

Weekly Parsha YITRO 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

A literal reading of the Parsha tells us that Yitro, who was the high priest of Midian and the father-in-law of Moshe, saw of the events of the Exodus from Egypt and, according to Rashi based on Midrash, saw the battle the Jewish people fought against Amalek.

The Torah implies, and Rashi states openly, that upon hearing of these events, Yitro was propelled to leave his home, and to come into the desert to accompany the Jewish people, at least initially, on their travels through the Sinai desert. The Torah does not tell us how he heard about these events, but, apparently, they were of such earth-shattering proportions, that the news spread rapidly throughout the Middle East.

From the verses in the song of Moshe and the Jewish people, at the splitting of the waters of Yam Suf, it is obvious that Yitro was not alone in hearing about these wonderous events. The verse says that all the nations of the area were also astounded to hear of these miracles, and to realize that a new nation had been born from the slavery of Egypt. Yet, the reaction of the people in those countries and especially that of Amalek certainly differed greatly from the response of Yitro to the very same news.

The nations of the world chose either to oppose the news by attacking the Jewish people, or, mostly, to simply ignore it as not being worthy of their concern. People are so confirmed in their inertia that even when there is an event that obviously is historic and earth-shattering, but which would, at the same time, cause a reassessment of their own lives, attitudes, and policies, they will, in the main, either deny the news, besmirch the miracle, or ignore the matter completely. It is to the credit of Yitro that he chose to act positively upon hearing of the events that occurred to the Jewish people in their exodus from Egypt. Of course, being the father-in-law of Moshe, he also had a personal vested interest in visiting his family, but, nevertheless, it must be recorded to his credit, that he uprooted himself to join the Jewish people in their travels through the desert.

One of the great tests in life is how one responds to news that is momentous and unexpected, that makes it necessary to change one's habits and life direction. Jews often piously – and I do not doubt their sincerity when they say it – put off momentous decisions until the Messiah arrives. But the little I know of human

nature teaches me that even when the Messiah arrives, there will be many who will not be willing to change their life pattern, sell everything to join the Jewish people in the land of Israel, with all the accompanying hardships that inevitably will be involved. People hear many things, many times very important things, but this knowledge does not necessarily imply that they are willing to act upon them in a positive and productive manner. Yitro is eternally privileged to have a portion of the Torah on his name because he heard and shortly thereafter, he acted.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Structure of the Good Society (Yitro)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

In the House of Lords there is a special chamber used as, among other things, the place where new Peers are robed before their introduction into the House. When my predecessor Lord Jakobovits was introduced, the official robing him commented that he was the first Rabbi to be honoured in the Upper House. Lord Jakobovits replied, “No, I am the second.” “Who was the first?” asked the surprised official. The chamber is known as the Moses Room because of the large painting that dominates the room. It shows Moses bringing the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai. Lord Jakobovits pointed to this mural, indicating that Moses was the first Rabbi to ever be honoured in the House of Lords.

The Ten Commandments that appear in this week's parsha have long held a special place not only in Judaism but also within the broader configuration of values we call the Judeo-Christian ethic. In the United States they were often to be found adorning American law courts, though their presence has been challenged, in some states successfully, on the grounds that they breach the First Amendment and the separation of church and state. They remain the supreme expression of the higher law to which all human law is bound.

Within Judaism, too, they have always held a special place. In Second Temple times they were recited in the daily prayers as part of the Shema, which then had four paragraphs rather than three.[1] It was only when sectarians began to claim that only these and not the

other 603 commands came directly from God that the recitation was brought to an end.[2]

The text retained its hold on the Jewish mind none the less. Even though it was removed from daily communal prayers, it was preserved in the prayer book as a private meditation to be said after the formal service has been concluded. In most congregations, people stand when they are read as part of the Torah reading, despite the fact that Maimonides explicitly ruled against it.[3]

Yet their uniqueness is not straightforward. As moral principles, they were mostly not new. Almost all societies have had laws against murder, robbery and false testimony. There is some originality in the fact that they are apodictic, that is, simple statements of “You shall not,” as opposed to the casuistic form, “If ... then.” But they are only ten among a much larger body of 613 commandments. Nor are they even described by the Torah itself as “Ten Commandments.” The Torah calls them the *asseret ha-devarim*, that is, “ten utterances.” Hence the Greek translation, Decalogue, meaning, “ten words.”

What makes them special is that they are simple and easy to memorise. That is because in Judaism, law is not intended for judges alone. The covenant at Sinai, in keeping with the profound egalitarianism at the heart of Torah, was made not as other covenants were in the ancient world, between kings. The Sinai covenant was made by God with the entire people. Hence the need for a simple statement of basic principles that everyone can remember and recite.

More than this, they establish for all time the parameters – the corporate culture, we could almost call it – of Jewish existence. To understand how, it is worth reflecting on their basic structure. There was a fundamental disagreement between Maimonides and Nahmanides on the status of the first sentence: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” Maimonides, in line with the Talmud, held that this is in itself a command: to believe in God. Nahmanides held that it was not a command at all. It was a prologue or preamble to the commands.[4] Modern research on ancient Near Eastern covenant formulae tends to support Nahmanides.

The other fundamental question is how to divide them. Most depictions of the Ten Commandments divide them into two, because of the “two tablets of stone” (Deut 4:13) on which they were engraved. Roughly speaking, the first five are about the relationship

between humans and God, the second five about the relationship between humans themselves. There is, however, another way of thinking about numerical structures in the Torah.

The seven days of creation, for example, are structures as two sets of three followed by an all-embracing seventh. During the first three days God separated domains: light and dark, upper and lower waters, and sea and dry land. During the second three days He filled each with the appropriate objects and life forms: sun and moon, birds and fish, animals and man. The seventh day was set apart from the others as holy.

Likewise the ten plagues consist of three cycles of three followed by a stand-alone tenth. In each cycle of three, the first two were forewarned while the third struck without warning. In the first of each series, Pharaoh was warned in the morning (Ex. 7:16; 8:17; 9:13), in the second Moses was told to “come in before Pharaoh” (Ex. 7:26; 9:1; 10:1) in the palace, and so on. The tenth plague, unlike the rest, was announced at the very outset (Ex. 4:23). It was less a plague than a punishment.

Similarly, it seems to me that the Ten Commandments are structured in three groups of three, with a tenth that is set apart from the rest. Thus understood, we can see how they form the basic structure, the depth grammar, of Israel as a society bound by covenant to God as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Ex. 19:6)

The first three – no other gods besides Me, no graven images, and no taking of God’s name in vain – define the Jewish people as “one nation under God.” God is our ultimate sovereign. Therefore all other earthly rule is subject to the overarching imperatives linking Israel to God. Divine sovereignty transcends all other loyalties (no other gods besides Me). God is a living force, not an abstract power (no graven images). And sovereignty presupposes reverence (Do not take My name in vain).

The first three commands, through which the people declare their obedience and loyalty to God above all else, establish the single most important principle of a free society, namely the moral limits of power. Without this, the danger even in democracy is the tyranny of the majority, against which the best defence against it is the sovereignty of God.

The second three commands – the Sabbath, honouring parents, and the prohibition of murder – are all about the principle of the createdness of life. They establish limits to the idea of autonomy, namely that we are free

to do whatever we like so long as it does not harm others. Shabbat is the day dedicated to seeing God as creator and the universe as His creation. Hence, one day in seven, all human hierarchies are suspended and everyone, master, slave, employer, employee, even domestic animals, are free.

Honouring parents acknowledges our human createdness. It tells us that not everything that matters is the result of our choice, chief of which is the fact that we exist at all. Other people's choices matter, not just our own. "Thou shall not murder" restates the central principle of the universal Noahide covenant that murder is not just a crime against man but a sin against God in whose image we are. So commands 4 to 7 form the basic jurisprudential principles of Jewish life. They tell us to remember where we came from if we are to be mindful of how to live.

The third three – against adultery, theft and bearing false witness – establish the basic institutions on which society depends. Marriage is sacred because it is the human bond closest in approximation to the covenant between us and God. Not only is marriage the human institution par excellence that depends on loyalty and fidelity. It is also the matrix of a free society. Alexis de Tocqueville put it best: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone." [5]

The prohibition against theft establishes the integrity of property. Whereas Jefferson defined as inalienable rights those of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," John Locke, closer in spirit to the Hebrew Bible, saw them as "life, liberty or possession." [6] Tyrants abuse the property rights of the people, and the assault of slavery against human dignity is that it deprives me of the ownership of the wealth I create.

The prohibition of false testimony is the precondition of justice. A just society needs more than a structure of laws, courts and enforcement agencies. As Judge Learned Hand said, "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it." [7] There is no freedom without justice, but there is no justice without each of us accepting individual and collective responsibility for "telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Finally comes the stand-alone prohibition against envying your neighbour's house, wife, slave, maid, ox, donkey, or anything else belonging to him or her. This seems odd if we think of the "ten words" as

commands, but not if we think of them as the basic principles of a free society. The greatest challenge of any society is how to contain the universal, inevitable phenomenon of envy: the desire to have what belongs to someone else. Envy lies at the heart of violence. [8] It was envy that led Cain to murder Abel, made Abraham and Isaac fear for their life because they were married to beautiful women, led Joseph's brothers to hate him and sell him into slavery. It is envy that leads to adultery, theft and false testimony, and it was envy of their neighbours that led the Israelites time and again to abandon God in favour of the pagan practices of the time.

Envy is the failure to understand the principle of creation as set out in Genesis 1, that everything has its place in the scheme of things. Each of us has our own task and our own blessings, and we are each loved and cherished by God. Live by these truths and there is order. Abandon them and there is chaos. Nothing is more pointless and destructive than to let someone else's happiness diminish your own, which is what envy is and does. The antidote to envy is, as Ben Zoma famously said, "to rejoice in what we have" (Mishnah Avot 4:1) and not to worry about what we don't yet have. Consumer societies are built on the creation and intensification of envy, which is why they lead to people having more and enjoying it less.

Thirty-three centuries after they were first given, the Ten Commandments remain the simplest, shortest guide to creation and maintenance of a good society. Many alternatives have been tried, and most have ended in tears. The wise aphorism remains true: When all else fails, read the instructions.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Yitro (Exodus 18:1-20:23)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "You shall not climb up My altar with steps, so that your nakedness will not be revealed on it." (Exodus 20:22)

In the time when the Torah was given, all religions were intimately connected with sexuality, temple prostitutes, and orgiastic rites. One of the great moral revolutions that Judaism brought to the world is the notion that holiness requires modesty in the realm of sexual matters and, by extension, all areas of life.

The Torah forbids the use of steps in ascending the altar, instead mandating the more gradually ascending ramp, in order that the priest's nakedness not be

revealed. This underscores the lesson that worship of God and sexual immorality are incompatible.

The significance of the ramp leading up to the altar can also be understood in another way. One of my mentors, Rabbi Moshe Besdin, z"l, explained to me that with a ramp you can either go up or go down, progress or regress. However, with steps, you can rest. The Torah may well be teaching us that, when ascending God's altar, you cannot stop to rest; you dare not fall into the trap of self-satisfaction and complacency. Judaism asks for constant examination, self-criticism and growth.

The Tzemach Tzedek, one of the great Chabad rabbis, once asked his students: Who stands higher on the ladder, the individual on the third rung or the individual on the tenth rung? The individual on the tenth rung, they all responded. Not necessarily, he qualified. If the individual on the tenth rung is going down or standing still, and the individual on the third rung is going up, the individual on the third rung stands higher than the individual on the tenth rung!

I would like to add an additional interpretation to this verse. The Torah uses the word *ma'alot*, usually translated as steps, but which can also be translated as "good character qualities." So now the verse reads, "Do not climb up to My altar with your good character qualities; so that your nakedness will not be revealed on it."

According to this reading, God warns us that if we ascend to the altar of God flashing our good qualities, proud of our achievements and self-satisfied about all that we know, then the danger is that our nakedness—our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities, our flaws—will be revealed. The altar cannot be a center for self-aggrandizement, a stage of religious worship from which we let others know how great we are; if we fall into this trap, God tells us that ultimately our nakedness—not our greatness—will be revealed.

The altar of God must be approached with a sense of humility, with full awareness of our inadequacies; it dare not become a center of self-satisfaction, religious one-upmanship, and arrogance.

The following Hassidic tale illustrates this point. In a town in pre-war Europe, there lived two Jews: One, named Reb Haim, a great scholar, and the other, also called Haim, an indigent porter who could barely read the Hebrew letters. The scholar married well: the richest man in town came looking for the most brilliant mind in the yeshiva as his son-in-law, and gladly supported him generously.

The two Haims, such very different people, crossed paths frequently. Haim the porter would pray early in the morning so that he could start working as soon as possible in order to earn his meager living. Rushing out after the service, he would invariably run into the great Reb Haim arriving early for another minyan, since he stayed up until the early hours of the morning learning Torah. In this way they "met" nearly every day.

Reb Haim the scholar would always dismissively sneer at Haim the porter, ignoring the deprivations faced by the other Haim. Haim the porter, in contrast, would look upon the scholar with yearning, feeling sad and unworthy that he couldn't spend his life studying the holy Torah.

Many years later, both Haims died on the same day, and went to face judgment in the Heavenly Court. Haim the scholar was judged first. All of his good deeds, years of long study, and righteous acts were placed on one side of the scale, and on the other side his daily sneer of self-satisfaction. The sneer outweighed all the good deeds. Haim the porter then submitted for judgment. On one side of the scale were placed his sins, and on the other side of the scale his daily sigh of yearning. When the scales finally settled, the sigh outweighed the sins and the sneer outweighed the merits.

Ultimately, in our worship of God, humility triumphs over all.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi David Fohrman

Aleph Beta Founder and Lead Scholar

Why Are the Ten Commandments Important To Judaism?

Do you ever wonder what's so special about the Ten Commandments? Why were they singled out to be part of God's momentous speech at Mount Sinai? Why do we make such a big deal about reading them on Shavuot, or putting them up in our shuls and on our courthouses? Why do we treat them as if they are somehow more special, or more fundamental, than all of the other parts of the Torah?

The answer that's often given is that they are more fundamental than the other parts of the Torah because they somehow represent the core ideas of the Torah. That every law in the Torah can be somehow reduced to one of these Ten Commandments. It's as if these

are the ten most essential concepts that God is trying to convey to us.

So go with that theory for a second, and now ask yourself this: What if we told you that the Ten Commandments, these ten essential concepts, do express a fundamental Torah truth, but they aren't actually ten? That the "ten commandments" are actually one single idea – the idea, the big, central message that God wanted the Israelites to hear, the one message that the whole Torah boils down to? The most core truth at the heart of all of Judaism, as it were?

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

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In-laws and Outlaws

And her two sons: whom the name of one was Gershom, for he had said, 'I was a stranger in a strange land'; and the name of the other was Eliezer, for 'the God of my father came to my aid and he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh' (18:4-5).

Moshe named his two sons after experiences in his life. Presumably, his son Gershom was named for the events of his life in Midian; having arrived as an Egyptian immigrant and settling there to marry Tziporah the daughter of Yisro – one of the chieftains of Midian. His second son, Eliezer, was named after the miraculous event sparing him from Pharaoh's decree and the resulting executioner's sword (see Rashi ad loc).

Many of the commentators are bothered by the fact that according to the chronological order of events in Moshe's life, he should have named his first child Eliezer because he was saved from Pharaoh's sword many years prior to his arrival as an immigrant to Midian. So why did he choose to name his first son after events that took place later in his life?

In addition, the name Gershom itself is rather perplexing; it definitely seems to slant toward the negative. Why should he express that he felt as a stranger in a strange land after being so warmly welcomed (albeit years later) by Yisro and his family? What kind of appreciation is this to his wife, father-in-law, and extended family who gave him a home and family in Midian?

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel (18:4) translates the verse similarly, but with a subtle addition; "I was a stranger

in a strange land, that was not mine." Why does the Targum add those words to the end of this verse? Remarkably, with those few words, Targum Yonasan ben Uziel refocuses our attention and tells us what Moshe Rabbeinu is really saying.

In the Bris Bein Habesarim, the covenant that Hashem made with Avraham Avinu, Hashem decrees that Bnei Yisroel will have to go down and be "strangers in a land that is not theirs" (Bereshis 15:13). Of course, we later learn that this land is Egypt. According to the Targum, Moshe, in naming his first Gershom, is not referring to Midian but rather to how he felt growing up in Egypt! Even though he grew up as a prince in Pharaoh's house, knowing who he really was caused him to feel like an undocumented Mexican living next door to the Trumps.

With this understanding, the questions raised by the commentators fade away. Moshe named his children specifically in chronological order: his first child describes his life growing up in Egypt, and his second child describes his exit from Egypt. Moreover, he was letting his new adopted family know that he didn't pine for the land or home in which he grew up.

Perhaps most significantly, we learn from Moshe Rabbeinu that growing up in a place with many privileges and comforts shouldn't obscure the vision of living in our own land and on our own terms. If history has taught us anything, it has taught us this: We can never confuse being comfortable in a country with actually being in our own country.

Seeing is Believing

Hashem shall descend before the eyes of all the people on Mount Sinai (19:11).

Rashi (ad loc) tells us a fascinating occurrence that took place prior to the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai: Everyone was miraculously healed. In other words, all the sick, infirm, and handicapped were cured at Mount Sinai. Obviously, this explains why almost every Jewish community with a hospital names it "Mount Sinai."

Yet, we must wonder why Hashem saw it necessary to perform such an incredible miracle. What was the purpose of healing everyone? What was the message that we were meant to take away from this incredible revelation of Hashem's power and the departure from the physical norm?

In a famous paraphrasing of Karl Marx, critics have called religion "the opiate of the masses." Marx believed that religion had certain practical functions in society that were similar to the function of opium in a

sick or injured person. Opiates reduce people's immediate suffering and provides them with pleasant illusions, but with no meaningful long term benefits. (As a side note, Marx was actually referring to religion as an opiate for the sickness and suffering brought on by the soulless and heartless suffering caused by rampant capitalism.)

We all know how well his philosophy worked out for the communists; and yet, Marx's criticism of religion persists even after his ideas for a new world order have been shown to be abject failures.

This is the message that Hashem wanted us to learn at Mount Sinai: Everyone was cured to teach us that the optimal way to receive the Torah is when we are in perfect health, both physically and emotionally. Of course the Torah also has the answers when we are suffering and/or not operating at our ideal level, but we can only fully appreciate all that the Torah has to offer on a personal and communal level when we are completely healthy.

When a person is ill or otherwise distracted by pain for physical or emotional issues, one's focus becomes distracted by the personal issues at hand. Of course the Torah can be helpful in addressing those issues, but at that moment all that one can see is a very limited perspective of what the truths of Torah contain. This is because a person in a state of pain sees everything through the lens of that suffering.

But when one is at 100% strength, both physically and emotionally, the Torah can be seen for what it is really meant to be; a blueprint of Hashem's wisdom for the world and a guide for having the most fulfilling life that Hashem has bestowed upon us. Hashem cured everyone at Mount Sinai so that each person could fully appreciate the infinite wisdom that the Torah offers and connect to Hashem's truths contained therein without the slightest distraction.

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***Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -
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Parshat Yitro - Does Shabbat Like You?

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

May I ask you a personal question? How's your Shabbat? Does every Shabbat make you feel suffused with holiness? Does every rock and building and tree

whisper to you "Shabbat!" Do you feel so much closer to G-d than on the rest of the week?

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

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

And even if Shabbat is not a burden, and we enjoy the food, the company, the Shabbat nap — do we feel that we have left one reality and entered another world?

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

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

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

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

But you would be wrong. It is not.

Shabbat is a being. Shabbat is an existence with feelings and likes and dislikes. Shabbat can choose to come to you once in your life, or every week or never. Because if you never felt Shabbat, that is because it never came to you.

It did not feel comfortable with you. Because you do not feel comfortable with it.

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

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

Every week we have to remember to make Shabbat holy, to exert ourselves and infuse those precious hours with Torah, with spirituality, enthusiasm and kedusha, for if we make it holy, then the Shabbatqueen will arrive with all her retinue of blessings to crown our week.

Sources: Based on Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz in Daat Chochma Umussar

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Yitro: The best entry points to greater Jewish engagement

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What is the best entry point through which more people can engage better with their Judaism?

Parshat Yitro commences with the words, "Vayishma Yitro," – "Yitro heard." (Shemot 18:1).

But the Torah doesn't tell us what exactly it was that Yitro heard. What prompted this priest of Midyan to join the Israelite camp in the wilderness and to embrace a life of commitment to Torah? Three answers are given in the Talmud, Masechet Pesachim. Rabbi Yehoshua tells us that Yitro heard all about 'milchemet Amalek,' the war that the Amalekites launched against our people in their attempt to annihilate us.

According to the second view, Rabbi Elazar Moda'i tells us that Yitro heard all about Matan Torah – how Hashem gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai.

According to the third view, that of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov, Yitro heard all about Kriat Yam Suf, the miraculous parting of the waters of the sea.

These three reasons are fascinating. According to the first, what changed Yitro's life was when he heard about an attempt to annihilate the Jewish people. Today we are all too aware of the tragic phenomenon of antisemitism and while it's true that antisemitism can sometimes strengthen Jewish identity, that's not our raison d'etre. We're not here just to survive as a people. We have something to live for.

That is why the second reason is suggested – that what Yitro heard about was Matan Torah, the fact that we are privileged to have a Divinely given guide to life, to enable us to walk in Hashem's ways and to have a

fulfilling, happy and meaningful existence through Torah.

That's also why, according to the third view, Yitro heard about the miraculous intervention of God at the sea. If only we would open our eyes we would also appreciate that Hashem is with us, sustaining us miraculously on every single day of our lives.

The Talmud here is speaking about effective entry points, and today we are aware that we need to create such entry points for more people to engage more effectively with their Jewish roots. There are many types of entry point. For example, one could be a beautiful shabbat meal. Another could be a spiritually uplifting shul service. For another person, an entry point could be playing football for a Jewish team, joining a Jewish security group, visiting a place of Jewish historical interest or just reading a Jewish history book. There are so many different ways for people's eyes to be opened and for them to be connected to their people and to their faith.

So which one was the entry point which worked for Yitro? We're not exactly sure. But one thing is for certain: Yitro had an extraordinary experience as a result of which his life was shaped for the better and if it could happen to Yitro, it can happen to anyone.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Yisro - Man over Moses

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Yisro begins by relating how impressed its namesake, Yisro, (Jethro) is upon hearing the amazing events that transpired to the nation led by his son-in-law, Moshe. He decides to convert to Judaism. Yisro sends word to Moshe that he will soon be arriving at the Israelite camp. Yisro wants Moshe to leave his post and greet him in the desert before he arrives at the Israelite camp. The Torah tells us that Moshe did go out to greet Yisro: "the man bowed and kissed him and asked the peace of his dear one." (Exodus 18:8)

Rashi is bothered by the ambiguity. "Who bowed to whom? Who kissed whom? Who was the one to make the gesture? Was it Yisro, the father-in-law, who kissed Moshe, or did Moshe, the son-in-law, leader of millions of people, run to greet his father in-law a Midianite priest, and bow and kiss him?"

Rashi quotes the Mechilta which refers us to Bamidbar (Numbers 12:3) where Moshe is called "the

man Moshe” obviously the words, “the man bowed and kissed him” in our portion must mean that same man – Moshe.

Why, however, did the Torah choose a seemingly convoluted way to tell us that Moshe prostrated himself before his father-in-law? Would it not have been easier to tell us that “Moshe man bowed and kissed him and asked the peace of his dear one”? Why did the Torah use the words “the man” and send us to the Book of Numbers to learn who “the man” was?

Last year my brother, Rabbi Zvi Kamenetzky of Chicago, tried to contact a friend who was vacationing at Schechter’s Caribbean Hotel in Miami Beach, Florida. After about 15 rings, the hotel operator, an elderly, southern black woman, who worked at the hotel for three decades politely informed my brother that the man was not in the room. “Would you like to leave a message?” she inquired.

“Sure,” responded Reb Zvi, “tell him that Rabbi Kamenetzky, called.”

The woman at the other end gasped. “Raabbi Kaamenetzky?” she drawled. “Did you say you were Raabbi Kaamenetzky?” She knew the name! It sounded as if she was about to follow up with a weighty question, and my brother responded in kind. “Yes.” He did not know what would follow. “Why do you ask?”

“Are you,” asked the operator, “by any chance, related to the famous Rabbi Kamenetzky?”

There was silence in Chicago. My brother could not imagine that this woman had an inkling of who his grandfather, the great sage. Dean of Mesivta Torah Voda’ath to whom thousands had flocked for advice and counsel, was. She continued. “You know, he passed away about ten years ago at the end the wintah?” She definitely had her man, thought Reb Zvi. Still in shock, he offered a subdued, “Yes, I’m a grandson.”

“YOOOU ARE?” she exclaimed, “well I’m sure glad to talk to ya! Cause your grandpa — he was a real good friend of mine!”

My brother pulled the receiver from his ear and stared at the mouthpiece. He composed himself and slowly began to repeat her words, quizzically. “You say that Rabbi Kamenetzky was a good friend of yours?”

“Sure! Every mornin’ Raabbi Kaaamenetzky would come to this here hotel to teach some sorta Bible class (It was the Daf-Yomi.) Now my desk is about ten yards from the main entrance of the hotel. But every mornin’ he made sure to come my way, nod his head,

and say good mornin’ to me. On his way out, he would always stop by my desk and say good-bye. Oh! Yes! He was a great Rabbi but he was even a greater man. He was a wonderful man. He was a real good friend of mine!”

The Torah could have told us the narrative an easier way. It could have told us that Moshe bowed before, and kissed Yisro. It does more. It tells us that it was a man who kissed Yisro. True, it was Moshe that performed those actions. But they were not the actions of a Moses, they were the actions of a mentch!

Often we attribute acts of kindness, compassion, and extra care to super-human attributes of our sages and leaders. The Torah tells us that it is the simple mentch that performs them. Inside every great leader lies “the man.” Little wonder that the words “and the man Moses” that Rashi quotes from the Book of Numbers begin a verse that fits our explanation quite well. The verse reads “and the man Moses was the exceedingly humble, more than any one on the face of the earth.” (Numbers 12:3) It was the man Moses, who was exceedingly humble, more than any one on the face of the earth.

Dedicated in Memory of Ephraim Spinner by Michael & Rikki Charnowitz

Dedicated in Memory of Rose Horn Felig by Dr. & Mrs. Philip Felig

Good Shabbos!

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Yisro

Midah K'neged Midah Punishment is a Big Chesed

When Moshe told Yisro all that happened to Klal Yisrael, Yisro responded: “Blessed is Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharoah; Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt.” (Shemos 18:10). Yisro then concluded: “Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods, for in the very matter in which (the Egyptians) had conspired against them (asher zadu aleihem)...!” (Shemos 18:11).

Rashi says that Yisro was speaking from experience because he was a Priest of Idolatry. In his search for the Truth, Yisro first tried all the other religions of the world, and now he came to the recognition that

Judaism was the true religion of the All-Powerful G-d. Yisro says that he recognized this fact “because of the matter asher zadu aleihem.” What do those words – asher zadu aleihem – mean?

Rashi says that Pharaoh attempted to destroy the Jews in water (drowning their male children in the Nile) and, in the end, the Egyptians were destroyed in water (when they drowned in the Yam Suf). Yisro saw the greatness of the Ribono shel Olam in the poetic justice of that punishment. The Egyptians did not receive just any punishment, but they died in exactly the same way they caused the Jews to die. Rashi adds that the Rabbis comment that the word zadu comes from the same root as “vayazed Yaakov nazid” (Yaakov cooked lentils) – as if to say – they themselves were cooked in the pot that they planned to cook the Jews.

I saw an interesting comment on Yisro’s statement “Now I know that Hashem is Gadol (greater) than all the Elohim“. The word Gadol has a special connotation in Yiddishkeit. In Parshas V’Eschanon, on the pasuk “Hashem Elokim you have begun to show me Your greatness (godlecha) and Your mighty Arm...” (Devorim 3:24), Rashi explains that “Godlecha” refers to Your Attribute of Goodness. So too, it is written “Now please magnify (Yigdal Nah) the Power of Hashem...” (Bamidbar 14:17).

The word Gadol, in reference to the Ribono shel Olam, refers to a specific Divine Attribute. It refers to His Attribute of Chesed (Kindness). This should come as no surprise to us. We need to know this to fulfill our obligation of reciting Shemoneh Esrei. In the first bracha of Shemoneh Esrei, it is essential to know the meaning of the words. We say “HaKel haGadol haGibor v’haNorah“. Each one of these descriptions has a specific connotation. Gadol connotes His Attribute of Chesed. Gibor refers to the Might and Power of the Ribono shel Olam. Each word means something specific.

When Yisro said, “Now I see the greatness of the Almighty,” what specific greatness did he mean? Offhand, we might think Yisro should not have used the word GADOL, but rather GIBOR – he drowned the Egyptians. He gave them what they deserved. This seems like the Attribute of Justice (Midas HaDin). The Hebrew word to express Midas HaDin is Gevurah – Gibor. Gadol is Midas HaChesed, the Attribute of Kindness. Why then, did Yisro say “Now I know that Hashem is Gadol” when he should have said “Now I know that Hashem is Gibor“? This seems like a

manifestation of His strict Gevurah, not of His Kindness!

Apparently, Yisro felt that the drowning of the Egyptians was a manifestation of the Kindness of the Ribono shel Olam. The reason for that is because it was a classic example of “Midah k’neged Midah” (measure for measure): They tried to drown you, so they are going to drown themselves. The reason the Almighty punishes people ‘measure for measure’ is because when the Ribono shel Olam metes out punishment to a person, it is not merely to punish him. It is not out of revenge. Hashem punishes us because he wants to straighten us out and correct our erroneous ways. However, how are we supposed to know what are we doing wrong? This is a terribly pressing question. People suffer all kinds of tzores. One of the most common questions is, “So what should I do? What should I correct?”

This is the tragedy of not having Prophets today. If we had prophets, and a person could go to the Navi and ask “Why is this happening to me?” the Navi could tell him exactly why it was happening. “This is what you are doing wrong!”

Today we are in a cloud. But there are times when the punishment matches the crime. When that happens, the Ribono shel Olam is hinting to us what we are doing wrong! This is a tremendous Kindness. The Ran writes in the Droshos HaRan that when retribution comes in the same form as the crime, we can recognize that it is happening by Divine Providence, and then it will be clear how to make amends. Unfortunately, though, it is not always so simple and not always so obvious.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz once told a story in a shmooze about a match that was proposed for a young lady with a tremendous bochur, but the bochur had a limp. When the Shidduch was proposed to the mother of the girl, she rejected it. “I don’t want a bochur with a limp. He may be the best bochur in the Mir Yeshiva, but I don’t want a son-in-law who limps.” She rejected the Shidduch. Shortly thereafter, this woman fell and broke her leg. She came to Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz and asked, “What did I do wrong that this happened to me?”

I don’t know if he told her this to her face, but Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz rightly said in this shmooze that this was as simple as the nose on her face. Of course, it is not always this obvious. But the Droshos HaRan emphasizes that Divine Providence is evident when

the punishment comes in the exact area where the sin was committed.

The Navi Yeshaya writes "...I am the L-rd your G-d who teaches you for benefit (l'lamdecha l'ho'il), He shows you the road upon which you shall walk" (Yeshaya 48:17). He teaches you so that there will be a benefit to the lesson. We do not have Neviim to talk to us today, but we need to try to look for the connection between what has happened and why it happened. If I received this particular klop, then maybe it somehow has to do with the particular way I am acting.

The Ramchal writes that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is interested in the Tikun (correction/improvement) of His creations. Divine punishment is not like putting a person in jail for fifteen years to let him rot for the evil crime he has committed. That is not how the Ribono shel Olam punishes people. He punishes people with the intention that they should improve. "He does not push away the wicked with two hands; on the contrary He purifies them in the furnace like a metallurgist takes away the impurities of metal."

That is what Yisro is saying: Now I realize that Gadol Hashem – it is a great kindness He did by executing 'measure for measure' judgment against the Egyptians for their sins. Now they became aware of what they did wrong!

Of course, we might ask, how did knowing what they did wrong help the Egyptians? They met their final fate by drowning in the water. What good does that knowledge do for them after they are dead?

The Ibn Ezra writes on the pasuk "And the Egyptians shall know that I am Hashem" (Shemos 14:18) that this refers to the Egyptians who were left and observed what happened to their fellow Egyptians who drowned at the Red Sea. He also adds that even those who drowned, in the instant before they expired they recognized the Hand of G-d and the appropriateness of their punishment. At that moment they had an opportunity to do Teshuva.

The tragedy with the Space Shuttle Challenger occurred a long time ago, in January 1986. I remember reading an editorial at the time—perhaps in the Wall Street Journal. Someone made an interesting observation. The conventional wisdom at that time was that when the Challenger exploded, the crew did not know what hit them. They all died instantly. People felt consoled "Well, at least they did not suffer."

However, someone pointed out that it is no big bonus for them to have died in a flash without knowing what hit them, and without even having an instant to formulate their "last thoughts". It is advantageous for man to have "hirschurei Teshuva" (thoughts of spiritual remorse) in his last moments on earth. It is no Chesed to die without being given that opportunity.

The Ibn Ezra says that the Egyptians may have drowned, and they may not have had more than a moment or two to formulate their last thoughts. But they did have the opportunity to recognize that they were drowning and to perhaps ask "Why is this happening to me?" There were Egyptians who "got it" and figured out that this was not a coincidence. For a split second or maybe two, the Egyptians had a recognition that "I am Hashem" who metes out just punishment. They went to their deaths with those thoughts, and maybe they even had a hirschur of Teshuva. Even that brief opportunity for improvement represents the Good and Kindness (Gadol) that Yisro recognized in Hashem's 'measure for measure' punishment.

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Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Torah Unfettered

The Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei haTorah, perek 8) designates the revelation at Sinai as the ultimate perception of G-d and the absolute cornerstone of our faith. It is obvious that this revelation was a result of it being the occasion for the giving of the Torah, as the truth of Torah rests on this very event.

However, if this is indeed the momentous event in Klal Yisroel's history, we are puzzled greatly. Why has the place where this happened been totally lost to us, and there never was any point made in marking it at all [whereas the crossing into Eretz Yisroel was marked by erecting stones]? Why is this place not at all sacred today, while the place of the akeidah is the most sacred of all places? Shouldn't the place where Torah was given remain eternally sacred, as the Torah itself is?

Furthermore, the exact date on the calendar of mattan Torah is also unclear; it could be the sixth or seventh of Sivan. Pesach is as exact as can be, while Shavous

is a bit murky!? Not only is the date of the giving of the Torah unclear, but the Torah never even mentioned it as the reason for celebrating Shavous! We have to put the pieces together ourselves and connect it.

There is another curious distinction, and that is that the Jewish nation has three "royalties": Monarchy, Priesthood, and Torah. The first two are fixed as regards to the tribe that it is attributed to, in addition to the fact that succession of the child of a monarch or kohein gadol is seen as optimal [and obviously, a kohein's son is a kohein]. Regarding Torah, neither of the two is true; no tribe is meant to have a monopoly on it, nor is progeny succession automatic (see Nedarim 81a.)

We see a perplexing pattern, where Torah, our most sacred possession seems to have the smallest "footprint".

It would therefore appear that our very reasoning is wrong. It is not despite, but because Torah is our ultimate spiritual gift, that it does not have a real physical imprint. The world of mitzvos has a physical context, and therefore it is somewhat limited. It has a time, a place, or an object that serves as its context. Torah, because it is completely spiritual, does not tie itself to any particular time, place or person. It happened to have been given on a particular spot, but that spot does not become its "location". So too regarding the time when it was given, and no person ties Torah down to his family.

This concept can perhaps be broadened to offer some perspective on the turmoil of the last two years. We seem to deal well with ruchniyas when there is a fixed schedule, everything is on track, and there are no surprises. Baruch Hashem we can feel some pride in how well things functioned all these years. But our world turning topsy turvy has greatly weakened our ruchniyas. Shuls are struggling to regain mispallim, shiurim their students, and serious issues of bein adam lachaveiro plague us. This has been a test for us in seeing how strongly our "ruchniyas" world is tied to its physical mooring. If our performance demands a routine to keep it going, then it is tied a lot more to the physical than we are comfortable admitting.

Let us remember, Torah was given in a desert, a place with no fixed coordinates. The dvar Hashem exists in its own right and is not dependent on time, place or person.

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Yitro 5782 - The Peasant And The Princess

In Parashat Yitro, we read the description of the most awesome event in human history: the giving of the Torah by G-d Himself. Fifty days after the children of Israel left Egypt, this incredible revelation of G-d's presence took place. The Torah and commandments given at Mount Sinai reveal the deepest secret to us: how to live a complete life.

The Ten Commandments were given at Mount Sinai; ten commandments that are the core of the Jewish nation's covenant with G-d. At the end of this event, for forty days and nights, G-d began to teach Moses all the commandments, laws, rules and lifestyle directives included in this covenant between G-d and His nation.

The tenth and final of the ten commandments is perhaps the hardest to implement:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or whatever belongs to your neighbor.

(Exodus 20, 14)

Following a series of commandments dealing with recognizing G-d's presence and the proper behavior between people comes a commandment that delves into man's most hidden desires and wishes: "You shall not covet!" Man is commanded not to feel the feeling of desiring something that isn't his, even if it is something very desirable.

This commandment sounds like one that only a select few would be able to apply. Even those who believe in free will and in man's ability to control himself and his behavior still conceive of hidden urges and desires as instinctive, and therefore not subject to restraint.

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra was a poet, philosopher, scientist and great biblical commentator in Spain of the 12th century. In explaining the tremendous significance of this commandment, he offered a wonderful parable:

Many people are amazed at this commandment. They ask, how is it possible for a person not to covet in his heart all beautiful things that appear desirable to him? I will now give you a parable. Note, a peasant of sound mind who sees a beautiful princess will not entertain any covetous thoughts...for he knows that this is an impossibility. This peasant will not think

like the insane who desire to sprout wings and fly to the sky, for it is impossible to do so...So must every intelligent person know that a person does not acquire a beautiful woman or money because of his intelligence or wisdom, but only in accordance with what God has apportioned to him...The intelligent person will therefore neither desire nor covet. Once he knows that God has prohibited his neighbor's wife to him she will be more exalted in his eyes than the princess is in the eyes of the peasant. He will therefore be happy with his lot and will not allow his heart to covet and desire anything which is not his. For he knows that that which God did not want to give him... He will therefore trust in his creator, that is, that his creator will sustain him and do what is right in His sight.

(Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra Exodus 20, 14)

The Ibn Ezra describes a parable drawn from the world of class distinctions. A peasant meets a beautiful princess. Assuming he is of sound mind, he will not develop any desire for her since he knows there is no chance for someone of his status to marry the princess. He does not desire the princess just as he does not desire to have wings so he can fly in the sky.

The moral is just as wonderful as the parable and is relevant today as well. Our property and assets, our partners and the people we are privileged to have present in our lives, are all gifts from G-d. No matter how much we strive to attain something that G-d did not intend for us to have we will not succeed, just as we will never grow wings. In the commandment of "You shall not covet," G-d is asking us to adopt this world view that sees everything we have as G-d given. This will lead us to not coveting something that isn't ours.

The Torah given to us at Mount Sinai teaches us that man's desires and urges are not disconnected from his thoughts and way of life and are the direct result of how he sees the world.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Yitro: Blessings on Miracles

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

Moses' father-in-law Jethro rejoiced when he heard of all that God had done for the Israelites:

"Blessed be God Who rescued you from hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, Who liberated

the people from Egypt's power. Now I know that God is the greatest of all deities: the very thing they plotted came on them!" (Exod. 18:10-11)

The Sages learned from Jethro's blessing that when one sees a place where a miracle occurred for the Jewish people, one should recite the blessing *שְׁעָשָׂה ה' לָנוּ מִפְּעוּלֵי הַיָּד הַזֹּאת* - "Who made miracles for our fathers in this place" (Berachot 54a).

This statement, however, is difficult to understand in light of the fact that Jethro did not say this blessing when visiting the Red Sea, but when he met Moses and the Israelites in the Sinai desert. How could Jethro serve as an example for this brachah, which is only recited when seeing the location where a miracle took place?

Appreciating all Aspects

We need to examine the concept of reciting a blessing over a miracle. Consider two different situations. In case A, a person was headed for the hospital and allowed a neighbor who was not feeling well to come along. The sick neighbor will be thankful for the assistance, but his gratefulness will be tempered by the fact that his benefactor was planning to go there anyway.

In case B, the benefactor, realizing that his neighbor was ill and needed to see a doctor, made a special trip to take him to the hospital. Clearly, the sick neighbor will feel much more thankful in this situation, where the assistance was rendered expressly for him.

If we consider the nature of a miracle, we will realize that it is similar to case B. When we bless God over a miraculous deliverance, we feel completely indebted and thankful to God, as this Divine intervention took place explicitly to help us.

But there is an additional aspect of Divine deliverance which should heighten our sense of gratitude. When an act comes directly from God, not only is the overall goal for the ultimate good, but also all the ramifications and side effects that result from the miracle. We should be appreciative not only for the actual deliverance, but also for any accompanying details. This even includes the location of the miracle, which at some point in time benefited (or will benefit) from the miracle.¹

The Sages learned this from Jethro: a blessing over a miracle should include recognition of the benefits gained from the miracle's accompanying details.

Besides thanking God for the overall rescue ("Who liberated the people from Egypt's power"), Jethro also mentioned the details of that rescue: that they were

saved from the hands of the Egyptian people and from the hands of Pharaoh.²

Furthermore, Jethro called attention to the poetic justice - middah kneged middah - in the way that the Egyptians were punished. "The very thing they plotted came upon them." The Egyptians drowned Jewish babies, so they were punished by drowning in the Red Sea. Here was an additional detail that reflected the ultimate justice of the miracle in all of its aspects.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 243-244)

1 Cf. the explanation given by Rabbi Nissim of Gerona (1320-1376) for the ancient custom of praying at the graves of great scholars and prophets. "Prayer at these locations is more desirable, since bodies that once experienced the Divine shefa [prophetic influence] are buried there." Sparks of holiness can still be found at their gravesites, "since their bones served as vessels for the Divine shefa" (Drashot HaRan, Drush 8).

2 For one can suffer at the hands of a cruel people, even if the king is kind; and one can suffer at the hands of an evil king, even if the people are sympathetic. In Egypt, the Israelites were the victims of cruelty on the part of the people and the king.

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Curious Kiddush Shaylos

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The Torah commands us to declare the sanctity of Shabbos, a mitzvah we fulfill when we recite Kiddush before beginning the meal. Notwithstanding that this mitzvah appears very clear cut, it sometimes involves interesting shaylos.

We recite Kiddush before the seudah at night and also Shabbos morning. The Torah mitzvah of Kiddush is fulfilled at night and has two brachos, one is on the wine and the other is the special Kiddush bracha. The daytime Kiddush was instituted by Chazal to demonstrate the specialness of Shabbos meals – therefore, we drink a cup of wine immediately before the meals begin. (The pesukim that we recite before this Kiddush are a later minhag, presumably to emphasize that we are reciting Kiddush.)

One is forbidden to eat or drink before reciting Kiddush. The poskim dispute whether an ill or weak person who eats before davening should make Kiddush before doing so. There is also a dispute whether a woman makes Kiddush before eating

breakfast on Shabbos morning, or whether she does not need to make Kiddush until she eats later with her husband.

Someone who failed to recite the full Kiddush at night, for whatever reason, must recite it before or during one of the Shabbos day meals (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 271:8). We will discuss later an interesting application of this rule.

You can fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush either by reciting it yourself or hearing it from someone who is reciting it. When the head of household recites Kiddush, he does so for everyone at the table. Everyone is yotzei Kiddush, he by reciting it and, everyone else, by hearing it. This is referred to as the baal habayis being "motzi" the others in their mitzvah. Several requirements must be met in order to fulfill the mitzvah through hearing someone else's Kiddush. One of the requirements is that the person reciting Kiddush must be obligated in the mitzvah. For this reason, only an adult can be motzi other adults.

When I was twelve years old, I once spent Shabbos with my widowed grandmother, a"h. She wanted me, as the "man" of the house, to recite Kiddush, and I was happy to oblige. Years later, it occurred to me that my recital did not fulfill her obligation to fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush, since I was under bar mitzvah at the time.

HEARING KIDDUSH

The people fulfilling the mitzvah must hear the Kiddush. Therefore, if the baal habayis mumbles inaudibly, they do not fulfill the mitzvah. Trying to solve this problem can sometimes create shalom bayis issues or hurt someone's feelings. A rav's direction may be very helpful.

Someone once asked me the following shaylah. His father-in-law recited Kiddush in a very garbled manner. Even if his father-in-law, indeed, recited a full Kiddush, he (the son-in-law) did not hear enough to be yotzei. How could he fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush without hurting anyone's feelings?

I proposed two possible suggestions. One was to find some practical excuse why he (the son-in-law) should recite his own Kiddush after his father-in-law (such as, this is his personal custom). Alternatively, if this is not a practical solution, he and his wife could discreetly make Kiddush in their own room, beforehand. (Of course, this solution will not help when their children get older.) Later in this article, we will discuss whether one can recite Kiddush in one room and eat in another.

KEEP THEM IN MIND

It is necessary that the person making Kiddush intend to be motzi those who want to fulfill the mitzvah, and they must have intent to fulfill the mitzvah with his recital. This leads us to a curious situation that once happened to me.

The hosts where we were eating honored me to recite Kiddush first – or so I thought. I assumed that I was reciting Kiddush for myself, and that the baal habayis would then recite Kiddush for his family. However, upon completing my Kiddush, it became clear that the family had assumed that I had made Kiddush for them, as well. But since this was not my intention, they were not yotzei.

It turned out that the head of household was embarrassed to recite Kiddush in my presence. Under the unusual circumstances, I may well have ended up reciting Kiddush twice, one right after the other, because the family still needed someone to be motzi them in Kiddush. Thus, if the baal habayis was still reluctant to recite Kiddush, I could have recited it a second time for them, because of the concept “Yatza motzi,” “someone who has already fulfilled the mitzvah may recite Kiddush, another time, for someone who has not yet fulfilled it.”

HOW CAN I RECITE KIDDUSH WHEN I HAVE ALREADY PERFORMED THE MITZVAH?

One may recite a birkas hamitzvah (a bracha on a mitzvah) on behalf of another person (presuming that we are both obligated to fulfill this mitzvah), even if one is not presently fulfilling this mitzvah, because of the principle “kol Yisroel areivim zeh lazeh,” “all Jews are responsible for one another,” (Rosh Hashanah 29a). This concept of “areivus” means that, since I am responsible to help another Jew observe mitzvos, his responsibility to fulfill a particular mitzvah is also my mitzvah. Since I am responsible to see that my fellow Jew makes Kiddush, I can recite the Kiddush bracha on his behalf. For this same reason, I may blow shofar in a shul and recite the brachos for other people, even if I fulfilled the mitzvah of shofar earlier.

MAKING KIDDUSH WHEN I WILL FULFILL THE MITZVAH LATER

I was once asked the following shaylah. Mr. Hirsch was hospitalized, and his wife was unable to make Kiddush for her family. Mr. Goldberg, one of the Hirsch’s neighbors, asked whether he could make Kiddush for the Hirsch family on his way home from shul, and then go home and make Kiddush for his own

family. I told him that this was perfectly acceptable. However, if he was not planning to eat anything at the Hirsch residence, he should not drink the Kiddush wine but, instead, ask one of the Hirsch adults to drink most of a revi’is (about one-and-a-half ounces) from the cup (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 273:4; 271:13). I will explain, shortly, why Mr. Goldberg should not drink from the Hirsch goblet.

This seems strange. How can Mr. Goldberg recite “borei pri hagafen” and not drink any wine?

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BRACHOS

The answer to this question needs an introduction. It is true that one cannot recite a bracha on food or fragrance (birkas ha’ne’henin) for someone else’s benefit, unless he is anyway making that bracha for himself. This is because the other person is not fulfilling any obligatory mitzvah by reciting these brachos. He needs to recite a bracha because he is gaining benefit, not because he is obligated to perform a mitzvah. Therefore, the rule of areivus does not apply in this case. Because the other person has no obligation to recite a bracha, someone else does not share in his mitzvah and cannot make the bracha on his behalf.

However, the bracha on Kiddush wine is different, because it is considered part of the obligatory mitzvah of Kiddush (Rosh Hashanah 29a). Therefore, Mr. Goldberg can make borei pri hagafen for the Hirsches, even though he is not drinking any wine. (It should be noted that it is disputed whether this halacha is true for the daytime Kiddush.)

AN INTERESTING APPLICATION

Sometimes one has guests for a Shabbos daytime meal who have not yet fulfilled the mitzvah of Kiddush this Shabbos. (A common application is when a guest is not yet observant.) This provides one with an opportunity to perform the additional mitzvah (in addition to exposing one’s guests to Shabbos) of Kiddush. As explained above, the normal daytime Kiddush is not a replacement for the night Kiddush. Therefore, reciting the daytime Kiddush will not help our not-yet-observant lunch guests fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush this Shabbos. How can one alleviate the situation?

Since Kiddush can be recited the entire Shabbos day, one should recite both brachos of the Friday night Kiddush before the daytime meal, on behalf of his guests. Although he has already fulfilled the mitzvah, he can still be motzi his guests. However, in order to

do so, he must explain to them that hearing Kiddush is a mitzvah, and that they should listen to him with the intent to fulfill the mitzvah. (It is always a good idea to do this, so that one's guests know to fulfill the mitzvah.)

WHY COULDN'T MR. GOLDBERG DRINK THE CUP OF WINE?

Before answering this question, we need to explain the concept of Ein Kiddush ela birkom seudah, "Kiddush must be recited in the place that one will be eating a meal" (Pesachim 101a).

The Gemara relates the following story. One Friday evening, Rabba made Kiddush. Although his disciple Abaye was present, Abaye planned to eat his Shabbos meal in his own lodgings. Rabba urged Abaye to "taste something" before he left, voicing concern that the light in Abaye's lodging might extinguish before his arrival, making it impossible to make Kiddush there. (I presume that Abaye was unable to locate his wine in the dark.) Rabba pointed out that Abaye would not be yotzei with the Kiddush he just heard unless he ate something at Rabba's house because of Ein Kiddush ela birkom seudah (Pesachim 101a).

This halacha is derived from the pasuk, Vekarasa laShabbos oneg (Yeshayahu 58:13), which Chazal midrashically interpret to mean, "In the place where you declare the Kiddush of Shabbos, you should also celebrate your Shabbos meal" (Rashbam and Tosafos ad loc.). From this we derive that one must eat a meal in the place that one recites Kiddush.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED THE SAME PLACE?

The Gemara rules that someone fulfills the mitzvah of Kiddush if he recited (or heard) Kiddush in one part of a large room and ate in a different part of the room, since the entire room is considered the same place. Some poskim contend that one should not move to a different part of the house between making Kiddush and eating, unless he knew at the time of Kiddush that he might do this (Magen Avraham 273:1; Mishnah Berurah 273:3). Even this should be done only under extenuating circumstances (see Biur Halacha 273:1). However, if one recited Kiddush in one building and then went to a different building without eating, one certainly did not fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush and must recite (or hear) it again. This is why Mr. Goldberg could not drink the Hirsch's wine. Since he had no intent to eat at the Hirsch's house, he could not fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush there. Therefore, he also couldn't drink the wine, since one cannot drink before fulfilling the mitzvah of Kiddush. (According

to most, but not all, poskim, Mr. Goldberg has another option: he could drink the Kiddush and then another cup of wine. This would be considered Kiddush birkom seudah.)

KIDDUSH IN SHUL

These two concepts (areivus and ein Kiddush ela birkom seudah) are the basis of the custom that the chazzan recites Kiddush in shul Friday evening, without drinking the cup of wine.

Why is Kiddush recited in shul at the end of Friday evening davening?

The Gemara mentions that, in its time, guests often stayed and ate their Shabbos meals in rooms attached to the shul, and someone recited Kiddush in shul on their behalf. Since the guests were eating in the same building, it was considered Kiddush birkom seudah and they fulfilled their mitzvah.

However, the chazzan who makes Kiddush does not fulfill his mitzvah, since he is eating his meal at his house, which is in a different building. Therefore, he should not drink the Kiddush wine. Instead, it should be drunk by a guest eating in the building, and, if there are no guests, the cup is drunk by children who are permitted to drink or eat before Kiddush. (Although, in general, children should be taught to keep mitzvos like adults, there is no requirement of chinuch in this case, a topic to discuss in a different article.)

ANOTHER INTERESTING SHAYLAH

I was once asked the following question by someone who was a guest at a Shabbos bar mitzvah:

"The baal simcha made Kiddush in the shul immediately after davening, but the reception was conducted in the shul's social hall. Is this an acceptable way to fulfill the mitzvah?"

Based on the above discussion, we can answer this question. If the social hall was in a different building, they would need to recite Kiddush again in the social hall. Assuming the social hall where they would be eating was in the same building as the Kiddush, this was acceptable, under extenuating circumstances. It would be preferable that they follow a different procedure, such as having Kiddush made in the social hall.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED A MEAL?

Rabba's words ("taste something") imply that one fulfills Kiddush without necessarily eating a full meal, notwithstanding the Gemara's statement that one must eat a meal where he recites Kiddush. The Geonim explain that one must begin his meal where he said Kiddush, either by eating some bread or drinking

wine, and this is quoted in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 273:5). The Geonim explicitly state that one does not fulfill Kiddush birkom seudah by eating only fruit. Although some poskim disagree, arguing that one fulfills Kiddush birkom seudah by eating fruit (Shiltei Hagiborim, Pesachim 20a:1, quoting Riaz, as explained by Magen Avraham 273:11), the accepted practice does not follow this opinion (Magen Avraham 273:11; Shu"t Ein Yitzchak #12).

Magen Avraham rules that one fulfills Kiddush birkom seudah by eating a kezayis-sized piece of mezonos (the same size piece that requires an "al hamichyah" blessing afterwards), and this is the prevalent practice followed on Shabbos morning, when people often make Kiddush and then eat pastry or crackers. The poskim dispute whether drinking

wine fulfills Kiddush birkom seudah (see Rabbi Akiva Eiger to 273:5 and Mishnah Berurah 273:26). Some people follow the practice of the Vilna Gaon to recite Kiddush only immediately before the meal they are eating for the Shabbos seudah (see Biur Halacha and Rabbi Akiva Eiger to 273:5). In his opinion, the concept of Vekarasa laShabbos oneg means that one should declare the Kiddush of Shabbos, specifically, at the time that one celebrates the Shabbos meal.

Conclusion

Kiddush sets the tone of the whole Shabbos meal. In the midst of remembering the details and requirements of this mitzvah, we should never forget to focus, also, on the beauty of Shabbos and the wonderful opportunity we are given to sanctify it verbally, day and night!

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה