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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON YISRO - 5784

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

The Dual Path to Avodas Hashem

Chazal teach us that the process necessary for a person to convert to become Jewish is derived from the events that preceded the experience. Just as our ancestors became endowed with קדושת ישראל at the time of התורה, so too in subsequent generations one enters a life of תורה and מצוה by undergoing a similar process. There are three components of the גר process for a man and two for a woman. A man receives a מילה, or if previously circumcised undergoes the halachic procedure of הטפת דם ברית – a small drawing of blood as a substitute for an actual ברית. In addition, both a man and a woman immerse in the מקוה and bring a קרבן in the days of the בית המקדש.

The men replicates the "גריות" of בני ישראל prior to התורה. The men performed מילה immediately before leaving מצרים, as the תורה relates in פרשת בא, since otherwise they would not have been permitted to participate in קרבן פסח. As a preparation for התורה everyone immersed in the מקוה. One opinion in Chazal derives this from the פרשת יתרו in פסוק that discusses immersing their clothing and certainly themselves. Others suggest it is learned from קרבנות פרשת משפטים that relate the blood of קרבנות being sprinkled on the people which always is accompanied by immersion in a מקוה. The obligation to offer a קרבן during the time of the בית המקדש is patterned after the special קרבנות that were offered accompanying מעמד הר סיני, as they appear in פרשת משפטים. Why are these three procedures ones that encapsulate the גריות process?

The זכור and שמירת שבת elaborates on the two distinct terms that are used to describe the observance of "זכור" and שבת. "זכור" refers specifically to קידוש and also encompasses all the positive actions performed to designate שבת as a holy day. שמור, which refers to refraining from מלאכה, speaks to the prohibitions that apply on שבת. These two dimensions of שבת emanate from the two dimensions of our relationship with ה'. We are commanded to simultaneously love and be in awe of ה'. Love expresses itself by actions, the positive מצוות that bring us closer to ה'. Awe requires us to step back and refrain from what ה' commands us to refrain from. זכור and שמור not only define מצוות and מצוות עשה which is comprised of עבודת ה' but describe our entire relationship with ה'. When we entered a covenant with ה' at הר סיני, and when a prospective convert is about to join that covenant, it is a dual commitment to the ideals of acting and refraining, יראה and אהבה, that make up the essence of our relationship with ה'.

Most מצוות are either an expression of either אהבה or יראה, but טבילה, and קרבן are a fusion of both. In many areas, הלכה equates an ערל – one who does

not have a ברית – to one who is טמא. The states of ערל and טמא are negative spiritual ones that must be overcome before one can join the ה'. יראה ה' necessitates distancing oneself and refraining from the aspects of טומאה that are antithetical to the מילה. מילה and קדושת ישראל are not only responses to negativity but also lead us on a path of positive spiritual growth through טהרה and קדושה. We recite a ברכה following a ברית highlighting that we are performing an "אות ברית קודש" – a sign of a holy covenant. ברית מילה symbolizes a distancing from the influences of spiritual negativity and simultaneously a commitment to spiritual positivity. Similarly, a מקוה removes impurity and endows with holiness. It is the vehicle of the מקוה that enables the מילה to attain the degree of sanctity necessary to enter the גר. So too, the prospective גר and גר purify themselves from the impurities that surround them and sanctify themselves in the water of the מקוה. Both מילה and טבילה are vehicles for attaining יראה ה' and אהבת ה' and are the perfect way to transition into a life of both aspects of ה'.

The world of קרבנות is also merging of אהבה and יראה. The בית המקדש is simultaneously a place of יראה, as the מורא המקדש מצוה requires, and a place to express our great love for ה' as we become closer to Him by offering a gift of love. The גר describes how one aspect of קרבנות is that it is a way to draw us away from idolatry. Yet the גר emphasizes that קרבנות will play a major role in עבודה זרה long after עבודה זרה is eradicated from the world. קרבנות are positive מצוות קדושה that connect us to ה'. As the prospective גר offers his קרבן, he is following in the footsteps of those who stood at הר סיני. He is joining the very people who offered קרבנות thereby distancing themselves from the idolatrous world that surrounded them. The גר is also connecting to ה' as he brings his first gift of love thereby embarking on a lifetime of אהבה and יראה. For both the born Jew and the גר, the dual goals of אהבה and יראה are the same. The entire Jewish people continue its journey to reach the heights of ה' אהבת ה' and יראה ה'.

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from: **Rabbi Yisrocher Frand** ryfrand@torah.org ravfrand@torah.org

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subject: Rav Frand - Passion is Necessary – Within Limits

Parshas Yisro

Passion is Necessary – Within Limits

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yisrocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion:

#1368 Davening For Personal Needs on Shabbos? Good Shabbos!

Passion is Necessary – Within Limits

The pasuk says "Mt. Sinai was smoking in its entirety because Hashem had descended upon it in the fire; its smoke ascended like the smoke of the kiln, and the entire mountain shuddered exceedingly." (Shemos 19:18). It is hard for us to picture or even imagine what Har Sinai looked like at the time of Matan Torah. But the Torah says that the entire mountain was smoking. It looked like the mountain was on fire.

There is a famous Gemara (Shabbos 88a) regarding the pasuk "...vayisatzvu b'sachtis hahor" (and they stood underneath the mountain) (Shemos 19:17). The Gemara says that this pasuk teaches "shekofo Hakodesh Baruch Hu aleihem es har k'gigis" (that the Almighty covered them with the mountain as though it were an overturned vat) and He said to them "im atem mekablim Hatorah mutav, v'im lav, shom tehay kevuraschem" (If you accept the Torah, good, but if not, there will be your burial.)

In effect, the Ribono shel Olam put a gun to our heads and made us an offer we could not refuse. Tosfos there asks a famous question: Klal Yisrael already proclaimed "Na'aseh" (We will do) before even hearing (nishma) what was written in the Torah. Why, then, was it necessary to "force them" to accept the Torah when they already willingly accepted it? Tosfos answers that they were so frightened when they saw the great fire surrounding Har Sinai that they would have retracted their previous commitment had Hashem

not “kafah aleihem har k’gigis” (turned the mountain over them like an upturned vat).

Rav Shmuel Rozovsky asks a question on this answer of Tosfos: If the only reason why it was necessary to set up a situation of “kafah aleihem har k’gigis” was because they saw the great fire, then why did Hashem make the great fire in the first place? Why didn’t He just allow the mountain to remain with its normal appearance and avoid the need for “kafah aleihem har k’gigis?”

The answer is that it was necessary for Kabalas Hatorah to take place with fire surrounding the mountain. Why is that? I read the following statement (translated from the original Yiddish) made by the Chofetz Chaim:

In this world, there are all sorts of ‘groups,’ including Litvish, Chassidish, Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Modern Orthodox, Chareidi, Mizrachi, Agudah – all sorts of stripes. There are all kinds of head coverings: Velvet yarmulka, black yarmulka, leather yarmulka, knitted yarmulka; sheitel, tichel, all sorts of groups. The Chofetz Chaim said that all this is only “down here.”

However, in the world to come, the world of truth, such groups do not exist. There are only five groups in the olam haemes: The boiling, the warm, the lukewarm, the cold, and the frozen. The Chofetz Chaim said that whatever group you belong to, you need to strive to be passionate. Whatever group you belong to, you need to be passionate about your affiliation. We learn that from Kabalas Hatorah because Kabalas Hatorah came about through fire. That is why it was necessary to give the Torah through a mountain on fire. That is how Rav Shmuel Rozovsky’s question is answered. There had to be fire because Kabalas Hatorah set the tone. There is a concept called “k’nesinasa” (as it was given). Torah must be learned and Torah must be observed “like it was given.” The Torah was given with fire because our commitment to and passion for Torah must be fiery!

This is not the only aspect of Kabalas Hatorah that we need to imitate. Passion for Torah is very important. We must engage in Torah with fire. However, like everything else in Yiddishkeit, there is a time and place for everything. Sometimes fire and passion need to be restrained. How do we see that? The Torah also says by Kabalas Hatorah, “And you shall set boundaries around it for the people, saying ‘Guard yourself from ascending the mountain or touching its edge; whoever touches the mountain shall surely die.’” (Shemos 19:12). There was a requirement at the time of Kabalas Hatorah that boundaries be established. If someone advanced beyond his place, “the one who touched the mountain shall die.” Moshe had his place where he was allowed to advance. Aharon had his place where he was allowed to advance. The Kohanim had their place, and the nation had their place.

Chazal say that as important as passion is for Judaism, it is also important to not go overboard. Each person needs to be “makir es mekomo” (recognize his place). It is the nature of people to not be satisfied with limitations and to feel “No. I want more!”

An interesting Klei Chemda asks on a Medrash: The Medrash says that the Ribono shel Olam went to all the nations of the world and offered them the Torah. They inquired: What is written in it? Some nations were turned off and refused to accept the Torah because of “Thou shall not commit adultery.” Others could not handle “Thou shall not murder.” Others rejected the Torah because of “Thou shall not steal.”

The Klei Chemda asks that it doesn’t seem fair. All the nations were seemingly encouraged to reject the Torah based on Hashem citing to them the Torah requirement that most challenged their natural instincts. Why did Hashem not similarly challenge Klal Yisrael. The Klei Chemda answers: Hashem did challenge Klal Yisrael with a mitzva that goes against our most basic inclinations: However, we are not intrinsically challenged by the prohibitions of murder, adultery, or theft. Our challenge is to accept boundaries and limitations upon ourselves. This is the test with which He challenged us: Do not cross the boundaries set up for you.

A Jew always wants more. He wants to get closer to the mountain. If I have a passion for Torah, I want to take it further. However, we must know that

every person has his place. A person cannot be successful in Torah – or in Yiddishkeit for that matter – unless he is makir es mekomo.

The Gemara says (Bava Kama 117a) that Rav Kahana had trouble with the government so Rav told him to leave Bavel and go to Eretz Yisrael. Rav further warned him, however, that he should go learn in Rabi Yochanan’s yeshiva, but not ask Rabi Yochanan any questions for seven years! (Rav felt that Rav Kahana, as a newcomer in that environment, should know his place and not actively participate in the give and take of the lessons until he fully grasped the style of Rabi Yochanan’s Torah lectures.) The Gemara says that Reish Lakish was saying over the shiur and Rav Kahana started asking him questions from all over Shas.

The Gemara says that Reish Lakish told Rabi Yochanan “A Lion has come up from Bavel” (indicating the presence of a great Babylonian Torah scholar in their yeshiva). Rav Kahana had been sitting near the back, in the seventh row of students. After hearing Reish Lakish’s report that “A Lion has come up from Bavel,” they moved him to the first row.

Rabi Yochanan said his first shiur and Rav Kahana said nothing. Rav Yochanan, having expected more challenge from this “lion who came up from Bavel” remarked, “This is not a lion that came up, it is a fox! Put him in the second row.” During the next shiur, again Rav Kahana was silent. He was demoted to the third row. Ultimately, as the pattern continued, he was placed all the way back in the seventh row again – all because Rav had instructed him: Don’t ask. It is not your place.

The Gemara says that the shame of being demoted seven rows was equivalent to waiting seven years and he then started participating in the shiurim and asking his penetrating questions.

I remember when I first became a rebbi in Yeshivas Ner Yisrael. It is every bochurs’ dream to be present at a Hanhala meeting (of the yeshiva leadership and rabbeyim). After many years as a student in Ner Israel, I went to my first Hanhala meeting. Who was there? The Rosh Yeshiva (Rav Ruderman) was there. Rav Weinberg was there. Rav Kulefsky was there. Rav Nussbaum was there. They were all my rebbeim. I don’t think I opened my mouth for three years. I didn’t wait seven years, but I should open my mouth with my little opinion in front of all my teachers and mentors? That was not my place at that time. I was afraid. “Who are you?” They remembered me from when I was fifteen years old. One must be makir es mekomo.

It could be that this provides a connection between the parsha and the haftorah. The haftorah of Parshas Yisro (Yeshaya 6) includes the vision of the navi’s beholding the Heavenly vision of the Divine throne of glory. This is a clear connection to the vision of Heaven that occurred at the time of Kabalas Hatorah.

However, I saw in the sefer Meorei Ha’esh that there is a second connection to the parsha. The Haftorah begins with the words “In the year of the death of King Uziyahu...” (Yeshaya 6:1). Uziyahu was one of the kings of Yehudah. He was a great king who “did that which was proper in the eyes of Hashem.” He fought the Plishtim and he was victorious in battles. He improved Yerushalayim and he improved Eretz Yisrael. He was terrific. Chazal say on the pasuk “In the year of the death of King Uziyahu...” that Uziyahu did not die. What does it mean “in the year of the death of King Uziyahu...”? The Medrash says that he became afflicted with tzaraas. How did he get tzaraas? We learn in Divrei Hayamim that after all of his aforementioned accomplishments, he said to himself “It is only right that the king does the avodah in the Beis Hamikdash for the King of Kings.”

Consequently, he decided to personally bring a ketores offering to the Ribono shel Olam. (Divrei Hayomim II 26:19-21)

King Uziyahu was so passionate about his Yiddishkeit that he felt he wanted to personally offer this special incense offering. The fact that the Torah teaches “The zar (non-kohen) who comes too close will die” (Bamidbar 18:7) did not cause him pause. He felt that referred to regular Jews, not to the king. Indeed, there was some halachic precedence for his error. The halacha is that no one is allowed to sit in the courtyard of the Beis Hamikdash other than kings of the Davidic dynasty. Thus, he reasoned, kings of Judea are different.

Therefore, he took a pan of ketores and started walking into the Heichal. He was followed by Azaryahu the Kohen Gadol and with him there were another eighty Kohanim. They meet Uziyahu and Azaryahu said to Uziyahu “Where do you think you are going? What you are doing is reserved for Kohanim. Leave immediately!” Uziyahu got very angry at them and was about to hit them with the pan of ketores. At that moment, tzaraas broke out on the middle of his forehead.

He ran out. A metzorah is not allowed to be in the Beis Hamikdash. What happened to Uziyahu? Why did he do this? The Alter from Slabodka says that just as we know that “ha’ahava mekalkeles es hashurah” (love spoils propriety) and “ha’sinah mekalkeles es hashurah” (hatred spoils propriety), so too, passion can also blind a person. Uziyahu’s passion to do the Avodah and to serve the Ribono shel Olam literally corrupted his ability to learn the pasuk “The stranger who draws close will die.” Indeed, there was to be no exception – even the king!

So, in spite of the fact that Har Sinai had to be entirely consumed with smoke and fire, and in spite of the fact that it scared the people and it necessitated holding the mountain above them like an inverted tub, there is also a counter balance to that – “v’higbalta es ha’am saviv...” (and you should set boundaries around the mountain...) No matter how passionate a person is, he needs to recognize his place. Yiddishkeit is not egalitarian. Today, society thinks “everyone is the same.” Men are the same. Women are the same. All is the same. No. There are Kohanim, there are Leviim, there are Yisraelim, there are men, there are women, there are adults there are minors. There are different gradations and different roles.

The introduction to receiving the Torah was – you shall place boundaries around the mountain. Know your place. The passion of the fire must be balanced with the boundaries placed around the mountain.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
 Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Yisro is provided below: # 042 – Kiddush: To Sit or Not to Sit # 085 – Christianity in Halacha # 133 – Honoring In-Laws # 180 – The Mitzvah of Kiddush for Men and Women # 226 – The Fearless Judge: A Difficult Task # 270 – Parental Wishes vs. Staying in Israel # 316 – The Reading of the “Aseres Hadibros” # 360 – Dolls and Statues: Is There An Avodah Zarah Problem? # 404 – Making a Bracha on a Makom Neis # 448 – Lo Sachmod # 492 – Eating Before Kiddush # 536 – Newspapers on Shabbos # 580 – Women and Havdalah # 624 – Resting Your Animal on the Shabbos # 668 – Kiddush B’mkom Seudah # 712 – The Kiddush Club # 756 – The Kosel Video Camera # 800 – Avoda Zara and The Jewish Jeweler # 844 – Yisro and Birchas Hagomel # 888 – What Should It Be – Hello or Shalom? # 932 – Saying The Shem Hashem While Learning – Yes or No? # 975 – Kiddush on Wine: Absolutely Necessary? #1019 – Unnecessary Brachos #1063 – Ma’aris Ayin: The Power Lunch In A Treife Restaurant #1106 – Must You Treat Your Father-in-Law Like Your Father? #1149 – Kiddush Shabbos Day – On What? What Do You Say? #1192 – I Keep 72 Minutes; You Keep 45 – Can You Do Melacha for Me? #1236 – “I Want Your House and I’ll Make You an Offer You Can’t Refuse”: Muttar or Assur? #1280 – The Shul Kiddish Shabbos Monring: Two Interesting Shailos #1281 – Kiddush Shabbos Day – Must Everyone Drink the Wine? #1324 – Saying Kaddish: All Aveilim Together or Each One Individually on a Rotating Basis? #1368 – Davening For Personal Needs on Shabbos? #1412 – Must One Keep Their Father’s Minhagim or What Bracha Do You Make on Potatoes #1456 – I Haven’t Accepted Shabbos Yet – May I Make Kiddush For You? #1543 – Can You Get Your Corona Vaccine on Shabbos? #1586 – Learning the Third Perek of Moed Katan – Is There a Problem? #1624 – Must You Honor Your Mother-in-Law? A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.
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 from: Team TorahAnytime <info@torahanytime.com>

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TheTorahAnyTimes

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Standing With You

At the conclusion of the Second World War, a small group of non-Jewish British intellectuals made an extraordinary decision. They chose to convert to Judaism.

Their reasoning was stark and unsentimental. History, they believed, had issued a warning: if one does not actively stand on the side of moral truth, one will eventually become complicit in its negation. They had witnessed how Germany, regarded as the most cultured and enlightened nation in Europe, descended within a few short years into unprecedented barbarism. Faced with that reality, they resolved not merely to admire Jewish survival from a distance, but to cast their lot with the Jewish people themselves. Rashi, commenting on the opening words of Parashat Yisro—“And Yisro heard”—asks the obvious question. What did Yisro hear that compelled him to come? The answer, as the Gemara notes, is striking. Yitro heard of the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek (Zevachim 116a). Why these two events, of all the miracles surrounding the Exodus?

Amalek represents a hatred that is irrational, instinctive, and visceral. Its animosity toward the Jewish people is not ideological or strategic, but elemental. It is antisemitism as reflex, as natural as breathing. Yet not everyone is born an Amalek. Most people inhabit the vast moral middle: neither Jew nor Jew-hater, neither ally nor enemy, waiting, consciously or not, to be pulled in one direction or the other.

Yisro understood something profound. Inspiration that is not acted upon does not simply fade; it decays.

Left unattended, moral awakening curdles into cynicism, disbelief, and ultimately revulsion. He recognized that if he failed to respond decisively to the overwhelming clarity of the sea splitting before the eyes of the world, he too would drift toward the coldness of Amalek, and move toward moral detachment, denial, and hostility. Conversion, for Yisro, was not sentiment; it was urgency.

Anyone paying attention to contemporary events cannot fail to notice the bitter irony of much of the world’s accusation that Israel is committing genocide. The very concept of genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish lawyer, to give language to the horrors of the Nazi extermination of the Jews. Among the judges deliberating interim measures in the case concerning Gaza, only one—Justice Julia Sebutinde of Uganda—rejected all proposed provisional measures, citing the absence of credible evidence of genocidal intent on Israel’s part.

Genocide is defined by intent: the deliberate aim to obliterate a people. It is not synonymous with the tragic civilian casualties that accompany urban warfare, especially when civilians are deliberately used as human shields by terrorist regimes. The chant “From the River to the Sea,” by contrast, is an unambiguous call for the erasure of a nation.

And yet, amid the noise and distortion, moments of moral clarity still emerge. The Jewish people may never have had many friends, but when someone—like Yisro—steps forward and declares, “I stand with you,” it does more than encourage.

It restores faith in human conscience itself.

 from: Team TorahAnytime <info@torahanytime.com>

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subject: Your TorahAnyTimes Parashat Yitro is here!

TheTorahAnyTimes

Rabbi Mordechai Becher

Climbing the Mountain

The Imrei Emes cites a teaching in the name of the Kotzker Rebbe, Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, on the verse describing the revelation at Mount Sinai. Hashem warns the Jewish people:

“Hishamru lachem alos bahar u’negoa bi’katzeihu—Be exceedingly careful not to ascend the mountain, nor to touch even its edge. “Kol hanogea bahar mos yumas—Whoever touches the mountain shall surely die” (Shemos 19:12).

On a simple level, the meaning is clear and straightforward. The sanctity of Sinai was absolute. The people were forbidden not only from ascending the mountain, but even from brushing against its perimeter. Any violation, even at the margins, carried fatal consequence.

But the Kotzker Rebbe read the verse in a radically different way. He explained it not as a prohibition, but as a challenge. If you wish to ascend the mountain—if you aspire to Sinai—then do not content yourself with merely touching the edges. Hishamru lachem: beware of superficial engagement. Alos bahar u’negoa bi’katzeihu: if all you are doing is grazing the margins, that is empty, even pathetic. True ascent demands total commitment.

Kol hanogea bahar mos yumas— to truly touch the mountain, to truly encounter Sinai, requires readiness for complete self-investment, even self-sacrifice. Not literally to die, but to give oneself over entirely.

This is not pschat; it is not the plain meaning of the verse. But it is profoundly beautiful. What the Kotzker is teaching is that Sinai is not a historical location. Sinai is any mitzvah. It is Torah study. It is chesed. It is avodas Hashem in all its forms. As the Chovos HaLevavos teaches, virtually any permissible act can become a mitzvah depending on one’s kavanah. Intention transforms action.

But transformation only occurs when one is fully present. If I am merely “touching the edge”—half-engaged, distracted, hedging my commitment—I receive nothing. Sinai demands immersion. It demands wholeness. It demands that I bring my entire self into the experience.

That is the Kotzker’s warning: do not dare approach holiness tentatively. If you want the mountain, you must give your life to it—not in martyrdom, but in meaning. And the key to sustaining such total engagement is simcha.

There is a well-known story about Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, the rebbe of the Kotzker. Before he became a rebbe, and even before he became a pharmacist, Rav Simcha Bunim served as the manager, effectively the CEO, of a lumber enterprise in Danzig. One day, he was walking along the riverbank with several students when one of them slipped in the mud and was swept into the river by the current. None of them could swim; swimming simply was not part of nineteenth-century Polish Hasidic life.

As the man was being carried away, the group ran helplessly along the riverbank, unable to intervene. Suddenly, Rav Simcha Bunim called out to him in Yiddish, “Give my regards to the Leviathan.” It sounded absurd. A man is drowning, and you send greetings to the mythical sea creature? It was the last thing anyone expected, and it was utterly impractical.

But something extraordinary happened. The man in the water smiled. That moment of levity pierced his despair. He began thrashing again, fighting the current with renewed energy, managing to maneuver himself close enough to the bank for the others to pull him out. His life was saved.

Later, the chassidim asked Rav Simcha Bunim what he had been thinking.

He explained by quoting the verse in Isaiah (55:12): “Ki b’simcha tetze’u.”

We usually translate it as “You shall go out with joy.” But Rav Simcha Bunim read it literally: With simcha, you can get out of anything.

“All I saw on his face,” he said, “was yei’ush, despair. If I could inject even a moment of simcha, I knew it would shift his inner state. One thought would spark another, his body would follow his mind, and he would save himself.” And he did.

This insight reaches far beyond that riverbank. Simcha is not a superficial emotion; it is a cognitive and spiritual force. In modern terms, simcha moves us out of compulsive dopamine-driven distraction and into a state of meaning, reflection, and flow; what psychologists might associate with serotonin and sustained engagement. That is Sinai. Not touching the edge, but climbing the mountain with joy, wholeness, and presence.

from: [Ira Zlotowitz Iraz@klalgovoa.org](mailto:Ira.Zlotowitz@klalgovoa.org) date: Feb 5, 2026, 7:04 PM
subject: Tidbits for Parashas Yisro 5786

During Kerias HaTorah of Parashas Yisro, the minhag of many Ashkenazic congregations is to stand when the Aseres HaDibros are read. Most Sephardic congregations are particular not to follow this practice..

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Menachos 27 • Yerushalmi: Beitzah 17 • Mishnah Yomis: Temurah 5:3-4 • Oraysa (coming week): Yevamos 28a-30a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 65:9-15..

Summaries YISRO: Yisro arrives at the Jews' encampment along with Moshe's family • Moshe greets him in distinguished fashion; Yisro praises Hashem • Yisro witnesses Moshe's wearying schedule and suggests a system of judges • Moshe implements Yisro's system • Moshe escorts Yisro as he leaves • The Jews arrive at Har Sinai • Moshe ascends the mountain • Moshe prophetically tells Bnei Yisrael that they are the chosen nation and must actualize their potential • Bnei Yisrael respond by saying “Na’aseh” • Hashem tells Moshe that He will reveal Himself to ensure the nation's eternal faith • Three days of preparation for the revelation • Moshe sets boundaries around the mountain • Hashem's glory descends on Har Sinai in an awe-inspiring manner • Moshe warns Bnei Yisrael not to approach the mountain • The Aseres HaDibros - See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvos [first two spoken by Hashem, the remaining eight by Moshe] • This event elicits intense fear and trembling • Prohibition against making idols • Laws regarding construction and ascension of the altar

Haftarah: The Parashah discusses Kabbalas HaTorah, the awesome event at Har Sinai, that was an amazing spectacle of the glory of Hashem. The Navi Yeshaya relates the great heavenly spectacle he saw in his nevuah. (Yeshaya 6:1)

Taryag Parashas Yisro: 72 Pesukim • 3 Obligations • 14 Prohibitions 1) Recognize and believe in Hashem's existence and His eternal omnipotence. 2) Do not believe in any other godly power. 3) Do not form or commission the formation of an idol. 4-5) Do not perform Temple services, or any other services, for another god. 6) Do not swear with Hashem's Name in vain. 7) Sanctify the Shabbos. 8) Do not perform melachah on Shabbos. 9) Honor your parents. 10) Do not commit murder. 11) Do not commit adultery. 12) Do not kidnap. 13) Do not testify falsely. 14) Do not attempt to acquire or covet another's possessions. 15) Do not create a statue or form of a human. 16) Do not construct an altar by carving stone. 17) Do not ascend the altar via stairs or with wide strides.

For the Shabbos Table

“לא תחמד בית רֵעֶךָ לֹא־תחמד אִשֶּׁת רֵעֶךָ וְעַבְדּוֹ וְשׁוֹר׃ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ” “You shall not covet your fellow's home; You shall not covet your fellow's wife, his servant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey or anything that belongs to your fellow man” (Shemos 20:14) In the prohibition of coveting another's possessions, the Torah first details various items and then concludes by prohibiting “anything that belongs to your fellow man.” Why does the Torah first list these various items if the conclusion is that everything is prohibited? Rav Yaakov Galinsky zt”l explains that it seems to be a difficult task for a human being to not desire something he likes. To address this, the Torah writes sage advice on how to curb jealousy. “V’chol (everything) asher l’reiecha” explains that although your friend's home seems so appealing, you must take all of the homeowner's life circumstances and burdens into account - “all that is his.” One would need to accept problems, issues, worries, and challenges that accompany this coveted item.

We can understand each person's unique circumstances and provisions with a parable from the Chofetz Chaim. A man enters a shop seeking to purchase an ax with which to chop firewood. The proprietor has no axes in stock, but the salesman offers him a quality saw used for cutting metal, and he implores the man to buy it. The man responds, “I am a woodchopper and have no need for blacksmith tools.” The Chofetz Chaim explains that one must recognize that Hashem provides each person with a custom-tailored package of a wife, household, etc., that he needs for his unique mission. Then, after the Torah lists these individual items, it guides us to understand that each of these gifts and possessions is uniquely suited to its owner. Through acceptance of this

reality, jealousy dissipates quickly and easily, as one views his situation from its correct perspective.

from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalchorowitz@gmail.com>

date: Feb 5, 2026, 8:06 AM

subject: Yisro 5786: Unity Through Torah

February 5, 2026

In Parshas Yisro, the nation of Israel arrives at the Wilderness of Sinai on Rosh Chodesh Sivan and camps opposite Mt. Sinai. There they spend the next days preparing for Matan Torah (and there they will stay for the next almost-one-year learning many mitzvot, building the Mishkan and preparing for their planned [but ultimately aborted] entry into the Promised Land). About their encampment at the mountain, the pasuk tells us: וַיֵּצְאוּ מִרְפִּידִים - And they journeyed from Refidim, and they arrived in the desert of Sinai, and they encamped in the desert, and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain (Shemos 19:2).

Noting an anomaly in this verse - for the verbs are all written in the plural form, except for "וַיֵּצְאוּ" which is singular and literally means "and he camped" - Rashi, quoting the Sages points out: וַיֵּצְאוּ מִרְפִּידִים, אֶחָד, אֶחָד, אֶחָד - Rashi, quoting the Sages points out: וַיֵּצְאוּ מִרְפִּידִים, אֶחָד, אֶחָד, אֶחָד - And Israel encamped there - as one man with one heart, but all the other encampments were with complaints and with strife.

The encampment at Har Sinai was different than all others, for here, they were united. Their unity was so strong that they stood before G-d like one man, with one heart.

In our world torn asunder, when the nations of the world rise up once again to destroy our nation and our Land - may the Almighty have mercy upon us - it behooves us to remember this well-known Rashi. While the greatest protection that Am Yisrael has is the holiness, beauty and wisdom of Torah, ultimately, the Torah can only truly rest when our people are united. While it is true there are Jews of many different hashkafos, dress, language, appearance, countries of dispersion and all across the religious spectrum - and each must stay true to the emes of Torah and masorah as transmitted by his rebbe/rav/teacher - despite differences, we must strive to be united as one nation.

As we come up to the yomtov of Purim, we must remember that to the nations of the world, we are one nation. They do not differentiate between different sects of Jews, and we must take to heart the words of Haman to Achashvairosh, in his request to annihilate the nation:

וַיֹּאמֶר הֵמָּה לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרִישׁ יִשְׁנֹן עִם־אֶחָד מִפְּגָר וּמִפְּרֵד בֵּין הָעַמִּים בְּכָל מְדִינֹת מְלָכוּתָךְ - And Haman said to King Achashvairosh, "There is a one nation scattered and separate among the peoples throughout all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws differ from those of every other nation, and they do not keep the king's laws - and to the king - there is no use to leave them alone" (Esther 3:8).

Though scattered and dispersed throughout 127 provinces, surely speaking different languages, with different dress, different head coverings, different shuls and different schools... to Haman, we were all one. If Haman knew this to be true (as do his descendants throughout the generations, dayeinu!), should we not know it to be true as well?

We must strive to recognize that it is the koach of Torah that binds us as one - as the nation understood at the foothills of Sinai - and not wait until the Hamans of the world remind us.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, teaches that, "The Jewish people constitute an edah when they are united in acknowledging and loving G-d, and when they have a shared desire to live a sanctified life. In such times they form an edah not because they take pride in their intellectuals, scientific geniuses, or inspired authors. Their edah is distinguished by virtue of its embrace of the prophets, tananim, amoraim, and other holy and heroic people who forged the character of the nation of Israel. When constituting such an edah, the Jewish nation is recognized for its holiness, ethical purity, humility, eternity and nobility of spirit... In such times, Adas Yisrael is

bathed in a sea of divine light, an ocean of eternal radiance, from which G-d's Shechina emerges...

"There are also times when Jews come together as a machaneh - whether out of fear of an Amalek or a Haman, or because it is impossible for them to assimilate. Such is the case in our own time, when our sanctity is diminished, Shabbos is in exile, Jewish family life is under assault, and our past spiritual glory is in tatters. We are bereft of the ancient commitment to spirituality that united us in the past. Today we are forced to invoke intellectual and pragmatic considerations for Jewish solidarity, such as fear of the enemy who despises us, or shared economic interests that often entail a disregard for the mitzvot. But such things by themselves cannot bind our camp together in lasting fashion. Yes, it is true that some of us come together occasionally for the sake of mutual protection, but this has no staying power, for there is no strong group identity. Proof can be found in the dismal failure of American Jewry when it comes to its organizational life. How much ink has been spilled, how much quills have been broken, how much energy and effort expended in attempting to consolidate the Jews in this country into a single entity! It is all to no avail.

"Where there is no shared spiritual vision, fear and trepidation are the only recourse to bring people together. But fear is a negative emotion, utterly incapable of building a lasting unity. Even though a machaneh might be formed on an emergency basis, its internal divisions will always resurface once the danger has passed. The only unity among Jews that can persist over time is the unity of an edah, which, like a tzibbur or kahal, is characterized not by shared fear or anxiety, but by a collective spiritual goal and purpose" (Chumash Masores HaRav, Bamidbar, p.71-72).

Two and a half years after the horrific and terrifying pogrom of October 7th, how powerful, true, unsettling in their reality, and awesome are the words of Rav Soloveitchik. They deserve to be read, and read again. In order for our nation to achieve lasting unity, it must be through the spirituality, holiness and purity of shared Torah goals, as the mamleches kohanim and goy kadosh (cf. Shemos 19:6) that we are destined to be. May we merit it speedily, in our days and in our time.

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What's in a Parsha Name? The Wisdom of Yitro

Feb 5, 2026 **Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

Jewish mothers take pride in their intellectually accomplished children—the doctors, the lawyers, the professors, even the rabbis. The Jewish people have earned a reputation for intellectual achievement, a stereotype reinforced by disproportionate representation among Nobel Prize laureates and leading scholars across disciplines.

The Ohr HaChaim (Exodus 18:21), however, makes a striking observation that challenges this perspective. He addresses why the Torah goes out of its way to connect Yitro's judicial suggestion with him specifically. The answer reveals something fundamental about why God chose the Jewish people; not because they possessed superior intellectual qualities, but in recognition of the faithfulness the patriarchs had shown Him and as an act of love toward this people. As far as intelligence is concerned, good ideas can come from anywhere, and there is no hesitation in acknowledging wisdom from outside the community.

It is a powerful statement of this principle, and recognition of the gratitude owed to the wise Midianite priest who came to offer his concerned advice, that the very portion in which the Torah is given bears his name. There is, in fact, a beautiful reciprocity in that the parashah is named after him, and Rashi tells us that he received an additional name, Yeter, to represent the parashah he caused to be added to the Torah, the judicial system that would allow Moses to delegate authority and create sustainable governance for the nation.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points to a revealing detail that builds on the Ohr HaChaim's insight. When the verse states "Vayishma Moshe"—"and Moses listened" (Exodus 18:24)—the Torah is emphasizing that Moses

needed Yitro to teach him these administrative basics. Moses had no independent qualifications as a lawmaker or organizer. He was simply a vessel for God's will. This humility, this recognition that wisdom can come from unexpected sources, creates the space for the true source of Jewish pride to be identified.

The Oznayim LaTorah makes a related observation. Other nations are united by common race or territory. Among the Jewish people, families have often been divided by circumstances and geography. What brings them together is not any racial or genetic characteristic, but rather a shared belief system, a commitment to Torah and its values.

This focus on the name of the parashah and of Yitro himself leads to another point about naming. When Rashi identifies which section Yitro added, he doesn't cite its opening words; rather, he refers to it as "Atah Techezeh"—"you shall see"—a phrase from the middle of that passage. Rabbi Meir Shapiro addressed this with an incisive observation: anyone can identify a problem, yet recognition goes to the one who provides the solution. Yitro didn't merely observe that Moses was overwhelmed; he presented a concrete, implementable answer.

This principle of problem-solving over problem-identification resonated deeply in Rabbi Shapiro's own life. When he founded Daf Yomi, critics had no trouble articulating why Jewish learning was in decline. They could identify the problem with ease. What they lacked was a plan. Rabbi Shapiro wasn't deterred by those who offered only criticism without solutions. He created a practical framework that would unite Jews across the world in daily Talmud study, a system that not only continues to this day but thrives as one of the most successful educational initiatives in Jewish history.

To take the theme of names a further step, the parashah's name is particularly noteworthy because "Yitro" is not actually the opening word. The first word is "Vayishma"—"and he heard." While custom has developed in various ways regarding how parashiyot are named, the choice to use Yitro's name rather than the opening word represents an additional measure of deliberate recognition.

It is particularly notable because that first word is not insignificant; it actually carries tremendous importance. The Talmud (Zevachim 116a) asks what exactly Yitro heard that prompted him to come to the Jewish people. The word "vayishma" in the verse implies not merely hearing but responding with action. Three possible choices are given as to which event brought him: the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, the war with Amalek, and the giving of the Torah. Rashi mentions only the first two.

In the context of this question, there is a discussion about whether Yitro came before or after the giving of the Torah. Nachmanides asks why, if he came after that momentous event, the text does not inform us that he had heard about it. R. Simcha Zissel Broide (Sam Derech) offers an answer that emphasizes the Torah's focus on the splitting of the sea, precisely because that miraculous occurrence was heard in three distinct ways by different populations. The nations of the world heard and were frightened, but continued living as before. Amalek heard and attacked. Yitro heard and responded with wisdom.

The Midrash (Tanchuma Yitro 3:2) expands on these different reactions through the language of Proverbs 19:25: "Strike a scoffer and the simple will become clever; reprove an understanding person and he will gain knowledge." The "scoffer" refers to Amalek, who witnessed the miracles and nevertheless attacked. The "understanding person" is Yitro, who heard the same news and came to join the Jewish people. The Midrash praises Yitro using this very language, as can be seen in Rashi's commentary on that verse in Proverbs.

These responses reveal a crucial component of this story. The splitting of the Sea represented a moment of miraculous salvation and divine intervention, followed almost immediately by Amalek's devastating attack. The Darkhei No'am of Slonim suggests that Yitro came not only to give advice but also to seek it. Having heard of these dramatic swings, he wanted to understand how one maintains consistency through such upheaval. The answer, ultimately, will be found through the Torah itself.

The Nachalat Eliezer raises a penetrating question about Yitro's conversion. Why did he convert rather than simply rely on his own intellect and wisdom? Yitro witnessed Amalek's pointless and self-destructive war against the Jewish people, which demonstrated the overwhelming power of bias and personal interest. Even the wisest person needs something beyond their own reasoning to guide them reliably.

The Ohr HaChaim's emphasis on the faithfulness of the patriarchs rather than intellectual superiority brings the picture into focus. Abraham was indeed a man of great intelligence and wisdom. He engaged with a transcendent system of morality and committed himself to it, while also creating a legacy of kindness and personal concern, all of which the Torah acknowledges (Gen. 18:19) as the reason for his selection; not his intellectual prowess, but his moral character, faith, and his readiness to transmit that message to his family, then and for all generations.

Intelligence is not the defining quality of the Jewish people. What matters is the commitment to something higher: to a moral framework rooted in divine command, to a tradition that would define Abraham's descendants. The Talmud emphasizes that Yitro didn't merely come to offer his advice; he actually converted and threw his lot in with the Jewish people. This wise man, this exemplar of intellectual achievement from among the nations, joined the Abrahamic vision, setting the stage for many righteous converts throughout Jewish history.

Perhaps this is why some refer to the parashah as "Vayishma Yitro," combining the two words. The title captures not just what Yitro heard, but how he responded; with recognition, action, and commitment. He understood that the Torah offers something intelligence alone cannot provide: the guide for morality and life, the framework that provides consistency when everything else is in flux. What the Jewish people received was something of an entirely different order; not superior intellect, but the Torah and its mission, the foundation that shapes the very essence of how to live and who to be.

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Feb 5, 2026, 3:31 AM

subject: **Rav Kook on Yitro: Reward and Punishment**
Yitro: Reward and Punishment

How did Moses first present the Torah and its laws to Israel?

The Talmud (Shabbat 87a) records a disagreement. According to Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, Moses began by warning the people of the penalties for violating the Torah, and only afterward spoke of its rewards. Others maintain that Moses reversed the order, first describing the rewards of observance and only later the punishments for transgression.

Rav Kook explained that this dispute reflects two distinct educational approaches, two different ways of guiding the soul toward holiness and spiritual growth.

First Liberate, Then Illuminate

Rabbi Yehudah held that we must begin by confronting a person's darker impulses. It is necessary to first battle the traits of selfishness, coarseness, and materialism. Only then will the soul be free to rise up in purity and realize its lofty potential.

Once these forces are neutralized, the light of Torah can shine clearly. For this reason, Moses first warned of punishment, loosening the grip of destructive tendencies. Only afterward did he speak of reward, so that their souls' yearnings for good and truth would be wholehearted.

Illumination That Refines All Forces

The second approach takes a different path. Rather than uprooting negative tendencies at the outset, it seeks to flood the soul with light. The soul's raw energies are not immediately suppressed; instead, they are redirected and harnessed for holy purposes.

When divine light fills the soul, even coarse impulses can intensify spiritual vitality. These energies are elevated and pressed into the service of holiness itself. Only what remains resistant, what cannot be refined, is uprooted.

According to this view, Moses began by describing the rewards of Torah observance. His words strengthened confidence and awakened the soul's inner light, drawing all life-forces toward holy service. Once the soul was uplifted, the remaining dross could be addressed through warnings and discipline.

Both paths reflect a shared aim. Reward and punishment are educational means, guiding the soul toward its highest potential. Whether by first restraining darkness or by first amplifying light, Moses led Israel to a life in which their capacity for holiness could be fully realized.

Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 181-182 on Shabbat 87a

from: Rabbi Yochanan Zweig genesis@torah.org rabbizweig@torah.org

date: Feb 5, 2026, 1:51 PM

subject: Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - Opiate Of The Elite

Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha

By Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

Parshas Yisro

Opiate Of The Elite

“The entire people saw the thinder and the flames...” (20:15)

Rashi cites the Midrash which teaches that since the verse states “kol ha’am ro’im es hakolos” – “the entire nation was able to see the thunder”, miraculously all those who suffered from impaired vision had their sight restored. Similarly, since the verse states that the entire nation responded “na’aseh venishmah” – “we will do and we will obey”, all those who were deaf or mute were miraculously healed.¹ Why is physical perfection a prerequisite for the Sinaitic revelation?

The Torah is dispelling the myth that religion is primarily a crutch for the infirm and misfortunate of society. Religion has always been prevalent amongst the lower classes of society, bringing them solace and hope in the face of the travails of their daily lives. The elite have generally shunned religion with affluence and health in inverse proportion to religious observance. The Jews leaving Mitzrayim were all laden with great wealth and were miraculously cured from any physical ailment, for Hashem wanted to ensure that there should be no misconceptions as to the nature of the Jewish religion; it is not a religion solely for the misfortunate, but on the contrary, for the elite. 1.20:15

ESSENTIALLY THE SAME “I am Hashem, your G-d, who has taken you out from the land of Egypt...” (20:2)

The commentaries all question why it was necessary for Hashem to identify himself as the G-d who took Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt. Rashi cites the answer given by the Midrash stating that at Sinai, Hashem appeared to Bnei Yisroel as an elderly person, full of compassion, whereas upon leaving Egypt, at the splitting of the Red Sea, He appeared as a powerful warrior. This apparent dichotomy could leave a person with the impression that the world is controlled by different deities. Therefore, Hashem accentuates that He is the same G-d who took Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt.¹ Monotheism is a basic tenet of Judaism introduced to the world by Avraham Avinu. After Avraham, this concept was passed down from father to son, and is the basic belief of every Jew. How could any person standing at Sinai require a message regarding the unity of Hashem? Furthermore, another basic tenet of Judaism is Hashem’s omnipotence, His ability to perform any miracle He desires. Why would there be any doubt that the G-d who split the Red Sea and drowned the Egyptians is the same force at the Sinaitic revelation? The Midrash is offering a powerful insight into the level of revelation which occurred at both the Red Sea and Sinai. All miracles require some level of revelation of the presence of Hashem. However, the level of revelation at the splitting of the Red Sea and at Sinai was so strong that, although Hashem is incorporeal, having no body or form, the people experiencing this event perceived that they “saw” Hashem’s true essence. It would cause great conflict in the human mind to perceive Hashem’s essence in one form, and then again in another. It required a statement from Hashem to prevent any misconceptions and to prove that there were no inconsistencies in His true essence.

1.20:2

TAKING A NEW IDENTITY “who took you out of the land of Egypt ” (20:2)

This week’s parsha records the Decalogue. The first commandment, which is the basis of all precepts, requires us to believe in the existence of Hashem. Hashem identifies Himself as the One “who took you out of the land of Egypt”. The Ibn Ezra recounts a question which he was asked by Rabbi Yehuda Halevi¹: Why does Hashem define Himself as the G-d who took us out of Egypt?² It seems that a more appropriate title for Hashem would be “G-d, Creator of the Universe”. Defining Hashem as “Creator” identifies Him as the One responsible for all existence, while, “the One who took us out of Egypt” indicates that He is responsible for only one historical incident. Rashi, apparently sensitive to this difficulty, comments “kedai hi hahotsa’ah shetihyu mishubadim li” – “Taking you out of Egypt is sufficient reason for you to be subservient to Me.”³ Most commentaries interpret that Rashi is explaining that we are obligated to be subservient to Hashem because He saved us from the tyranny of Pharaoh. Citing the Midrash, Rashi offers a second explanation; Hashem was identifying Himself at Sinai as the same power that took Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt. When punishing the Egyptians Hashem appeared as a “man of war”, while at Sinai He appeared as an “elderly man full of compassion”. Hashem was dispelling the notion that there were two different deities. He therefore stated at Sinai “I am the G-d who took you out of Egypt.”⁴ How does compelling Bnei Yisroel to subjugate themselves to Him reflect the compassion of an elderly man? Bnei Yisroel left Egypt to begin a relationship with Hashem. Rashi is not stating that the basis of our relationship with Hashem is that we owe Him our allegiance because He saved us. Rather, Rashi is explaining that the basis for every healthy relationship is each party’s concern for the well-being of the other. Hashem’s taking us out of Egypt reflects His compassion and care for the Jewish people, and it is therefore the cornerstone of the relationship. “Kedai hi hahotsa’a” means that it is fitting that this act should be the basis for our serving Him, for He has shown His commitment and concern for our well-being. The relationship forged at Sinai is described by our Sages as a marriage; by definition it must be exclusionary. Stating that Hashem created the world does not indicate a unique concern for the Jewish People alone. Therefore, it could not be the cornerstone of the marriage. The exodus from Egypt, which was performed exclusively for us, is the appropriate basis of our marital bond.

1. 20:2 2. Ibid 3. Ibid. 4. Ibid. Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha © 2023 by Torah.org.

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** rabiyy@theyeshiva.net info@theyeshiva.net
date: Feb 5, 2026, 11:20 PM

Understanding the War Against the Jews The Two Great Evils of History: The Islamists and Hitler

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Give Us Two

One of the intriguing things about the Ten Commandments^[1], given to the Jewish people is that they were engraved on two separate tablets. Was G-d short of granite that He needed to use two tablets? Why could He not carve the commandments onto a single stone?

There is the stereotypical Jew-bashing joke about this. Before coming to the Jews, G-d approached all the nations and asked if they would like to accept the Torah. Each of them refused because of some commandment in the Bible to which they could not possibly adhere. When G-d presented the offer to the Jews, their sole question was: How much do you want for it?

To which G-d responded: “It’s for free.”

So the Jews replied: “Give us two.”

Yet the issue demands sincere reflection. Why indeed was there a need for two tablets?

Two Versions

The rabbis in the midrash proposed a novel answer. The Ten Commandments, they suggested, were engraved on two tablets, five on each

stone, so that they would be read in two directions -- from top to bottom, and from side to side[2].
The simplest way of reading the Ten Commandments is, of course, from top to bottom:

On the first stone:

- 1) I am the Lord your G-d who has taken you out of Egypt...
- 2) You shall have no other gods...
- 3) You shall not swear in G-d's name in vain...
- 4) Remember the Sabbath...
- 5) Honor your father and your mother...

And the five commandments engraved on the second tablet:

- 6) You shall not murder.
- 7) You shall not commit adultery.
- 8) You shall not steal.
- 9) You shall not bear false witness against your fellow.
- 10) You shall not covet your fellow's house; you shall not covet your fellow's wife ... nor anything that belongs to your fellow.

This was the way of reading the Ten Commandments vertically. Yet due to the fact that the first five commandments were engraved on one stone and the second five on a separate stone, there was another way of reading the commandments -- horizontally instead of vertically, from commandment No. 1 directly to No. 6; from No. 2 to No. 7; 3 -- 8; 4 -- 9; 5 -- 10.

This version of the Ten Commandments would then read like this:

- 1) I am the Lord your G-d/You shall not murder. 2) You shall have no other gods/You shall not commit adultery; and so forth with the rest of the commandments.

But why is it necessary to read the Ten Commandments horizontally? What insight can we gain from this alternative reading of the commandments?

In this essay we will discuss the juxtaposition of the first and sixth commandments: "I am the Lord your G-d/You shall not murder." The significance of this "horizontal" reading from a historical, political and religious standpoint cannot be overstated. It embodies one of the most stunning aspects of Judaism. What is at stake in this juxtaposition is nothing less than the future of human civilization.

Two Historical Attempts

Two groups have made an attempt to divorce commandment no. 1 from commandment no. 6 -- to sever the idea of a Creator, who conceived the world for a moral purpose, from the imperative to honor the life of another human being. The first group was comprised of the philosophers of the Enlightenment during the 18th and 19th centuries, the second of religious leaders in many and diverse ages. The result for both was moral defeat. The thinkers of the Enlightenment ushered in the Age of Reason and the modern secular era, founded on the belief that the great ideal of "You shall not murder" did not require the prerequisite of "I am the Lord Your G-d" in order to be sustained. Religion was not necessary to ensure moral behavior; reason alone, without G-d, would guide humanity into an age of liberty and to the achievement of moral greatness. The sixth commandment could operate successfully independent of the first.

While religion embodied the vision of man standing in a continuous relationship with G-d, the essence of the Enlightenment represented the vision of man without G-d. It was a vision already introduced during the first days of creation near the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, by the most sophisticated animal of the time, the serpent. "You shall be like G-d," it promised Eve[3]. Man could, and ought to, replace G-d. Left to his own (de)vices, the thinking went, the human being will achieve greatness. But the Holocaust spelled the end of this grand faith in the promise of human progress based on human reason. In Auschwitz, the belief that modern man felt a natural empathy for others was ruined forever.

The gas chambers were not invented by a primitive, barbaric and illiterate people. To the contrary, this people excelled in sciences and the arts, but nevertheless sent 1.5 million children, and 4.5 million adults, to their deaths solely because they had Jewish blood flowing in their veins. SS guards would spend a day in Auschwitz, gassing as many as 12,000 human beings,

and then return home in the evening to pet their dogs and laugh with their wives. As the smoke of children ascended from the crematoriums, these charming romantics would enjoy good wine, beautiful women and the moving music of Bach, Mozart and Wagner. They murdered millions of innocents in the name of a developed ethic, and they justified genocide on purely rational grounds.

In "Schindler's List," there is a scene during the liquidation of the Krakow Ghetto where a little girl hiding in a piano is shot dead by an SS guard. As her little angelic body lay in a river of blood, another guard sits down to play the piano.

First SS guard: Was ist das? Ist das Bach?

Second SS guard: Nein. Mozart.

First SS guard: Mozart?

Second SS guard: Ja. And they both marvel at the exquisite music.

This was Nazi Germany at its best.

Elie Wiesel, who gripped the world's imagination with his book "Night," a personal testimony of life and death in Auschwitz, once asked the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who himself lost many members of his family in the Holocaust, how he could believe in G-d after Auschwitz. If G-d existed, Wiesel asked, posing the single greatest challenge to faith, how could He ignore 6 million of His children de-humanized and murdered in the cruelest of fashions?

The Rebbe shed a tear and then replied, "In whom do you expect me to believe after Auschwitz? In man?"

This must remain one of the lasting legacies of Auschwitz. If there is any faith at all left after the extermination of 6 million people, it must glean its vitality from something transcending the human rationale and its properties. If morality is left to be determined exclusively by the human mind, it can become a morality that justifies the guillotine, the gulag and the gas chamber. As Dostoevsky famously put it in "The Brothers Karamazov," "Where there is no G-d, all is permitted."

The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote: "I cannot see how to refute the arguments for the subjectivity of ethical values [resulting from atheism], but I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don't like it." Russell's point is critical. Without G-d, we cannot objectively define any behavior as good or evil. As difficult as it is to entertain, no one can objectively claim that gassing a mother and her children is any more evil than killing a mouse. It is all a matter of taste and opinion. The validity and effectiveness of "You shall not murder" can be sustained only if it is predicated on the foundation of faith in a universal moral creator who gave humanity an absolute and unwavering definition of what constitutes good vs. evil.

It is why so many on the radical left are so confused about morality, as to even defend Hitler and Hamas. Who would have believed the vile hatred that emerged from Harvard and Colombia, the elite universities of our country? who would believe how sick and deranged some professors and students can be?

Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel, who escaped Warsaw a few weeks before it was invaded and lost most of his family in the Nazi Holocaust, captured this sentiment succinctly: "If man is not more than human, then he is less than human." Either we climb to a place beyond ourselves, or we are likely to fall to a place below ourselves. When the vision of the sacred dies in the soul of a person, he or she is capable of becoming a servant of the devil.

Religious Evil

But this is far from the whole picture.

While the Enlightenment abandoned commandment no. 1 in favor of no. 6, various religions over the ages abandoned no. 6 in favor of no. 1. Theirs has been the atrocious belief that as long as you believe in the Lord, or in Allah, you can kill and maim whomever you brand an "infidel." Whether it is a business executive in New York, or a teenager eating a slice of pizza in Jerusalem, or a child on the first day of school in Beslan, or a commuter in Madrid, or a tourist in Bali, or a Chabad couple in Mumbai, if the person is

not a member of your faith, G-d wants him or her to die. For the religious fundamentalist, "I am the Lord your G-d" has nothing to do with "You shall not murder."

This is the greatest perversion of faith. When thousands can rejoice gleefully in the torture of Jewish babies, in the rape and beheading of Jewish women, as the Hamas monsters did on October 7th, 2023, while millions of others celebrated, it is the most vile desecration of Allah. Faith that does not inculcate its followers with the sanctity of every single human life desecrates and erodes the very purpose of faith, which is to elevate the human person to a state beyond personal instinct and prejudice. If you delete "You shall not murder" from religion, you have detached yourself from "I am the Lord your G-d." To believe in G-d means to honor the life of every person created in the image of G-d. What the juxtaposition of the two commandments is telling us is that you can't believe in G-d and murder[4].

Conversely, if you truly believe that taking the life of another human is wrong -- not just because you lack the means or motive to do so or are afraid of ending up in jail, but because you recognize the transcendent, inviolable value of life -- that's just another way of saying you believe in G-d. For what confers upon human life its radical grace, its transcendent sanctity and its absolute value if not the living presence of G-d imprinted on the face of the human person?

3,336 years ago, Judaism, in the most ennobling attempt to create a society based on justice and peace, established its principle code in the sequence of the two commandments -- "I am the Lord your G-d/You shall not murder." A society without G-d can become monstrous; a society that abandons the eternal and absolute commandment "You shall not murder" is equally evil. Both are capable of burning children alive during the day and then retiring to sleep with a clear conscience.

The Mountain

The Talmud captures this notion in an intriguing fashion[5].

The Talmud cites a tradition that when Israel approached Sinai, G-d lifted up the mountain, held it over the people's heads and declared: "Either you accept the Torah, or be crushed beneath the mountain." (The Talmud bases this tradition on the verse in Exodus, "And they stood beneath the mountain[6].")

This seems ludicrous. What worth is there to a relationship and a covenant accepted through coercion[7]?

The answer is profoundly simple. What G-d was telling the Jewish people is that the creation of societies that honor life and shun cruelty is dependent on education and on the value system inculcated within children of the society. The system of Torah, G-d was suggesting, was the guarantor for life and liberty. If you reject the morality of Torah, if you will lack the courage and conviction to teach the world that "I am the Lord your G-d" and that I have stated unequivocally "You shall not murder," the result will be humanity crushed under a mountain of tyrants.

Seventy-five years since Auschwitz and after two decades of incessant Islamic terrorism, the mountain is hanging over our heads once again. Shall we embrace the path of divine-based morality? Shall we never forget that religion must always be defined by "You shall not murder[8]?"

[1] Exodus chapter 20. [2] Mechilta to Exodus ibid. [3] Genesis 3:5. [4] The Midrash (Mechilutah ibid.) in discussing the connection between the first and sixth commandments presents the following parable to explain the evil behind murder: "There was a king who entered a country and put up portraits of himself, and made statues of himself, and minted coins with his image. After a while, the people of the country overturned his portraits, broke his statues and invalidated his coins, thereby reducing the image of the king. "So, too, one who sheds blood reduces the image of the King, as it is written (Genesis 9:6): "One who spills a man's blood... for in the image of G-d He made man." [5] Talmud, Shabbas 88a. [6] Exodus 19:17. [7] This question is raised among many of the Talmudic commentators. Many answers have been offered. See Tosfos, Eitz Yosef, Pnei Yehoshua, Shabbos Shel Mi and Ben Yehoyada to Talmud Shabbos ibid. Midrash Tanchumah Noach section 3. Daas Zekeinim Mibbalei Hatosafos on Exodus 19:17. Maharal Tiferes Yisroel ch. 32, Gur Aryeh on Exodus ibid. and Or Chodash p. 45. Sources noted in Pardas Yosef to Exodus ibid. Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Pulnah in Ben Poras Yosef Parshas Vayeishev. Torah Or Megilas Esther p. 96c; 118c. 7) This essay is based on a Yiddish letter by the Lubavitcher Rebbe written to Dr. Elie Wiesel in 1965 (published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 33 pp.255-260) and on a 1962 public address by the Rebbe (published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 3 pp. 887-895), and on other sources. [8] This essay is based on a Yiddish letter by the Lubavitcher Rebbe written to Dr. Elie Wiesel in April, 1965 (published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 33 pp.255-260) and on a 1962 public address by the

Rebbe (published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 3 pp. 887-895), and on a lecture presented by Rabbi Dr. Benjamin Bleich, and other sources.

From: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

Sent: Thursday, February 5, 2026 at 06:05:33 PM EST

Subject: My message for Yitro Alan

Yitro contains two main events central to the story of our people. Chapter 18 focuses on Moshe's father-in-law Yitro, who hears of the miracles that Hashem performs for B'Nai Yisrael. The word reaches him in Midian, far from Egypt or B'Nai Yisrael (who are in the Midbar between Egypt and Canaan). Chapter 19 is the story of the Revelation at Har Sinai, the intense experience when Hashem's presence comes to the mountain and is too much for B'Nai Yisrael to experience in person (so they ask Moshe to listen and tell them everything). Rather than focus on either of the two "big" stories, both of which I have discussed in previous years, I decided to observe some connections in the parsha with events elsewhere in the Torah.

How do B'Nai Yisrael end up in Egypt for such an extended period of time?

During an early famine, Avram and Sarai go to Egypt. Avram tells Sarai to pose as his sister, not his wife, for fear that the Egyptians would kill him to take her as a wife (Bereishis 12). God protects them, and Paro tells them to leave. He also gives Avram and Sarai Hagar as a servant. Hagar -- whose name means "the foreigner" -- has a difficult relationship with Sarai, who later (renamed Sarah) sends Hagar and Ishmael away because he is a bad influence on Yitzhak. Sarah's problems with Hagar return after the Revelation as the mitzvah to be kind to strangers and the less advantaged members of society -- a theme that appears throughout the Torah and Navi.

One of the themes in Sefer Shemot is that God brings the plagues to Egypt as part of an educational campaign -- so B'Nai Yisrael, Paro, the Egyptians, and the world will know that "Ani Hashem." God is the supreme power in the world and stronger than all the pagan gods combined. Hashem gives Moshe three signs as a taste of His power: turning his stake into a snake and back again; turning his arm into tzaraat and back again; and turning water into blood (ch. 4). The campaign of plagues is to demonstrate to B'Nai Yisrael (6:7) and the Egyptians (7:5) that "Ani Hashem." When God destroys the Egyptian army and weapons at the Sea of Reeds, the message is immediately clear to B'Nai Yisrael and the Egyptians that Hashem is more powerful than the combined gods of Egypt and the most powerful army of the time.

Despite the primitive methods of communication and travel of the time, word of Hashem's power reaches as far as Midian, where Yitro learns of God's power and his defeat of the Egyptian army. Yitro then brings Moshe's wife and sons to meet B'Nai Yisrael to reunite with Moshe. Moshe tells his father-in-law all that Hashem has done for B'Nai Yisrael, and Yitro is even more impressed -- enough that he prepares a huge feast in honor of Hashem (18:9-12). What did Moshe tell Yitro that topped the story of Hashem defeating the entire Egyptian army?

Moshe explains that God performed these miracles because of His love for B'Nai Yisrael. Yitro and the Egyptians already understood the concept of an all powerful God of war. What was new was the concept and proof of a God who loved and cared for every single Jew. A God who wanted a close relationship with every person and cared for the welfare of every person was a completely new concept, even for Paro (who knew all 70 pagan gods) and Yitro (a priest for Paro and Midian). The concept of a Deity who looks for a close, personal relationship with each individual, which goes back to Adam and Gan Eden, is central to Judaism.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on a related concept. Moshe and Yeshayahu both have speech imperfections and wonder how they can fulfill their roles as spokesmen for Hashem. God's response is that He provides His messengers with the means to reach their targets. He purifies Yeshayahu and has Moshe spend three days purifying himself and B'Nai Yisrael to make them ready for His messages. Our task for today is to prepare ourselves, to be ready to listen to Hashem's messages, to work on our relations with Hashem (prayer and mitzvot), and to be a part of the spiritual renewal of our people now that all our hostages are back from Gaza. We must remember to care for those of our people less fortunate than we are and to teach our children and grandchildren the messages of Moshe, Yeshayahu, Micah, and our other prophets. Let us make this world a better place for ourselves and those who come after us.

Shabbat Shalom, Alan & Hannah