert mountain awaiting Divine instruction as to how to conduct our behavior and our lives.

We said that we would do and we would listen but in reality our commitment was not absolute and our moral compass is still not properly adjusted. Hence, we are aware of everything that is still happening all around us. The obsessive nature of shopping and the ever-futile pursuit of entertainment and escapism have sapped the vitality and holiness of the Shabbat in the Jewish world, and of any day of rest in human society generally.

Murder is an everyday acceptable occurrence and the warped amongst us even justify its commitment by hiding behind the name of God. And honoring parents and elders is passé, a relic of ancient ideas and bygone societies. So, one can easily see that there is not much left of the Ten Commandments in the modern world.

But, we should not be overly discouraged by all of the above. After all, God has not given up on us so why should we do so. The prophet Malachi has taught us: ‘I the Lord God have not changed.’ There are no other sets of commandments from God to the human race and to the Jewish people – and the proof of that statement lies in the fact that ‘...you, the children of Yaakov have not been destroyed.’ The Jewish people remain eternal.

As far as God is concerned, so to speak, the Ten Commandments remain obligatory and enforceable through God's will. King Solomon warned us in Kohelet never to say that previous times were better than our days are

now. All generations rose against the Ten Commandments, violated them and disregarded their practical and moral import. But the Ten Commandments have survived all attempts to ignore, modify or even forget them.

Instinctively, we are aware that they are in force and set the bar by which we are to measure ourselves and assess our actions. Thus the revelation at Sinai was not a one-off event. In the words of Avot, the echo of Sinai reverberates daily in the universe that we inhabit. The Ten Commandments are not past advice. They are current instructions and mandatory obligations, a loving Torah that speaks to our generation and its challenges and problems. We would certainly be wiser and happier if we heeded its words and absorbed its eternal moral messages.  
Shabat shalom

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Yitro**

*For the week ending 30 January 2016 / 20 Shevat 5776*

**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**

**Insights**

***The Limits of Desire***

***“In the third month of the Exodus of the Children of Yisrael from the land of Egypt...” (19:1)***

The greatest desire of G-d for His People — Yisrael — was revealed in the giving of His “marriage pledge”, His holy Torah.

If so, why didn't G-d give us the Torah immediately after we left Egypt? Why did we have to wait three months to consummate this Divine union?

You can't say it was a function of distance, that it took three months to get to Sinai, because even for Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, G-d supernaturally truncated his journey, and without a doubt He would have certainly done this also for His People.

Rather, G-d wanted the impurity of Egypt to gradually fade from us and leave us worthy to join Him under the marriage canopy of Sinai.

This is the meaning of the above verse:

“In the third month of the Exodus of the Children of Yisrael from the land of Egypt...”

Because they were coming “from the land of Egypt” and were still steeped in its impurity, so only “in the third month of the Exodus” of the Jewish People were they ready to receive the holy Torah at Sinai.

This understanding of the verse is borne out by the fact that immediately after their period of purification came to an end the Torah tells us “on that day”, i.e. on the same day that they traveled, so too did they arrive. As soon as they were they really ready to travel to Sinai they arrived there.

You might still ask: If the period of waiting was to allow the miasma of Egypt to fade from the Jewish People, why then did we have to endure a journey of three months through the desert? Why couldn't we have just arrived at Sinai and waited there for seven weeks?

Human words cannot express more than human feelings, but if one can say it, from here we can discern the tremendous “overwhelming” desire of G-d to give the Jewish People the Torah. G-d didn't want us to arrive at the “wedding hall” early, for He would have to ‘endure the overwhelming suspense’ of waiting to be joined to His beloved People.

He knew that if we were already under the Chupa, we would not be able to hold back from taking ourselves to Him.

Source: Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh in Tallalei Orot

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**Rabbi Weinreb on Parsha Yitro**

***“I Know vs. Now I Know”***

Assembling complicated gadgets is generally facilitated by the printed instructions that the factory provides. Occasionally, however, there are no instructions, either because of the manufacturer's negligence or because of his assumption that there is no one out there dumb enough not to be able to figure out how to assemble the gadget on his own. That assumption is

frequently mistaken. There are plenty of dummies out there, and I count myself among them.

So what's a person to do without the instructions for the new gadget he eagerly wishes to put into action? Some people, perhaps most of them, use the method of trial and error. They tinker with the various parts, desperately attempting to force round pegs into square holes, or alternatively, square pegs into round holes. After a while, typically after much frustration, they succeed. With that success comes the exhilaration which naturally accompanies the elimination of ignorance and doubt, and the discovery of certainty.

There are others who are blessed with a native understanding of all things mechanical. They require no painstaking course of trial and error. They just look at all the pieces spread out before them and somehow immediately apprehend which piece goes where. In an instant the gadget is perfectly assembled and ready for use. Personally, I envy these gifted individuals.

In this week's Torah portion, Parashat Yitro (Exodus 18:1-20:22), we read of someone who fits the first category. Yitro, the father-in-law of Moses whom we first met several weeks ago when we began the book of Exodus, clearly is the “trial and error” type. His frustrating ordeal, however, was not with some complicated gadget but rather with something of far greater significance. Yitro's was a lifelong search for a god to worship. According to our Sages, he worshiped all the idols of the ancient world, and even succeeded in becoming the high priest of at least one of those pagan religions. But he found none of them satisfactory.

Where did our Sages learned of Yitro's religious odyssey? Nowhere in the Bible is there any explicit mention of this “trial and error” search for a deity that he could accept. Yes, we do know that he was the high priest of Midian, but we are not in possession of evidence of the rejection of the multitude of false gods that is attributed to him.

The answer lies in a single phrase. It appears in the conversation which occurred during the reunion of father-in-law Yitro with his son-in-law Moses. “Moses recounted to his father-in-law everything that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake...And how the Lord had delivered them. And Jethro rejoiced...”

Not only did Yitro rejoice, but he made the following proclamation: “Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods!”

That single word “now” says it all. “Now,” after many false leads and blind alleys, Yitro at last discovers the Lord of the universe, the God of Israel. It is upon this single word that our Sages base their contention that Yitro experimented with every god in the galaxy of pagan gods before finally “assembling the gadget.”

By contrast, we find another biblical hero who typifies the second type of person, one who has intuitive insight into things and does not require a process of trial and error. That hero is none other than King David.

One does not commonly think of the former high priest of Midian as having much in common with the “sweet singer of Israel,” the source of most of the sublime Psalms, and the progenitor of the Messiah. But, like Yitro, King David also proclaims the greatness of God. He does so in words that are almost identical to the words of Yitro, with one small but very significant difference.

Open your Bible to psalm 135, verse five. It reads, “For I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods.” David does not say “now I know”. He insists, “I know!” His knowledge is not the result of experimentation, of trial and error, of a frustrating philosophical quest. Rather, he knows God's greatness from within himself. The source of his knowledge is not based upon his disappointment with foreign gods. It is based upon what he knows in his own soul. He is blessed with a capacity for the kind of spiritual insight which dispels uncertainty and doubt. His inner self is the source of his certainty.

We have here two paradigms of men of faith. Yitro typifies the seeker whose journey is long and tortuous, and focused outwardly. David exemplifies the seeker who finds God through an inward journey, which can sometimes be equally lengthy and trying.

Rabbi Elimelech bar Shaul, the rabbi of Rehoboth who passed away in the mid-20th century, quotes the 16th century mystic Rabbi Moses Cordevero, who offers a parable in his book *Eilima* to illustrate these two paradigms. Here is a loose translation of those wise words:

Imagine Reuben carrying a heavy package on his back. Observing him are Simon, Levi, and Judah. They begin to try to surmise the nature of the package that Reuben is carrying.

Simon says: "Reuben is a strong man, and it is a small bundle. Yet he seems to have difficulty bearing the burden. So whatever he's carrying must be very heavy."

Simon's observations are totally accurate, yet he is far from knowing what the package contains. All he knows is that it is heavy and small. It might be iron, but it can equally well be tin or lead, or silver or gold.

So Levi chimes in: "If it was iron he would not have put it into such a fine cloth container. So it must be silver."

Levi is getting closer to truth, but he still not there.

Judah then speaks up: "if it was silver or gold he would not have brought 1000 warriors along with him to guard and protect the contents of the package. It must be a very precious gemstone."

Judah is even closer to the real truth about Reuben's burden. But none of them knows the full truth. Only Reuben, who actually bears the burden, knows not only that it is a gemstone, but knows its nature, its size, its color, and its value.

So it is with spiritual truths. Philosophers can use their skills of reasoning to approximate the true nature of the divine. But it is only those bear the burden, who come to know the Almighty from within, who can really "know" the truth. This knowledge was given to each of us when we stood at Mt. Sinai, participating in the glorious occasion of the gift of the Torah. Only when we heard, "I am the Lord thy God," were we able to say, "I know."

This Shabbat, we read those glorious passages which describe the scene at Mount Sinai in full dramatic detail. These passages are designed to instill within us the capacity to draw upon our inner selves in order to be able to proclaim, not "now I know," but rather, "I know." Let us take advantage of this week's very special Torah portion to use this capacity of spiritual introspection. Let's avoid the path of "trial and error" and instead take advantage of the opportunity to emulate King David's inward spiritual journey.

Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb is the Executive Vice President, Emeritus of the Orthodox Union.

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**Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

***To Thank Before We Think***

The Ten Commandments are the most famous religious-and-moral code in history. Until recently they adorned American courtrooms. They still adorn most synagogue arks. Rembrandt gave them their classic artistic expression in his portrait of Moses, about to break the tablets on seeing the golden calf. John Rogers Herbert's massive painting of Moses bringing down the tablets of law dominates the main committee room of the House of Lords. The twin tablets with their ten commands are the enduring symbol of eternal law under the sovereignty of God.

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

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

However, it also makes sense to see them as three groups of three. The first three (one God, no other God, do not take God's name in vain) are about God, the Author and Authority of the laws. The second set (keep Shabbat, honour parents, do not murder) are about createdness. Shabbat reminds us of the birth of the universe. Our parents brought us into being. Murder is forbidden because we are all created in God's image (Gen. 9:6). The third three (don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness) are about the basic institutions of society: the sanctity of marriage, the integrity of private property, and the administration of justice. Lose any of these and freedom begins to crumble.

This structure serves to emphasise what a strange command the tenth is: "Do not be envious of your neighbour's house. Do not be envious of your neighbour's wife, his slave, his maid, his ox, his donkey, or anything else that is your neighbour's." At least on the surface this is different from all the other rules, which involve speech or action.[1] Envy, covetousness, desiring what someone else has, is an emotion, not a thought, a word or a deed. And surely we can't help our emotions. They used to be called the "passions", precisely because we are passive in relation to them. So how can envy be forbidden at all? Surely it only makes sense to command or forbid matters that are within our control. In any case, why should the occasional spasm of envy matter if it does not lead to anything harmful to other people?

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

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

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

Rene Girard, in his classic *Violence and the Sacred*, says that the most basic cause of violence is mimetic desire, that is, the desire to have what someone else has, which is ultimately the desire to be what someone else is. Envy can lead to breaking many of the other commands: it can move people to adultery, theft, false testimony and even murder.[3]

Jews have especial reason to fear envy. It surely played a part in the existence of anti-semitism throughout the centuries. Non-Jews envied Jews their ability to prosper in adversity – the strange phenomenon we noted in *parshat Shemot* that "the more they afflicted them the more they grew and the more they spread." They also and especially envied them their sense of chosenness (despite the fact that virtually every other nation in history has seen itself as chosen[4]). It is absolutely essential that we, as Jews, should conduct ourselves with an extra measure of humility and modesty.

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

We are here because God wanted us to be. We have what God wanted us to have. Why then should we seek what others have? If what matters most

in our lives is how we appear in the eyes of God, why should we want anything else merely because someone else has it? It is when we stop defining ourselves in relation to God and start defining ourselves in relation to other people that competition, strife, covetousness and envy enter our minds, and they lead only to unhappiness.

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

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

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

[1] To be sure, Maimonides held that the first command is to believe in God. Nachmanides, however, disagreed and maintained that the verse, "I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt" is not a command but a prelude to the commands.

[2] This has long been part of Jewish thought. It is at the heart of Chabad philosophy as set out in R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi's masterpiece, *Tanya*. Likewise Ibn Ezra in his commentary to this verse says that we only covet what we feel to be within our reach. We do not envy those we know we could never become.

[3] The classic work is Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: a Theory of Social Behaviour*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969. See also Joseph Epstein, *Envy*, New York: New York Public Library, 2003.

[4] See on this Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, Oxford University Press, 2003. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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***Echoes of Eden***

**Rabbi Ari Kahn**

**Dual Loyalty**

Hearing of the wonders that had transpired, Yitro, Moshe's father in law, arrives in the Israelite encampment in the desert. He is genuinely happy to hear of the wondrous events that had brought about the Israelites' reversal of fortune, transforming them from lowly slaves into free people. Yitro joins Moshe, Aharon and the elders in a thanksgiving feast.

When the celebration ends, Yitro observes Moshe and is struck by his son-in-law's enormous workload. Yitro, the leader ("kohen") of Midian, knew something about leadership and public service. He knew that Moshe could very quickly be overwhelmed and "burned out" by the enormity of the responsibility. This over-extension strikes Yitro as a terrible strategy, and he suggests a system in which the burden may be divided and, whenever possible, delegated.

The wisdom of Yitro's suggestion is immediately apparent, and his proposal is incorporated into the Israelite camp's basic structure.

As an aside, we might pause to appreciate the irony of the situation: Moshe and Yitro would never have met had Moshe not fled Egypt – and his escape was precipitated by a very pointed question hurled at him accusingly: "Who appointed you judge over us?" Upon seeing two Jews struggling, Moshe jumped into the fray – only to be accused of

overstepping his authority. Now, Moshe had become the authority, the sole arbiter of justice, the judge for all Israel.

And so, Yitro assesses the situation and proposes a method for curtailing Moshe's workload, delegating responsibility and sharing authority – with one exception. There is one aspect of Moshe's position that will not be shared: Moshe alone will continue to stand between the people and God. The difficult questions that rise through the lower courts will be brought to the Almighty by Moshe for clarification and adjudication.

You are going to wear yourself out, along with this nation that is with you. Your responsibility is too great. You cannot do it all alone. Now, listen to me; I will advise you, and God will be with you. You must be God's representative for the people, and bring [their] concerns to God. (Shmot 18:18-19)

Moshe has a dual role: He is both God's representative and the people's representative, and it may be this dual role that explains why the story of Yitro's arrival is inserted at this particular juncture.

According to tradition, Yitro arrived in the Israelite camp months later – after Yom Kippur, in the fall – whereas the following portion, the Revelation at Sinai and all the events described in the next several chapters, transpired in the spring. Ostensibly, the reason Yitro's arrival is recounted at this point is because it is, in a sense, the continuation of the Exodus and the splitting of the sea: The report of the great miracles and triumphs the Israelites had experienced had reached Yitro in Moav, spurring him to visit and pay his respects.

However, there may be a deeper, more substantive reason to insert Yitro's visit at this point. Yitro apparently had a uniquely clear grasp of the nature of Moshe's role. Having himself served in a position of leadership, Yitro was able to see the day-to-day operation of the Israelite camp from a more removed perspective, akin to that of a systems analyst or organizational consultant. The judicial structure Yitro suggests is predicated on his very discerning and insightful understanding of Moshe's essential role. And what more important juncture to clarify Moshe's dual role, as God's representative to the people and the people's representative to God, than on the eve of the Revelation at Sinai?

Indeed, in the events that immediately follow Yitro's arrival (Chapter 19), in Moshe's most celebrated role, he brings the Word of God down to the People, and represents the frightened, awe-struck nation when they are afraid to hear the Word of God. Moshe is far more than an ambassador, representing one side of the dialogue; he faithfully represents both sides, with both precision and compassion. It is this role that continues until the end of Moshe's life.

In the story of the Exodus, Moshe's role had been secondary; God spoke through him, Aharon spoke for him – even his own "magical" staff took a more prominent role in the plagues and miracles. But at Sinai, Moshe's role becomes perfectly clear. Moshe is far more than a judge, far more than a neutral messenger of God's instructions. From this point on, Moshe is both the "Servant of God" (a description that eventually becomes his epitaph), bringing the Torah down from heaven, and, at the same time, the defender, protector, representative and teacher of the Jewish People. At Sinai, Moshe becomes, for all time, Moshe Rabbenu – Moshe, our teacher, leader, and master. Yitro was the first to identify Moshe's dual role, and the first to give it practical expression, in preparation for the events that would soon unfold.

For a more in-depth analysis see: <http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2016/01/audio-and-essays-parashat-yitro.html>

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**Rabbi Yisrocher Frand - Parshas Yisro**

***A Time And Place For Everything***

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mir Mashgiach, zt"l, observed: Yisro had a certain quality which can be considered positive or negative -- he was a critical person. He looked at situations and did not shy away from offering criticism when he felt the situation demanded it. That is why, when he came to the Jewish encampment where hundreds of thousands of people were pleased with the status quo – of waiting in line for hours on end to

have Moshe Rabbeinu resolve their problem or dispute -- Yisro, the outsider, came along and declared it to be an intolerable situation which needed urgent remedy. Yisro's criticism changed the entire judicial system in Klal Yisrael. Yisro essentially introduced a form of appellate process, such that only the most difficult queries and disputes reached Moshe Rabbeinu.

Rav Yeruchem wonders whether this quality of criticism is a positive attribute or not. He says there is an acid test to determine whether being a critic is a good quality or not. If a person applies criticism to himself as well, it is a good quality; if he only criticizes others, it is a bad quality. Armchair quarterback whose function in life is to see shortcomings in others and point out everyone else's faults but not their own faults possess a very undesirable characteristic. However, when a person is universally critical -- when he is critical not only of others but equally if not more so critical of himself -- then that is a desirable characteristic. Yisro was a person who was prepared to critically view his own actions and beliefs. Chazal say that Yisro had originally been an idolatrous priest. The Torah itself introduces him as "The Priest of Midian". The Rabbis say that he tried all known religions of his time and found them all wanting. He critiqued them all. This is how he finally came to adopt Judaism and accepted it as the true religion.

Yisro was not just a worshipper of other religions. He was a chossid [extreme devotee] of them. Chazal say "he fattened up the sacrifices that were to be brought for Avodah Zarah [idolatry]. This is the equivalent, l'havdil, of a person who bakes his own matzahs for Pessach. He was not just going to purchase a fat cow to offer to Avodah Zarah -- he was going to personally raise and fatten up the calf himself! He was really into his idolatry. However, he saw that it was not right and he left every religion he experimented with, one by one, until he came to Yiddishkeit.

Such a person, who uses his power of criticism, not only on others and other institutions, but who applies it to himself as well, has developed a very positive human characteristic. The point being that there is no midah [quality] in life that is all bad or all good. In fact, that is why midos are called midos, because midah also means measure. Whether it is anger or jealousy or desire or whatever it may be -- there is a positive place to channel those (usually negative) qualities as well.

For example, Chazal say that Kin'ah [jealousy] is a terrible character trait. However, on the other hand "kin'as sofrim tarbeh chochmah" [rivalry among scholars increases wisdom]. It is praiseworthy when a person sees other people learning at a superior level and as a result is inspired to learn himself. He channels the characteristic of jealousy in the right direction to improve his own Torah scholarship. This is a positive thing. Likewise, there are things that should anger a person. There are situations where a person has to make machlokes [engage in argumentation]. These situations are few and far between. However, even though machlokes is generally a negative activity, in the right situation and channeled in the right direction, anger is positive.

This is evident from the words of a fascinating Zohar in this week's parsha: This week's parsha contains the Asseres Hadibros [Ten 'Commandments']. We are familiar with the concept of "upper notes" (taam elyon) and "lower notes" (taam tachton). There is one set of cantillation notes (trop) printed in the Chumash, but when the Asseres Hadibros are read publicly, the trop is actually based on a different set of cantillation notes (which is usually printed in the back of Chumashim). The Zohar points out that we see a very interesting phenomenon in the five negative commandments that make up the second half of the Asseres Hadibros. In the "lower notes", the prohibition against killing (Lo Sirtzach) has the cantillation notes mercha-tipcha. In the "upper notes", there is a tipcha under the word Lo (thou shall not). One who is familiar with the rules of Torah reading knows that a tipcha is almost like a comma -- it represents a pause. In effect, according to the "upper notes" the reading is not "Don't kill" (Don't commit adultery; Don't steal, etc.) but rather "Don't, Kill! (Don't, Commit adultery!; Don't, Steal!, etc.).

The Zohar explains: If the Asseres Hadibros did not include this pause -- as a possible way of readings these commandments -- the world could not

exist as we know it. If the Torah had simply commanded "Don't kill" (as a single unit) then it would be forbidden to ever take a life. How then could we ever carry out a death sentence in court? How would we ever execute anybody when they need to be executed? That is why we have the possible reading "Don't, Kill!" Normally, of course, the correct reading is "Don't kill" but sometimes it is necessary to kill.

The Zohar continues -- if there would not be (a possible reading including) a comma in Lo Sin'af, it would mean that after a person fulfilled the Biblical command of being fruitful and multiplying (by having a son and a daughter), he would no longer be able to live with his wife. Alternatively, it would mean that when a woman was incapable of having children, a man would not be able to live with her. To indicate otherwise the pasuk may be read "Do not, have "illicit" relations!" Of course this is not really adultery, but this is a "Biblical hint" justifying sexual relations with one's wife even where the Biblical command to procreate is not applicable. (In this way Judaism is fundamentally different from Catholicism which views positively only having relations with one's wife for the purpose of procreation.)

The Zohar applies the same logic to Lo Signov: Were there not a pause in the (possible) reading, we would not be allowed to even fool (Geneivas Da'as -- literally "stealing one's knowledge") -- on occasion -- one's teacher. This means that a student who heard the teacher's interpretation and understood it would be forbidden to approach the teacher and saying "I didn't really understand your point, could you please repeat it over one more time". The student is technically engaged in Geneivas Da'as but he does it because he wants to become closer with this teacher or he wants to learn more from the teacher (thinking he'll get greater insight hearing the teaching a second time).

Also when judges have a case in front of them and suspect that one of the disputants is a liar, they may set him up by fooling him (Geneivas Da'as) in their line of questioning in order to trap him into admitting his lie. This too would be forbidden were the reading absolutely "Lo Signov" without considering possible scenarios where "Lo -- comma -- Signov!" would be acceptable or even recommended.

Sometimes there is a place for "murder". Sometimes there is a place for "adultery" (with one's own wife). Sometimes there is a place for "theft". There is thus nothing in existence that is either all bad or all good.

The Zohar does state that there is an exception to the rule that "There is a time and a place for everything." That is in the commandment "Do not bear false witness against your fellow man". In commandment #9 there is no comma. The "upper notes" and the "lower notes" are in synch. One is never allowed to bear false witness against his friend.

However, in the tenth commandment (Do not covet) we also do not find a tipcha-under the word "Lo" in the "upper notes". There is no pause after the "Do not" before the word "covet". Does that mean, the Zohar asks, I should under no circumstances covet what my neighbor possesses -- even his Torah learning, even his Fear of Heaven? Why does the Torah state Lo Sachmod -- no ifs, ands, or buts?

The Zohar answers -- here that was not necessary because the Torah goes on to specifically enumerate the parameters of this commandment. We are told exactly what we are not allowed to covet of one's neighbor: His wife, his house, his donkey, his ox, and all that belongs to your friend. The pasuk is strictly referring to his material possessions -- this the Torah states without qualification should not be coveted. Things not specifically enumerated here -- such as his Torah learning -- would fall under the category of "kin'as sofrim tarbeh chochmah". So again, here we have the same theory and the same concept -- there is a time and a place for everything.

Along the same lines, there is a beautiful teaching of the Vilna Gaon: The Gaon points out (based on the rules of Hebrew grammar) that in the "lower notes" the reading of the Sixth Commandment (prohibiting murder) is "Lo SirtzAch" (with a patach under the Tzadee). In the "upper notes" the reading is "Lo TirtzUch" (with a kamatz under the Tzadee). He explains the difference:

The Talmud teaches [Avodah Zarah 19b] "What is the meaning of that which is written: 'For many victims has she felled' [Mishlei 7:26] – this is a Torah student (Talmid) who has not reached the level of maturity to decide the law and he decides the law nonetheless." A Talmid sometimes "commits murder". When is that? It is when a Talmid who should not be paskening nevertheless issues halachic rulings! The Talmudic passage continues exposition of the pasuk in Mishlei: "...and mighty are all she has slain" – this is a Torah student who has reached the level of maturity to decide the law, and yet does not decide the law." Here we are talking about a Rav who should pasken, but he says "What do I need the hassle for, better to stay quiet and keep out of controversy."

Sometimes it is best to keep quiet. A person who does not have Semicha, who does not know how to pasken, should keep his mouth shut. Sometimes it is best not to be quiet. One who knows what to pasken and keeps quiet is performing a great disservice. The Gaon interprets the two readings of Lo Sirtzach beautifully. One is with a patach. Patach means open (pasuach). Sometimes when one opens his mouth, it amounts to murder (for many victims she has felled). Kamatz means to close (as in the Kemitza service of a Mincha offering, involving closing one's palm). Sometimes when one closes his mouth it amounts to murder (mighty are all she has slain). It all depends when.

Is being quiet a good character trait? It depends. When one is not worthy to pasken, it is good to be quiet. When one is worthy to pasken it is bad to be quiet. Everything has a time and place. Even silence -- in the wrong place -- can be equivalent to murder.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD  
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**The TorahWeb Foundation**  
**Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg**  
**Elevating the Mundane**

At the beginning of Parshas Yisro the Torah describes how after Yisro decided to convert to Judaism, he brought various korbanos. "Vayikach Yisro olah u'zevachim l'Elokim - Yisro brought both a korban olah and korbanos shelamim" (Shemos 18:12). Why did he bring both types of korbanos?

Perhaps the answer is that this double korban symbolized Yisro's transition from non-Jew to full-fledged ben Yisrael. The halacha is that a non-Jew cannot bring a korban shelamim, only a korban olah (Menachos 73b). Some explain that this is because according to the non-Jewish world's perspective, kedusha requires a total separation from physicality; to live a life of holiness, a person must deny himself physical pleasure. For a non-Jew, the korban olah is the only way to serve Hashem because a non-Jew feels that a spiritual life requires total sacrifice.

However, the Torah has a different perspective. While there certainly is room for a korban olah which is completely burnt on the mizbeach, there is also a place for a korban shelamim, in which part of the korban is burnt on the mizbeach, part is given to the kohein, and part is also eaten by the owner. The korban shelamim shows that the Torah believes that man can partake of the physical world, he can enjoy physical pleasures like eating and drinking, and still be serving Hashem. Kedusha does not require a person to abstain from the physical world. It requires that he elevate and sanctify the physical world. By bringing both an olah and a shelamim, Yisro demonstrated that he understood this message.

This idea can also help explain a puzzling Gemara (Pesachim 68b.) which says, "All agree that to fulfill the mitzvah of simchas yom tov on Shavuos, one must have some physical pleasure because on Shavuos the Torah was given to the Jewish people." On all other yomim tovim, the Rabbis argue as to whether a person can choose between total immersion in spiritual pursuits (kulo l'Hashem) and complete involvement in physical activities (kulo lachem), or rather he should split the day chatzi l'Hashem v'chatzi lachem - he should engage both in spiritual endeavors like davening and

learning Torah, as well as physical activities like eating and drinking. But on Shavuos, everyone agrees that some physical enjoyment is necessary.

At first glance, the opposite seems more logical. After all, Shavuos is the day that the Jewish people received the Torah, a day on which we celebrate the value of ruchniyus in our lives. Why must there be some portion of lachem on that day? If anything, everyone should agree that on Shavuos one can choose the option of kulo l'Hashem to fulfill the mitzvah of simchas yom tov!

The answer is that precisely because Shavuos is the day of kabbolas haTorah we have to eat and drink to celebrate the yom tov because Shavuos is a day that we declare our commitment not only to learning Torah, but to living a Torah lifestyle as well. And there is no better way to demonstrate the Torah's perspective on life than by elevating ourselves through eating and drinking (see Beis Halevi).

As Jews, the ultimate level we can aspire to is not to separate ourselves from the world, but to engage in physical activities - even the most mundane - and imbue them with a sense of kedusha. When we eat and drink l'shem shomayim, in a refined way, when we dedicate some of our resources to tzedaka and hiddur mitzvah, we demonstrate that we have internalized the message of the korban shelamim. We do not have to abstain from physical pleasures in order to reach the ultimate level in avodas Hashem. All we have to do is live for a higher purpose.

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**The Jerusalem Post**  
**By Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**  
**Parshat Yitro – Love, faith, and partnership**  
**01/28/2016**

*The Revelation at Mt. Sinai seems at first glance to be relevant only to the Jewish people's history, it was actually a very significant step for all of humanity.*

At the center of this week's Torah portion is the greatest of all events – Ma'amad Har Sinai – the Revelation at Mount Sinai – when the Jewish nation received the Torah. Though this event seems at first glance to be relevant only to the Jewish people's history, it was actually a very significant step for all of humanity.

At this event, it became clear that the existence of man in the world is not random or insignificant, but rather that man exists in order to fulfill a lofty and important role. Indeed, when God created the world, He chose man as His partner in running it, a partner who despite his many weaknesses has the power to bring about change and improvement to all of reality.

The Torah is not an instruction manual, but a partnership agreement between man and his creator. This partnership – which is seemingly limited to those who received the Torah, the Jewish nation, points to the proper role of any man. He is demanded to restrict his character and erase his desires; his existence does not "disturb" the Divine plan; he is not given directives that are disconnected from his life but rather he is a partner in tikkun olam (repair of the world), a partner whose desires and tendencies are part of the mosaic that creates the huge potential of bringing the entire world to redemption, a redemption that has no suffering and no sin.

When God offered the Torah to Am Yisrael, the Jewish nation's reaction was direct and clear, despite not knowing what commandments were included in the Torah: "And all the people replied in unison and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we shall do.'" (Exodus 19:8) In relation to this answer, we read in the Babylonian Talmud about an interesting story that took place in Babylon about 1,700 years ago: "There is a story of a heretic who saw Rabba [of the great Talmudic sages] studying a Jewish legal issue, and the fingers on his hand were under his legs and were bleeding, and he [Rabba] did not notice since he was so focused. The heretic told him: 'The Jewish nation is an impulsive nation, you spoke before you listened [meaning, you gave a positive answer before you heard the commandments of the Torah], and you stand by your impulsiveness. You

should have listened first to hear what it was about, and seen that if you could stand by it, you accept it; and if you cannot, you do not accept it.” Rabba answered him: “We walked with God innocently, in good faith.” (Story based on the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat, daf 88.) The answer given by Rabba shows us one of the fundamentals of Judaism that preceded receiving the commandments, and as the commentator of the Torah and Talmud Rashi explains: “We walked with Him innocently as one does out of love, and we trusted Him not to burden us with anything we couldn’t handle.” Meaning, receiving the Torah could not happen on the basis of suspicion and lack of faith, but only on the basis of love and trust in God. Only in this way could the nation declare, “All that the Lord has spoken we shall do!” even without knowing what God was going to say.

This is not a story about distant history. This is a phenomenon that exists to this day, when people express their faith in God and their faith in His love for them, only then can they enter that partnership of tikkun olam. This partnership must be based on faith that has no restrictions; faith that works both ways: God believes in man with limitless faith and is confident that despite the many human mistakes we make, we have the capacity to hold up our end of the partnership. At the same time, man has faith that God’s will is always good and that His commandments lead us to do the right thing, to advance, to redemption.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and holy sites.

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## The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

### *Yitro: Tough Starts*

January 26, 2016

*Much as we may wish to make a new beginning, some part of us resists doing so as though we were making the first step toward disaster. -William Bridges*

There is an ancient Hebrew saying that “all beginnings are difficult.” The Sfat Emet in 5637 (1877) analyzes this concept from a Kabbalistic vantage. He explains that in every endeavor there are two parts – the beginning, and the remainder of the effort. He states that the beginning is always under the jurisdiction of the “Attribute of Justice,” while the remainder of the effort is under the influence of the “Attribute of Mercy.” What that means is that in the beginning we need to work hard. Nothing comes easy. The beginning is the point of the greatest resistance, the greatest fear and the greatest risk. If we don’t put in serious effort, if we don’t give it our all – the chances of making it past the initial stage are limited. “Justice” reviews our efforts closely. “Justice” does not accept slipshod work. “Justice” has no patience for half-hearted efforts. We have to earn our accomplishments – most especially as we start on the path. However, something happens as we pass the threshold of action. Once we have taken those initial difficult steps, once we have firmly planted ourselves on the road to accomplishment, the “Attribute of Mercy” takes over. Things get easier. Matters work out. That initial resistance has been broken and the sailing gets smoother. God’s “Attribute of Mercy” gifts success to the person who has committed himself, who has embarked on his mission.

May we undertake positive goals and see them accomplished despite rough beginnings.

Shabbat Shalom

Dedication - To my nephew Benjamin Tocker on his Bar-Mitzvah. You’re off to a good start!

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## *Shabbat: Sabbath Peace, Inside and Out*

### *Checking Pockets*

Sometimes it is the seemingly insignificant details that enable us to see the big picture.

“Hanania taught: One should examine one’s garments on Sabbath eve before nightfall. Rav Yosef observed: This is a great law for the Sabbath. (Shabbat 12a)

The Sages sought to prevent one from unknowingly carrying objects in the public domain on Shabbat. This is perhaps a useful suggestion, but what makes it such an important principle - ‘a great law for the Sabbath’? After all, even if one were to accidentally carry an object forgotten in one’s pocket, this would fall under the Halachic category of mitaseik - an unintentional act for which one is not at all culpable.

Why did Rav Yosef so highly praise Hanania’s advice? Is checking one’s pockets really so central to Sabbath observance?

Sabbath Harmony

We live out our lives in two realms. There is our inner world - our ideals and moral principles, our aspirations and spiritual goals. And there is our outer world - our actions in the ‘real’ world, our struggles to eke out a living and tend to our physical needs in a challenging and competitive world. The greater the dissonance between our inner and outer lives, between our elevated ideals and our day-to-day actions, the further we will have strayed from our Divine image and true inner self.

Shabbat, however, provides an opportunity to attain a degree of harmony between our inner and outer lives.

The holiness and tranquility of Shabbat help enrich our inner lives. Shabbat is a state that is very different from our workday lives, which have been complicated and even compromised by life’s myriad calculations and moral struggles. “God made man straight, but they sought many intrigues” (Ecc. 7:29).

The Sabbath, with its elevated holiness, comes to restore the purity of inner life that was suppressed and eroded by the corrupting influences of day-to-day life, influences that often contradict our true values and goals. But the power of Sabbath peace is even greater. Not only does Shabbat restore our inner world, but it reaches out to our outer world. The spiritual rest of Shabbat enables our outer life to be in harmony with our inner life, bestowing it a spirit of peace and holiness, joy and grace.

Great Principle of Shabbat

Now we may begin to understand the importance that the Sages placed on observing the Sabbath, even in life’s external aspects. The Hebrew word for clothing, beged, comes from the root bagad, meaning ‘to betray’; for clothes can hide and betray the true inner self. One Shabbat, however, even the most superficial facets of our lives, our clothes and pockets, should reflect the sanctity of the Sabbath day.

The Sages prohibited certain activities because of marit ayin, an action’s superficial appearance as inappropriate for Shabbat. And we are commanded to wear special clothing in honor of the Sabbath (Shabbat 113a). These external displays of Sabbath holiness are meant to ensure that its spirit of peace and harmony will permeate and refine our outer lives.

For this reason we should be careful even in situations that do not truly desecrate the Sabbath. Since they can occur frequently, they have the potential to dilute its sanctity. Forgetting an object in one’s pocket does not truly entail Sabbath desecration; it is a completely mindless and unintentional act (Tosafot on Shabbat 11a). But the realm of external actions does not make these fine distinctions between degrees of intention. On the superficial, physical plane, some measure of desecration of Sabbath peace has taken place.

Rav Yosef praised this advice to check one’s pockets before Shabbat as “a great law for the Sabbath.” He recognized that this halachah fulfills the ideal of Shabbat as a force of holiness binding together the spiritual heights of our inner self together with the most superficial aspects of our physical existence. This is truly a great principle, refining the sanctity of the Sabbath and guarding its character, as it seeks to balance our inner and outer worlds, our highest aspirations with our day-to-day actions and external aspects of life.

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## Rav Kook List

### Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

## Rabbi Nachman Kahana

### BS"D - Parashat Yitro 5776

#### *With all your heart and with all your soul*

In his final address to the nation, Moshe says (Dvarim 10,12):

ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלהיך שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ה' אלהיך ללכת בכל דרכיו ולהאבה אתו ולעבד את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך

*And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to be in awe of the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to Him, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul*

Awe, obedience, love, to serve, with all your heart and with all your soul. When taken together, these feelings comprise the most profound emotions of which we as human beings are capable. However, they remain devoid of meaning when not predicated on the one overriding feeling – TRUST.

What would we say to a young woman who has received a marriage proposal and willingly accepts the conditions of “awe, obedience, love, service, with all her heart and with all her soul” but does not trust the man’s word nor his promises?

A story

Four chassidim wanted to see their Rebbe in a faraway city. However, they had neither money nor food for the journey.

Then one of them came up with a plan. Mendel was to play the role of a Rebbe and the other three his ardent chassidim. They would go to a small Jewish town and spread the word that a great tzaddik would be arriving the following day, and everyone could ask their questions and bring their problems to the Rebbe. And when the “Rebbe” blessed the people, they would shower him with enough money and food for the four chassidim to journey to their own Rebbe.

They arrived at the shul, where Mendel took his seat at the front of the table. The town’s people began arriving to speak with the “Rebbe,” and every one left a gift of money or food, as was the custom. The four renegades decided that, right after havdala on the close of Shabbat, they would escape from the town before their true identities were revealed.

On Shabbat afternoon, a man came to the Rebbe Mendel and told him with tears in his eyes that his son was deathly ill and the doctors said that only a miracle could save him. He begged the “Rebbe” to come to the boy and bless him with full recovery. The four scoundrels had no choice but to go with the man to his house. The father brought the “Rebbe” to the boy’s room and left the two alone. Fifteen minutes later, the “Rebbe” came out of the room and returned to the shul. After Havdala was recited, the four escaped from the town with their new found money and food.

Six months later, the four chassidim were walking on the road and saw the boy’s father approaching. They turned around to flee, but the father soon overtook them. He ran to the “Rebbe” and in tearful embrace and kisses thanked him for saving his son who, immediately after Havdala, had jumped out of bed totally healthy.

After the father departed, the three chassidim pleaded with Mendel to tell them what he had done in the room alone with the boy? He replied: “I fell on the floor with tears streaming down my face. I beat the floor with my fists and cried to Hashem, ‘I am a lowlife. The worst of the Jewish people. A liar, a scoundrel and thief. But Father in Heaven, I beg of You, do not let me be guilty of extinguishing this man’s pure and total TRUST in You and in Your rabbis. Please heal the boy for the sake of Your holy name and Your holy rabbis’.”

Trusting Hashem in the Desert

The Creator demands basic requirements from gentiles but vastly different ones from the Jewish nation.

The highest ideals of the Seven Noachide mitzvot are intended to imbue gentiles with honesty and integrity. No to murder. No to theft. No to idolatry and sexual impropriety. Their requirements are intended to make them upright and honest (albeit with little or no expectations).

Hashem’s requirements and expectations for His chosen nation of Yisrael are on a totally different quantitative level. While gentiles are required to be upright and straight, the Jewish nation with 613 mitzvot are required to be HOLY. The point where gentiles achieve their required goals is where the requirements of the Jewish nation just begin.

For a Jew to acknowledge the oneness and infinity of Hashem and the fulfillment of all His mitzvot is indeed admirable. However, it is devoid of true religious meaning when not accompanied by the ultimate requirement of TRUSTING Hashem.

During our desert experience, Hashem could have provided continuous sustenance for the millions of Jews in those forty years; but He chose to provide for us through the daily Mahn (manna). The fresh Mahn was collected every morning anew, but spoiled at the following dawn.

The result was that for 365 days times 40 years (14,600 days), millions of Jews retired for the night not knowing if the Mahn would reappear in the morning. It was Hashem’s way of training the Jewish nation not only to believe in Him but, even more, to TRUST Him.

Trusting Hashem Today

The number of Torah observant Jews in the Galut are estimated to be a little over one million. There is Torah learning and mitzvot observance. There are many rabbis, roshei yeshiva, chassidic grand rabbis, day school principals, teachers and daf hayomi learners.

They all believe in Hashem and His Torah as the absolute universal truth. They believe, but only on their own terms because very few TRUST Hashem.

By remaining in galut when the gates of the Holy Land are open to our return, their testimony speaks that they do not trust that Hashem will provide for their sustenance. It is a tacit admission that they doubt if Hashem will protect His people in the face of so many enemies. It is an acknowledgment of doubt in the legitimacy of the word of our prophets that Hashem will return us to the Holy Land.

At this time, when there are close to seven million Jews in Eretz Yisrael, they still question if we are in the process of the final redemption.

Where is the one eminent rabbi in the galut who will call out to his people to TRUST Hashem and leave the galut behind to return home?

Ultimate Trust and Reward

David, son of Yishai, who was to become the King of Israel, wrote in his Tehilim (Psalm 91)

ישב בסתר עליון בצל שדי יתלונן

אמר לה' מחסי ומצודתי אלהי אבטח בו

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, and resides in the shadow of the Almighty*

*I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust*

Here are some impossible scenarios where authentic Jews trusted Hashem. Gideon, the Judge, defeated the entire Midianite army with only 300 soldiers (Shoftim chapter 7).

Yehonatan, son of King Shaul, with only his shield bearer with him vanquished the entire Philistine army (Shmuel I, chapter 14).

David, the young shepherd, vanquished Galyat, the Philistine human war machine, with one well-placed stone from his slingshot.

The Macabim drove out the Greeks from Eretz Yisrael despite the enemy’s awesome numbers and military might.

In our times, the degree of trust did not wane.

Miracles occurred in our own time, which rank among the most impressive that Hashem has ever wrought for His people. To name only two – the War of Independence and the Six Day War.

If you were there, the memories will never be forgotten. If you were not there, you will never know!

In 1967, the Medina was a mere shadow of what we are today. The army was small, the economy stagnant, the population unprepared for war.

Tensions began to rise three weeks before the beginning of armed conflict, when President Nasser of Egypt ordered the UN peace-keeping troops to evacuate the Sinai Peninsula. Nasser blocked the Straits of Tiran, Israel’s

gateway from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, which is considered in international law to be *casus belli* (justification for war).

Nasser led a coalition of four Arab States (Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq), and the scoreboard at the opening of the 1967 hostilities looked like this:

- Soldiers: Israel 275,000 / Arabs 456,000
- Tanks: Israel 1093 / Arabs 2,750
- Cannons: Israel 681 / Arabs 2,084
- Warships: Israel 15 / Arabs 118
- Fighter planes: Israel 228 / Arabs 488
- Bombers: Israel 19 / Arabs 80
- Helicopters: Israel 45 / Arabs 101

The situation at the time of the War of Independence was even more desperate.

In both wars, the world waited impatiently to see the demise of the impossible Jewish state.

However, our Father in Heaven had other plans. Our enemies were defeated in shame and dishonor, and the fledgling Jewish State was catapulted to a higher quantum level within the community of nations. Because the Jews in Eretz Yisrael TRUSTED Hashem.

On a personal note: At the time of the Six Day War, we were living in Kiryat Sanz, near Netanya. During the three weeks prior to the outbreak of hostilities, many people ran away from the country, including families from Kiryat Sanz. I was told of a yeshiva (not religious Zionist) that went to Switzerland, because the tension was disturbing their concentration.

Our home became the hub for many activities in the Kirya. Feiga was the postmistress and was involved in many other matters. I volunteered for Tzahal and was told to wait for a call up. It came, but only after the war's end because the military bureaucracy could not keep up with the troops who had defeated the enemy in six days.

The reward for trusting Hashem was not long in coming. At the war's end, we had increased the land area of the Medina three times over and the greatest prize of all – the Jewish nation was now sovereign over holy Yerushalayim for the first time in over 2000 years.

Those who trusted Hashem breathed in the exhilaration of His greatest miracles. Those who cowered in fear would have to live with themselves.

One more short story:

A man was climbing a high mountain, when night fell and the pouring rain created zero visibility. He slipped and began falling to certain death. Suddenly, he put out his hand and grabbed a branch jutting out of the mountainside, and found himself suspended between heaven and earth.

He began to pray. A thunderous voice emerged from nowhere. "Do you trust me?" the voice asked. The poor fellow cried out, "With all my heart and soul, I trust You."

"In that case," thundered the voice, "LET GO!"

The following morning, they found the man hanging on to the branch, dead from hypothermia, when between him and solid ground was a distance of ten centimeters.

Shabbat Shalom

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## Make our Mitzvos Count!!

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The opening words of *Rashi's* commentary on the Torah quote the following *Midrash*: *Rabbi Yitzchak said, "There seems no need to begin the Torah before Hachodesh Hazeh Lochem, which is the first Mitzvah that the Jewish people were commanded."* I decided to use the *parsha* in which

we read the *Aseres Hadibros* to discuss all 613 *Mitzvos* that we are commanded.

Most of us are unaware of the vast literature that debates, disputes and categorizes what exactly comprises these 613 *Mitzvos*, and the *halachic* ramifications resulting from these discussions. I will simply note that if one counts every time the Torah says to do or not to do something the result is thousands of *Mitzvos*. Aren't we shortchanging ourselves by limiting our *Mitzvah* count to 613? Since the *Mishnah* (at the end of *Makkos*) states: *Hashem wanted to provide Israel with much merit and, therefore, provided them with much Torah and many Mitzvos*, why do we limit the count to 613?

Why 613?

What is the source for the count of 613 *Mitzvos*?

The *Gemara* teaches: *Rav Simla'i explained: "Moshe Rabbeinu was taught 613 Mitzvos, 365 negative Mitzvos equal to the number of days of the solar year, and 248 positive Mitzvos, corresponding to a man's number of 'limbs.' "* *Rav Hammuna said: "What verse teaches this to us? 'Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehillas Yaakov,' Moshe taught us the Torah, which is an inheritance of the community descended from Yaakov. The Gematriya (numerical value) of the word Torah equals 611, and two Mitzvos of Anochi Hashem and Lo Yihyeh Lecha were taught to us directly by Hashem" (Makkos 23b).*

Thus, we now know that we have 613 counted *Mitzvos*, and yet there are thousands of places that the Torah commands us what to do. Obviously, some of the Torah's commandments are not counted, but which ones? This question led many early authorities to calculate what exactly is included in the 613 *Mitzvos* and thereby understand what the *Gemara* means. Several *Geonim* and *Rishonim* authored works that list the 613 *Mitzvos* of the Torah, and no two lists are exactly the same.

The *Sefer Hachinuch*

Most of us are familiar with the listing of the 613 *Mitzvos* of the *Sefer Hachinuch*. Actually, this author did not develop his own list of 613 *Mitzvos*, as he mentions several times in his work. He followed the calculation of the *Rambam*, who wrote a large work on the subject, called *Sefer HaMitzvos*, which includes both the rules of when to count something as a *Mitzvah* and a list of the 248 *Mitzvos aseh* and the 365 *Mitzvos lo saaseh*, organized in a logical pattern. (Actually, notwithstanding what the *Sefer hachinuch* himself writes, he counts one *mitzvah* that the *Rambam* does not, and omits one of the *Rambam's*.)

Chronology versus Logic

The *Sefer Hachinuch* reorganized the *Rambam's* list, numbering each *Mitzvah* according to its first appearance in the Torah. Thus, the first *Mitzvah* of the Torah, *Pru Urvu*, having children, which is mentioned in *parshas Bereishis*, is the first *Mitzvah*; *Bris Milah*, mentioned in *parshas Lech Lecha* is counted as the second *Mitzvah*, and *Gid Hanasheh*, taught in *parshas Vayishlach*, completes the three *Mitzvos* mentioned in *Sefer Bereishis*. *Parshas Bo* is the first that contains many *Mitzvos*, a total of twenty, reflecting its significance as the first *parsha* in which *Hashem* directly commanded *Mitzvos* to the Jewish people, as Rabbi Yitzchak noted in the above-quoted *Midrash*.

What Counts as a *Mitzvah*?

In the first section of the *Sefer HaMitzvos*, the *Rambam* details the rules that he used to determine what qualifies as a "*Mitzvah*" in the count of 613. He establishes 14 rules, which include:

I. No Rabbinics

Any *Mitzvah* that is only *miderabbanan* is not counted among the 613 *Mitzvos*. This rule may seem obvious, since the *Gemara* is calculating the 613 *Mitzvos* that *Hashem* commanded us, and not those later added by the Sages. However, one of the great *Geonim*, the author of the *Baal Halachos Gedolos*, counts many *Mitzvos derabbanan* in his list of the 613, including kindling *Ner Chanukah*, reading *Megillah* on Purim, and reciting *Hallel*. How could the *Baal Halachos Gedolos* include these in his list of *Mitzvos* that *Hashem* commanded us?

The *Ramban*, in his exhaustive commentary to the *Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos*, provides two answers:

A. There is an alternative text to the *Gemara in Makkos*, which reads, “*The Jewish people are commanded 613 Mitzvos.*” According to this wording, the *Gemara* there cites a Biblical verse not to imply that we derive these 613 *Mitzvos* from the Torah, but merely as a mnemonic device (based on the *Gematriya* of the word *Torah*) to remind us that there are a total of 613 *Mitzvos* of both Torah and rabbinical sources.

B. The *Ramban* contends that even the text of the *Gemara* that I quoted earlier, which states that *Moshe Rabbeinu* was commanded 611 *Mitzvos*, does not present an obstacle to the *Behag’s* approach, and could include *Mitzvos* introduced by *Chazal*. The *Ramban* cites many places where, even though the *Gemara* states that “The Torah required...” or “*Hashem* said...,” the statement refers to a rabbinic command, not a Torah requirement. In his opinion, *Chazal* used this terminology, even in the context of Rabbinic requirements, since the Torah requires us to observe the *Mitzvos* that *Chazal* commanded.

Thus, although the *Rambam* insists that there are 613 *Mitzvos* that *Hashem* commanded the Jewish people, and his opinion is accepted by most authorities, there are other Torah scholars who include *Mitzvos* introduced by the Sages among them.

#### Dispute the Rules

In addition to the above dispute, there are other authorities who disagree with many of the fourteen rules that the *Rambam* used to define the *Mitzvos* (listed below). Nevertheless, since the Jewish people have come to accept the *Rambam’s* and *Chinuch’s* count of the *Mitzvos*, it is important for us to know and understand these rules.

#### II. Only What the Torah Says

The *Rambam’s* second rule is to not count any *Mitzvah* that is derived hermeneutically, through a *drasha*, but only *Mitzvos* that are mentioned outright in the Torah. Therefore, says the *Rambam*, we do not list the requirements to treat one’s stepfather or stepmother with appropriate respect as separate *Mitzvos*, since these requirements are derived from the extra word *es*, rather than being mentioned outright. Instead, these responsibilities are included under the *Mitzvah* of respecting one’s parents. Similarly, the *Rambam* rules not to count Visiting the Sick (*Bikkur Cholim*) or Comforting Mourners (*Nichum Aveilim*), as separate *Mitzvos*, but includes them under the Torah’s *Mitzvah* of emulating *Hashem* by acting in ways that imitate His acts of kindness.

#### III. Mitzvos are Forever!

One counts only a *Mitzvah* that is everlasting, and not one that is temporary. For example, we do not count as one of the 613 commandments that a *Levi* may not serve in the *Mishkan* past his fiftieth birthday, since this rule applied only in the Desert and not afterwards.

The reason for not counting these commandments is that the 613 *Mitzvos* form an eternal relationship between *Hashem* and the Jewish people, and, as such, apply only to *Mitzvos* that apply forever. However, many *Mitzvos* that are not applicable today due to the absence of the *Beis Hamikdash* still count in the list of 613. This is because these *Mitzvos* are eternal commandments that are temporarily beyond our ability to observe.

#### IV. Torah, but Not the Whole Torah!

One should not count as part of the 613 any command that includes observing the entire Torah. For example, the Torah states: *Be careful concerning all that I am telling you (Shemos 23:13) and Guard my decrees and observe my judgments (Vayikra 18:4)*. These and other similar statements are not counted among the 613 *Mitzvos*. The *Rambam* explains that each of the 613 *Mitzvos* involves a different mode of developing our relationship with *Hashem*, while a *pasuk* that instructs to keep all the *Mitzvos* is not indicating any specific way to grow.

#### V. No Reasons!

In the instances when the Torah provided a reason to observe a *Mitzvah*, we do not count the reason as a separate *Mitzvah*. Although these reasons are significant in understanding both our relationship with *Hashem* and why we observe His *Mitzvos*, they do not obligate any additional actions with which to deepen our relationship with *Hashem*.

#### VI. Yes and No

When there are two commands pursuant to an activity, one a positive command (*mitzvas aseih*) and the other a negative command (*mitzvas lo saaseh*), we count the *Mitzvah* twice, once among the 248 *Mitzvos aseih* and once among the 365 *Mitzvos lo saaseh*. There are numerous examples of this: For example, there is a positive *Mitzvah*, “to keep Shabbos,” and a negative *Mitzvah*, “not to perform *melachah* on Shabbos.” The situation is repeated concerning the observance of all the *Yomim Tovim* (seven times, or 14 more *Mitzvos*), afflicting ourselves on *Yom Kippur* (which has both a positive and a negative commandment), and regarding all *korbanos* being salted before placing them on the *mizbeiach* (which also has a *lo saaseh*, *Do not place unsalted korbanos on the mizbeiach*).

#### VII. Details, Details

Details about when a *Mitzvah* applies and how to fulfill it do not count as separate *Mitzvos*. For example, for certain sins the Torah requires an atoning *korban* that has a sliding scale: a wealthy person offers an animal, a pauper offers only a grain offering, and someone in-between offers a dove or pigeon. All this counts as only one *Mitzvah*, although there are many different ways of accomplishing it. Here again, there is one *Mitzvah* that develops our relationship with *Hashem*, although depending on one’s financial circumstances, there are different ways to perform it. Dividing this into several *Mitzvos* would send an erroneous message.

#### VIII. Not Every “No” means “No!”

There are instances where, even though a verse might seem to be forbidding something, a careful reading of the verse indicates that the Torah is merely stating that something will not happen or does not need to be performed. Obviously, these instances do not qualify as *Mitzvos*. For example, the Torah says that no prophet will arise who will be like Moshe. Although the wording of the Torah, *Lo kam od navi kemoshe*, might be read to mean, “No prophet should arise like Moshe,” which implies that we are commanded to make sure this does not happen, the translation of the verse is actually a prophetic Divine statement: “No prophet will arise like Moshe.” Thus, this verse is not a directive and does not count as a commandment.

#### IX. Five Times One Equals One.

When the Torah repeats a *Mitzvah* many times, we do not count each time as a separate *Mitzvah*, but we count it as one *Mitzvah*. Therefore, although the Torah prohibits eating blood on several occasions, it counts as only one of the 613 *Mitzvos*. As a result, in the *Rambam’s* opinion, someone who violates this prohibition is punished as if he violated only one *lo saaseh*, and not many.

According to this approach, when two similar *Mitzvos lo saaseh* or two similar *Mitzvos aseih* are both counted as *Mitzvos*, this must be because one *Mitzvah* is more comprehensive than the other. Otherwise, this *Mitzvah* would not be counted more than once.

Here is an example:

The *Rambam* counts two different *Mitzvos* against owning *chometz* on *Pesach*, *bal yei’ra’eh*, that *chometz* should not be seen, and *bal yematzei*, that *chometz* should not be found. Why does he count both of these *Mitzvos*, whereas he counts only one *Mitzvah* not to eat blood?

The answer is that these two *Mitzvos* are not identical: *bal yematzei* includes cases that are not included under *bal ye’ra’eh*. Specifically, someone who buried *chometz* does not violate *bal yei’ra’eh*, since the *chometz* cannot be seen. However, he does violate *bal yematzei* since the *chometz* can be found.

This distinction not only affects whether this *Mitzvah* is counted once or twice among the 613, but also has other *halachic* ramifications. Someone who purchased *chometz* or mixed dough and allowed it to rise on *Pesach* violates two different prohibitions, since these prohibitions count as two separate *Mitzvos*.

#### X. Preliminary Steps do not a Mitzvah Make

Preliminary steps involved in the performance of a *Mitzvah* are not counted as a *Mitzvah* on their own. For example, one does not count the statement that one should take flour to bring a *korban mincha*, a grain offering, as a *Mitzvah* on its own. It is simply one stage in the performance of the *Mitzvah*.

#### XI. Part of a *Mitzvah* is Equal to None

There are *Mitzvos* in which several items are involved in successfully performing one *Mitzvah*, such as taking the four species on *Sukkos*. The *Rambam* points out that one counts the taking of the four species as one *Mitzvah*, not as four separate *Mitzvos*, since taking each of them without the others, or even three without the fourth, does not fulfill a *Mitzvah*.

#### XII. Completing one Part of a *Mitzvah*

Some *Mitzvos* involve the successful completion of several other commandments, such as the *Mitzvah* to build the *Mishkan/Beis Hamikdash*, which involves the completion of many of the vessels, including the *Menorah*, the *Shulchan*, and the Altar. Each of these independent *Mitzvos* is not counted separately: Since the purpose of all of them is the creation of the *Mishkan/Beis Hamikdash*, they are all included under the one *Mitzvah* of building *Hashem's* "house."

#### XIII. Many Days are not Many *Mitzvos*

If a *Mitzvah* continues for several days, one counts the *Mitzvah* only once. It is interesting that the *Rambam* counts offering the *Korban Musaf* on *Sukkos* as only one *Mitzvah*, even though the number of its bulls changes daily.

Included in this rule is that a *Mitzvah* observed more than once a day is counted only once. Therefore, reciting *Kerias Shma* every morning and evening is counted as only one *Mitzvah* (*Kinas Sofrim*).

#### XIV. Punishments are not *Mitzvos*

When the Torah describes the punishment for violating a specific *Mitzvah*, we do not count that punishment as a separate *Mitzvah* in its own right.

Although almost every one of the *Rambam's* rules has its disputants, this last rule is interesting because it entails a major dispute between the *Geonim's* approach to counting *Mitzvos* and that of the *Rambam*. Several of the *Geonim* count each time the Torah mentions a punishment for violating a certain command as a separate *Mitzvah*. The individual's command to observe this law counts as a *Mitzvah*, and the *Beis Din's* instruction to mete out a specific punishment to those who violate the law is counted as a separate *Mitzvah*. This understanding of the *Mitzvos* creates a list of 71 *Mitzvos* of the Torah that apply to the *Beis Din*.

As mentioned above, the *Rambam* disputes this approach and counts simply five *Mitzvos* for the *Beis Din* to fulfill, one for each of the four types of capital punishment that *Beis Din* administers, and one for *malkus*, lashes.

#### Other Lists

Among those who did not follow the *Rambam* fully, the one that is probably closest to the *Rambam's* count of the 613 *Mitzvos* was that of Rav Moshe of Coucy, one of the *Baalei Tosafos*, whose magnum opus, the *Sefer HaMitzvos HaGadol* (often abbreviated *Smag*) is a compendium of all the *halachic* conclusions of the *Gemara*, with a full analysis of the author's decision, organized according to the list of the 613 *Mitzvos*. Although the book is not commonly studied today, and it is never used as the final *halachic* decision, at one time it was the major decisor of *halachah* for Ashkenazic Jewry.

What is interesting is that although he also organized the *Mitzvos* in a logical fashion, similar to the approach of the *Rambam*, his list is in a very different order from that of the *Rambam*. Nevertheless, his count is so similar to the *Rambam* that in his list of 248 positive *Mitzvos*, he agrees with the *Rambam* on 245 of them.

His extra three, which the *Rambam* does not count, include:

To accept *Hashem's* judgment on anything that happens. Whereas the *Smag* counts this as one of the 613 *Mitzvos*, deriving it from a *pasuk*, the *Rambam* does not count this as one of the 613 *Mitzvos*.

Among the 613 *Mitzvos*, the *Smag* counts the *Mitzvah* to calculate seasons and the movement of heavenly bodies in order to know how to determine the Jewish calendar. The *Rambam* mentions in his second rule that one should not count this as a separate *Mitzvah*, because it is derived from a *drasha*. The *Smag* does not accept this rule.

#### The Third *Smag* Addition

The *Smag* counts as a positive *Mitzvah*: To distance oneself from falsehood. I admit to having no idea why the *Rambam* does not count this

as a *Mitzvah*. He includes all the laws of distancing oneself from falsehood under the *mitzvas lo saaseh* of "Do not bear a false story," a *lo saaseh* that includes the laws of speaking *loshon hora*. However, as we mentioned earlier, the *Rambam* contends that one counts overlapping *Mitzvos aseh* and *lo saaseh* separately, so why does he omit the count of this *Mitzvah*? In conclusion, we have seen that much *halachic* literature is devoted to enumerating and understanding the various counts of the 613 *Mitzvos*. Some people have the practice of reviewing the *Mitzvos* that are included in the week's Torah reading at the Shabbos table, a *minhag* that is not only praiseworthy, but has the additional benefit in that it familiarizes us with all the 613 *Mitzvos*.

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#### **Rabino Pynchas Brenner - Conectándose al Judaísmo**

#### ***El nudo indisoluble: moral y religión***

#### ***YITRÓ Éxodo XVIII - XX***

***Thursday, January 28, 2016***

Los últimos versículos de lecturas anteriores de la Torá relatan algunos de los pormenores del enfrentamiento bélico entre los hebreos y los amalekitas. Yehoshua es elegido para dirigir el combate. Moshé, su hermano Aharón y su sobrino Jur escalan un montículo desde el cual presencian la batalla. Dice el texto, "y cuando Moshé levantaba su brazo, Israel era victorioso; y cuando lo bajaba, Amalek era el victorioso". Comenta el Talmud: "¿acaso los brazos de Moshé pueden decidir una victoria"? La enseñanza es, según el Talmud, que cuando el pueblo tiene su vista hacia arriba, hacia lo celestial y lo trascendental, mejor dicho cuando el pueblo está consciente de su responsabilidad con la tradición y con las *mitsvot*, entonces es victorioso. Pero cuando se preocupa de lo mundano e inmediato y olvida el *berit*, que es el pacto que cerró con el Creador, entonces sus enemigos son los victoriosos. Amalek, desde aquel momento en adelante, se convierte en el prototipo del enemigo gratuito del pueblo judío. Siglos más tarde se identificará a Hamán, el villano del Libro de Ester, como un descendiente de Amalek. La historia de la humanidad dará testimonio de que Amalek estuvo presente en cada generación. Salimos victoriosos de algunos de los encuentros. Ganamos algunas batallas. Pero aun con el establecimiento de *Medinat Israel*, la guerra continúa. Amalek no descansa y por tanto debemos mantenernos alerta en todo momento.

Yitró, el suegro de Moshé que presta su nombre a nuestra lectura semanal, escucha el eco de las hazañas de su yerno y se dirige al desierto para encontrarse con el pueblo hebreo. Lo acompañan su hija Tsiporá, la esposa de Moshé, con sus dos hijos, Gershom y Eliézer. Estos dos hijos desaparecen rápidamente del texto bíblico. No desempeñan ningún rol en la historia del pueblo. Aprendemos tal vez que la condición de líder no es hereditaria. Hay que obtenerlo por mérito propio. Los personajes claves de la historia tienden a descuidar a sus hijos, porque todas sus iniciativas y preocupaciones están dirigidas y centradas en las metas trascendentales que se trazan.

Vayíjad Yitró, Yitró se alegra al escuchar el relato de las hazañas de su yerno Moshé y por las bondades de Dios con el pueblo judío al sacarlo de la esclavitud. A pesar de que el aparente sentido de nuestro texto es que Yitró se alegró con la noticia del éxodo de nuestros antepasados de Egipto, nuestros *jajamim* sugieren que su alegría no fue completa. Se vio opacada por la muerte de los egipcios en las aguas del Mar Rojo. En cierta forma, nuestra tradición también se hace eco de este hecho al señalar que Dios no permitió que se cante el *Halel* completo en los últimos seis días de *Pésaj* cuando "lo hecho por sus manos", que era una referencia a los egipcios, que igualmente habían sido creados por El, se ahogaban en aquel momento. ¿Por qué consideran nuestros *jajamim* que la alegría de Yitró no era completa, cuando el texto bíblico no hace alusión a esto? Tal vez, en opinión de nuestros *jajamim* es muy difícil alegrarse a cabalidad con el éxito del prójimo. En nuestra vida cotidiana podemos constatar que la identificación total con la felicidad y la buenaventura de otra persona está limitada a la madre, al padre, a la esposa, o a un amigo extraordinario. El

mejor alumno de la clase no es necesariamente el más popular. La envidia suele aparecer cuando estamos en presencia de la buena fortuna de otro.

Yitró reconoce que su yerno Moshé dedica enormes energías a la enseñanza, a responder a las interrogantes del pueblo y al ejercicio de la justicia. Yitró le sugiere a Moshé que seleccione un grupo de personas poseedoras de ciertos atributos que puedan asistirle en sus tareas. ¿Cuáles eran estas cualidades? Las personas escogidas tenían que ser anshei jáyil, “guerreros fuertes”, las que según el comentarista Rashí, tenían que ser personas económicamente independientes para que sus fallas, no se vieran comprometidos por ninguna presión material. La segunda cualidad requerida es yirei Elohim, “temerosos de Dios”, porque en la tradición judía aunque la noción de “no robar” tiene un gran sentido social, ésta representa al mismo tiempo un imperativo religioso. El siguiente requisito es que sean anshei emet, “gente que dice la verdad”. Rashí comenta que al ser ellos responsables y consecuentes con su palabra, se tendría confianza en sus veredictos. La última cualidad mencionada en el texto bíblico es sonei batsa, “detestan el soborno”. Las cualidades citadas servirán de base para escoger a los integrantes del Sanhedrín, la corte de los setenta que servirá, posteriormente, como máxima autoridad religiosa.

Los capítulos XIX y XX del Éxodo contienen el relato de los preparativos al pie del Monte Sinaí y la revelación de la Voluntad Divina contenida en los Diez Mandamientos. El mundo occidental ha reconocido que estos mandamientos sirven de fundamento moral para formar una sociedad. Igualmente, en la tradición judía hay expositores del texto bíblico que encuentran en estos mandamientos, la génesis de todas las otras mitsvot de la Torá. Aparentemente, en la época del Beit HaMikdash, que es el Templo de Jerusalem, la lectura de estos Diez Mandamientos formaba parte de la liturgia de Shemá Israel, “Escucha Israel” que es la afirmación de la existencia de un solo Dios. Aparecieron entonces los que cuestionaron la legitimidad del texto restante de la Torá. Su argumento se basó en el hecho de que únicamente los Diez Mandamientos habían sido incorporados al ritual. Los jajamim decidieron entonces eliminar la recitación diaria de los Diez Mandamientos para evitar la duda, por inferencia, acerca de la veracidad del resto del texto de la Torá. Sin embargo, hasta el día de hoy, hay quienes recitan, individualmente, los Diez Mandamientos al concluir el servicio religioso de las mañanas.

El primero de los Diez Mandamientos, es en realidad una afirmación, porque reza así, “Yo soy Dios, tu Dios, que te sacó de la tierra de Egipto, de la casa de la servidumbre”. Según Rambam esta afirmación es, al mismo tiempo, un mandamiento, porque asume una fe en la existencia de Dios. Este mandamiento identifica a Dios, como aquel que nos sacó de Egipto. El texto bíblico pudiera haber optado por identificar a Dios de manera diferente, por ejemplo como el que creó el universo. Pero en esta

eventualidad se hubiera podido concluir que Dios creó el universo para que éste se comportara de acuerdo a ciertas leyes establecidas y luego abandonarlo a su propio destino. En cambio, al señalar que fue Dios quien rescató a nuestros antepasados de la casa de la esclavitud, equivale a afirmar que Dios interviene en la historia. Dios continúa activamente interesado en el proceso de desarrollo de la humanidad y responde a ciertos hechos. Cuando nuestros antepasados imploraron a Dios que los aliviase del yugo excesivo de la esclavitud, El los escuchó y actuó. En caso contrario, ¿qué sentido tendría rezar, si Dios se abstiene de intervenir en el desarrollo de los sucesos terrenales?

Los Diez Mandamientos fueron grabados sobre dos tablas de piedra. Los primeros cinco hacen referencia a la relación entre el hombre y Dios. Los últimos cinco tienen como objetivo la relación entre los seres humanos. El quinto mandamiento, el que nos encomienda honrar padre y madre, sirve de puente entre los dos grupos, porque nuestros padres son nuestros “creadores”. Cabe preguntar entonces, ¿cuáles son más importantes? ¿Acaso la relación entre el hombre y Dios tiene mayor jerarquía que los que regulan las responsabilidades entre los hombres? En la concepción judía, cuando uno se abstiene de asesinar a otro ser humano, está cumpliendo también con una instrucción Divina. Así, la mitsvá de “no matarás”, que tiene que ver con la relación con otro ser humano, está ligada al mismo tiempo con el deber hacia Dios, porque fue ese Dios quien lo ordenó. Por tanto es un error pensar que tefilín y talit, kashrut y Shabat son la suma total del judaísmo. Desde luego, no hay cómo destacar suficientemente la importancia de estos elementos en el marco de la tradición judía. Pero hay que tener siempre presente que bein adam lajaveró, que son las relaciones entre el hombre y su prójimo, son normas religiosas que son indispensables y fundamentales para el bienestar de toda sociedad.

El cuarto mandamiento que promulga el derecho a un día de descanso, es revolucionario. Los romanos sostenían que los hombres nacían para ciertos roles. Los patricios para mandar y los plebeyos para trabajar. La noción de un descanso obligatorio era incompatible con la estructura esclavista reinante. La Torá basa esta ley en el descanso de Dios en el acto de la creación. Dios creó el mundo en seis días y en el séptimo, Shabat, descansó, y luego santificó ese día. De esa manera la Biblia enseña que la noción del día de descanso semanal es una parte integral de la creación del mundo. El Shabat no fue promulgado para un grupo particular. El Shabat va más allá de los límites de la humanidad, porque los animales también deben gozar de ese día de descanso. La conciencia social manifestada por los profetas de esos milenios, y que tienen eco en nuestro quehacer contemporáneo, son resultado directo del espíritu de estos capítulos.

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