

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In the House of Lords there is a special chamber used, among other things, as 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. Lord Jakobovits pointed to the large mural that decorates the chamber and gave it its name. It is known as the Moses Room because of the painting that dominates the room. It shows Moses bringing the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai. So Moses was the first rabbi to adorn 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 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 G-d 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 aseret 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 G-d 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 G-d, 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 G-d. 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" on which they were engraved. Roughly speaking, the first five are about the relationship between humans and G-d, the second five about the relationship between humans themselves. There is, however, another way of thinking about

¹ Mishnah Tamid 5:1, Berakhot 12a.

² We do not know who the sectarians were: they may have included early Christians. The argument was that only these were directly heard by the Israelites from G-d. The others were heard only through Moses.

³ Maimonides, Responsa, Blau Edition, Jerusalem, 1960, no. 263.

⁴ Maimonides, Sefer ha-Mitzvot, positive command 1; Nahmanides, Glosses ad loc.

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
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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 G-d 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, in the second Moses was told to "come in before pharaoh" 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 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 G-d as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

The first three – No other gods besides Me, no graven images, and no taking of G-d's name in vain – define the Jewish people as "one nation under G-d." G-d is our ultimate sovereign. Therefore all other earthly rule is subject to the overarching imperatives linking Israel to G-d. Divine sovereignty transcends all other loyalties (No other gods besides Me). G-d 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 G-d 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 G-d.

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 G-d 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 G-d 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 G-d. 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 and property." 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." 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

⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vintage, 1954, vol. 1, 340.

to someone else. Envy lies at the heart of violence.⁶ 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 G-d 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 G-d. 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" 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. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd now, if you will surely hearken to my voice and observe My Covenant, then you shall be for Me a chosen treasure (segulah) from amongst all the nations, because all of the earth is Mine And you shall be for Me a Kingdom of Priest-teachers and a holy nation..." (Exodus 19:5,6).

The Covenant between G-d and Abraham was the National Covenant, a Divine agreement that Abraham's seed will be eternal, that his descendants will inherit the land of Israel, and that this nation – despite periods of dreadful persecution and affliction – will eventually bring the glorious star-light of G-d to a universe darkened by ignorance, transgression and warfare. (Gen 15). Hence the future family of Abraham is likened to the stars of the heavens.

In our Biblical portion of Yitro, we have the Religious Covenant between G-d and the Israelites, a Divine agreement that if this newly-formed emerging nation will observe the moral and ritual commandments, they will become G-d's treasured

people, a holy nation of priest-teachers to all of humanity. Hence the prophetic fulfillment of G-d's promise to Abraham, chosen because he was commanding his household after him to act with compassionate righteousness and moral justice, that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 18:18-19; 12:3).

From this perspective, the Covenant at Sinai may be seen as the Bar-Bat Mitzvah of the Jewish Nation at the very dawn of their history. Indeed, it is a commitment – consecration ceremony, which can be ratified only after the Israelites publicly accept the challenge – or the gift – which G-d is placing before them, "And (the Israelites) said, 'all that the Lord has spoken we shall perform and internalize' – and then Moses took the blood (of the earlier sacrifices) and sprinkled it upon the nation, and he said, 'behold, the blood of the Covenant, which the Lord has cut with you on all these words.'" (Ex. 24:7-9) As should be expected, this ratification comes after the lengthy portion of Mishpatim, replete with a sampling of the moral and ritual commandments which have always been seen by our Sages as part and parcel of the Revelation at Sinai.

This ratification of the Covenant includes the youth of Israel who brought whole burnt offerings and peace offerings – and a celebratory meal for the leadership (Moses, Aaron, Nadav, Avihu and the Seventy Elders), at which they ate and drank in the presence of the Divine. (Ex. 24:11). Biblically, sacrifices of whole burnt offerings and peace offerings are generally identified with Festival celebrations (for example, Num. 10:10).

As we have seen, there is also the sprinkling of blood upon the nation, which is reminiscent of the Covenant between the Pieces with Abraham, when a great dread which fell upon our first Patriarch in the context of the animal's blood, and the prophecy of Jewish servitude and persecution along the way to redemption. (Gen. 15:9-14). The circumcision ceremony, by which every male baby enters into the Covenant of Abraham, must also include the loss of some blood from the male sexual organ of propagation, and every single birth, male and female, is accompanied with the significant loss of blood.

Every worthwhile idea or ideal requires commitment (mesirut nefesh), even commitment unto death. It was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said that anyone who has not found an ideal for which he would sacrifice his life is not living a worthwhile life! As the prophet Ezekiel taught, "And I see that you are rooted in your blood, and I say to you "by your blood shall you live, by your blood shall you live" (Ezek. 16:6).

The great paradox of the biblical story of the binding of Isaac was G-d's telling Abraham that only if he was willing to risk his future through his son Isaac would he be worthy of having a future with covenantal

⁶ The best book on the subject is, Helmut Schoeck, *Envy; a Theory of Social Behaviour*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969.

seed. G-d Himself (as it were) is invested in Israel's commitment, even commitment unto death, to the Covenant, because unless Israel succeeds in teaching the world ethical monotheism, our global village will have no future! That is why in picturing G-d's participation in the celebratory meal at Sinai, what I believe the Bible is trying to express metaphorically is that G-d has chosen us as His partners, to be His witnesses to the world, to help Him save humanity from self-destruction.

The Talmud records (B.T. Tamid 32a) that "Alexander of Macedon asked the Elders of Tzfat: 'What ought a person do if he wishes to die?' They responded, 'Let him attempt to keep on living,' because he will surely die sooner or later; nobody has yet left this world alive! 'And what ought a person do if he wishes to remain alive?' They responded, 'Let him slay himself for the sake of an eternal value, of a lofty ideal, and he will continue to live as long as the value or ideal remains alive in the world.'"

To be a committed Jew means that although you may be engaged in a dangerous occupation, there is no more privileged way to live your life. Yes, it is a great joy to be Jewish. And even if you experience a temporal "oy," that is certainly worth the eternal "joy" of participating in G-d's vineyard dedicated to perfecting the world. ©2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There are two different viewpoints as to the timing and to the nature of the visit of Yitro to the Jewish encampment in the desert of Sinai. One opinion is that he came before the revelation of G-d to the Jews and the granting of the Torah to them. The other opinion is that he came after Sinai and the Torah revelation. I think that these two different opinions really delve into the character and nature of Yitro himself, as much as they deal with chronological events recorded for us in the Torah.

Rashi indicates that Yitro came because of his awareness of the miracle of the splitting of Yam Suf and of the subsequent battle between Amalek and Israel. If so, as Rashi seems to indicate by not mentioning the Torah revelation as one of the causes for his leaving his country, his position and his faith to come to join Israel in its journey, then it seems that Yitro's "conversion" to Judaism was motivated by seemingly outside influences rather than by personal soul-searching.

If however Yitro arrives at the camp of Israel after the revelation at Sinai, then one can justifiably argue that it was an inner recognition of the veracity of the newly revealed Torah. Recognition of the truths of its monotheistic moral code that Sinai represents would have motivated his abandonment of past idols and ideals and drove him to his new attachment to the G-d

and people of Israel.

In this seemingly pedantic discussion on the timeline of events that befell the Jewish people in their forty year sojourn in the desert of Sinai, lies a very deep and relevant understanding of the Jewish world and its obstacle laden path to faith and belief.

Throughout Jewish history there have been many who were influenced by outside, historical events that made them wonder in amazement at the survival and influential presence of the Jewish people. The Jew was always outnumbered and discriminated against by world society. It has always been felt by many that it was only a matter of time that Judaism and Jews would finally cease to exist. Yet from the ancient pharaohs to the modern age the survival of the Jewish people has remained a troublesome mystery to world society.

The world is aware of the miracles that have accompanied us while crossing the sea of history and of the constant battle that we have been forced to fight against Amalek. This awareness has provided us with a few allies from the outside world to aid us in our quest for equality and fair treatment. These people are valuable friends and allies but are rarely if ever true converts to Judaism. However, we had been blessed in every generation by the attachment of people to Judaism and Israel because of the appreciation and recognition of the G-d-given moral code that the Torah represents.

It is the inner spiritual drive of their souls that drove and drives these people to become converts to Judaism. Since it is difficult, if not well nigh impossible, for any Jewish rabbinic court to explore the inner soul of any other human being the problems of formal conversion to Judaism, especially in our time, are many and difficult. Yet, Yitro stands as an example as to the benefits to the individual and the nation as a whole of those who are not born Jewish and who stubbornly wish to attach themselves to the people and destiny of Israel. ©2015 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And Yisro heard..." "What did he hear that motivated him to come? The splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek." (Rashi, Sh'mos 18:1) This Rashi is based on several sources, including the M'chilta, the Babylonian Talmud (Z'vachim 116a) and the Jerusalem Talmud (M'gila 1:11), with one major omission: each of these brings three opinions, not just two. Besides the two that Rashi mentions, a third opinion says that it was hearing (about) the giving of the Torah that caused Yisro to come. Why did Rashi leave out this third opinion?

Maharshal is among those who say that Rashi wanted to avoid inserting himself into the disagreement about whether Yisro came before Matan Torah (the giving of the Torah) or afterwards. If he had mentioned the possibility that it was the giving of the Torah that Yisro heard (and motivated him to come), since this could only have happened after the event had occurred, it would obviously only be valid according to the opinion that he came after Matan Torah. However, Rashi doesn't seem to avoid mentioning differing opinions elsewhere, and in fact does mention this dispute as well (18:13). He also apparently takes sides in this dispute, implying there that he is of the opinion that Yisro came after Matan Torah (giving his own opinion then adding "even according to those who say he came before Matan Torah"), as well as praising Yisro for leaving the comforts of home in order to learn Torah (18:5). [His reference to the Torah on 18:9, which Rashi includes as part of "all the good that G-d had done for Israel" even though it is not included in the M'chilta (which is his source), could refer to the parts of the Torah taught at Marah and not what was first given at Matan Torah, and therefore does not necessarily impact Rashi's opinion on when Yisro arrived.]

An additional issue to contend with is that both Talmudic sources indicate that those of the opinion that Yisro heard about the splitting of the sea or of the war with Amalek are also of the opinion that he came before Matan Torah, while the opinion that it was Matan Torah obviously thinks he came after its occurrence. If so, by mentioning the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek, Rashi is actually inserting himself into this discussion, not avoiding it! (Not to mention that it would contradict Rashi's apparent stance about when Yisro came.) Which brings us back to our first question; if Rashi is not trying to avoid the possibility that Yisro came after Matan Torah, and even supports that opinion, why did he omit the opinion that Yisro came because he heard about Matan Torah?

Another question that arises is why Rashi presents these two opinions as one (that Yisro heard about both the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek), rather than bringing them as they are quoted in the original sources, as two different, or differing, opinions.

Many of the commentators discuss the merits of each opinion about when Yisro came. Ibn Ezra brings five "proofs" that it had to be after the public revelation at Mt. Sinai. [Of these, the most powerful is the verse (18:5) which states that Yisro came to "the mountain of G-d," i.e. Mt. Sinai; the nation would not have been there if the revelation hadn't yet taken place (or was about to).] One of the "proofs" brought by those of the opinion that Yisro came before Matan Torah (including the Ramban) is the placement of Yisro's coming. The Torah doesn't tell us about the nation leaving Refidim (where the war with Amalek occurred) and arriving at Sinai (Chorev) until chapter 19, which is

after Yisro leaves (18:27), indicating that the story of Yisro happened first, before they left Refidim (which is obviously also before they got to Mt. Sinai).

When Rabbi Yehoshua says (in the M'chilta and in Z'vachim) that Yisro heard about the war with Amalek, he adds, "which is written next to it." If this was placed in chronological order, being written right after this war cannot be taken as a proof that it was the cause, as the Torah is only relating things in the order in which they occurred. If, however, things were not taught in chronological order, placing Yisro's story at this spot is a valid indicator that the two are connected. Rashi, who (as previously mentioned) seems to be of the opinion that Yisro came after Matan Torah, may therefore only quote these two opinions in order to explain why Yisro's story is placed here if it occurred later. By telling us Yisro's story before telling us about Matan Torah, we know that it must be an earlier event (such as the war with Amalek or the splitting of the sea) that motivated Yisro to come.

[As far as why Yisro waited to come until after Matan Torah if the reasons he came occurred earlier, there are several possibilities. Among them is that Yisro knew the nation would eventually serve G-d on the same mountain that his son-in-law had seen the burning bush, so waited until they arrived there. Another is that there wasn't enough time after hearing about these things to meet them any earlier, as the Torah was given only fifty days after leaving Egypt (and they arrived at Mt. Sinai before that), with the war against Amalek occurring between the exodus and when they reached Sinai. (This is one of the "proofs" brought by Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam that Yisro must have come after Matan Torah.)]

Although this explains why Rashi chose only these two opinions, it is inconsistent with the implication in the two Talmudic sources that only according to the third opinion (that Yisro heard about Matan Torah) did he come after the revelation. Nevertheless, if we take a closer look at these sources, we are not forced to say that the other two opinions (that the splitting of the sea or the war with Amalek caused him to come) must also be of the opinion that Yisro came before Matan Torah.

The Babylonian Talmud is discussing the types of offerings brought before the Torah was given, and tries to bring a proof from Yisro's offering in our Parasha. The Talmud responds by saying that this may have occurred after the Torah was given, and proceeds to bring the dispute about when Yisro came. It then equates this dispute with the dispute about what Yisro heard that caused him to come. However, it is only the opinion that he came before Matan Torah that is forced to say that he either heard about the splitting of the sea or the war with Amalek, and this could be all the Talmud is trying to say -- that this opinion must admit that there is an earlier machlokes (dispute), with one opinion of that earlier dispute disagreeing with him. The

opinion that Yisro came after Matan Torah, on the other hand, can still maintain that all earlier opinions agree with him. Since Rashi is following this opinion, he can also maintain that despite coming after Matan Torah it was the splitting of the sea and/or the war with Amalek that caused Yisro to come.

[When the Jerusalem Talmud brings the dispute about when Yisro came, it knows who argued about it (Yehuda the son of Rebbe and Rabbi Yanai, which are, incidentally, different names than those having the same dispute in the Babylonian Talmud), but not which of them held which opinion. It therefore brings the other dispute, about what Yisro heard, where it is Yehuda the son of Rebbe who says that he heard about Matan Torah, proving that he also was the one who said that Yisro didn't come until after it. However, it does not prove that the other two opinions regarding what Yisro heard (neither of whom is Rabbi Yanai) must be of the opinion that he came before Matan Torah.]

Both the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek were written in the Torah before Yisro came, but if the only reason he came was because of the splitting of the sea, Yisro meeting the nation should have been written right after that, before the war with Amalek (just as it was written before they got to Sinai even though, according to Rashi, he joined them at Sinai, to indicate that he came for reasons other than the giving of the Torah). Therefore, if Rashi understands the placement of Yisro's coming to be an indicator of why he came (and not when he came), the splitting of the sea couldn't have been the only reason he came. It could have been part of the reason, but the war with Amalek had to also be at least part of the reason, which is why Yisro coming was placed after it. And why Rashi chose to combine both reasons, as opposed to stating them as independent opinions.

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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The above title was the name of an article that Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook published a year before he passed away. He based his essay on the verse in this week's Torah portion, "Behold I come to you in the thickness of the cloud so that the nation will listen when I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever" [Shemot 19:9]. The Rambam feels that the momentous events at Sinai and not the grandiose miracles that took place are the foundation of our faith (Hilchot Yessodai Torah 8). One question that we can ask is why it was necessary for this glorious revelation to appear in a cloud, from within a fog, and not as a clear vision.

Rav Kook's answer is that Divine light is different from the physical light with which we are familiar. When we want physical light to do something we increase its intensity. The brighter the light the less darkness remains. But this is not true for Divine light. It is so powerful that the only way it can be seen is for its intensity to be decreased. Only then can the human eye perceive it.

"The weak eye of a human being and his limited and shaky intellect is not capable of looking at the awesome shine of the Divine light. Therefore humanity in its confusion flees from G-d, as a bat flees from the sun... The only way for the Divine light to become visible is for it to be diminished in a known way. Covering the light, decreasing it, and hiding it -- these are the ways to reveal it."

And just as the Divine revelation at the time of the giving of the Torah was through a thick cloud, so is the revelation of G-d through history.

One of the phenomena through which the Divine light appears is linked to the light of the Mashiach. This light will be revealed to the world through darkness and from hiding. The first spark of Mashiach appeared in Sedom. "I found my servant David' [Tehillim 89:21]. Where did I find him? In Sedom." [Bereishit Rabba Lech Lecha]. As is written, "your two daughters who are here" [Bereishit 19:15]. Mashiach begins to take shape in the darkness of Sedom, through an act of illicit sex. David says, "I was a stranger to my brothers" [Tehillim 69:9], created in an illegitimate act! This process continues with the events of Yehuda and Tamar, in the immodest meeting between Boaz and Ruth, and in the story of David and Batsheva.

This same effect was seen in the building of the Second Temple, which was founded with the help of Koresh, who also had a hidden spark of the Mashiach. "This is what G-d says to his Mashiach Koresh... I will call out to you by name, I give you a nickname but you do not know Me." [Yeshayahu 45:1,4].

Rav Kook notes that the same principle applies in modern times, when the leaders of the movement include "some people who do not know their worth with respect to the role within the exalted guided process. They have been called out by name, but they do not know who is calling them."

"Just as the light of Mashiach appears in ugly envelopes, now that the footsteps of Mashiach are beginning to appear it is necessary for the same thing to happen... People like this have been chosen for the process, and everything is part of the wonders of the One who is Perfectly Wise." [Eim Habanim Semeicha].

"I will put My words in your mouth and I will hide you in the shadow of my hand... And to say to Zion -- you are My nation" [Yeshayahu 51:16]. "Because of the awesome power of its bright light, the world is not worthy of receiving it, and it will therefore be wrapped

by the left side, with the secret of 'his left hand will be under my head' [Shir Hashirim 2:6], and this is the shadow." [Rabbi Charlap, Mayanei Hayeshua, page 103].

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Right at the outset of the Aseret Hadibrot, the ten declarations (commonly translated as the Ten Commandments), G-d declares "I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt." (Exodus 20:2) One can't help but note that this statement is written unlike all the others. Each of the other declarations are written as commandments, i.e. "Honor your father and mother," (Exodus 20:12) or "Thou shalt not steal." (Exodus 20:13) In contrast, the first statement is not written as a commandment. One wonders, is belief in G-d a mitzvah?

Rambam argues, indeed, that belief is a commandment. For Rambam, the verb "to be" is often read into the text. Thus, "I am the Lord your G-d," really means "I am to be the Lord Your G-d." In other words, we are commanded to believe.

Commentators like Rashi (quoting the Midrash) disagree. After all, belief is a feeling, and feelings are neither right nor wrong, they just are. For Rashi, "I am the Lord your G-d," is not a commandment, rather it provides a formula through which one can come to believe.

The formula is first mentioned when Moshe (Moses) meets G-d at the sneh (burning bush). There, G-d tells Moshe that His name is Ehyeh asher Ehyeh, literally "I will be that which I will be." (Exodus 3:14) Through this name, Rashi insists, G-d is teaching how the Jews can come to believe in Him. Tell them, G-d says: "I will be with you in this time of distress, even as I will be with you in other times of distress."

In a similar fashion, Rashi explains, "I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of Egypt," tells us that "I, the G-d who took you out of the Egyptian exile now continue the redemption process by giving you the Torah." Here again, G-d says, that through this experience, the Jews will come to know Him.

In this sense, belief in G-d is similar to knowing you are in love. Just as you cannot prove you're in love, it can only be experienced, so can one come to believe in G-d by experiencing Him.

Perhaps the most powerful experience of G-d emerges when assessing how against all odds, we as a people have endured. Historian Arnold Toynbee once remarked that a rational assessment of the forces of history would lead to the conclusion that Judaism today should be fossil. We would respond that Jewish history is not logical or rational. Indeed, the scope and unique nature of Jewish history points to the existence of G-d.

The Egypt experience can serve as a prototype of our entire history. After all, Mitzrayim doesn't only

mean Egypt. Coming as it does from the root tzara (suffering), or tzar (distress), it suggests that there would be other Egypts in history (inquisitions, pogroms and more) that we would miraculously survive.

Jewish ritual can be seen as a re-enactment of Jewish history. On Passover for example we do not only recall the Exodus, we simulate and re-enact the event. The truth is that a mitzvah may not be the result of one's belief but rather the means to come to believe. So, too, Jewish history can be a vehicle that inspires belief in G-d.

Years ago, Menahem Begin, then Prime Minister of Israel, addressed a large assembly of Holocaust survivors. Looking out at the thousands who had emerged from the camps, he emphatically and emotionally declared, "Mir zinnem da-we are here." This is yet another, and arguably one of the greatest manifestations of G-d, the G-d of our history, "the Lord who took us out of Egypt." ©2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Adapted by Binyamin Frankel

Translated by Kaeren Fish

A verse in our parasha reads: "You shall not make with Me gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold." (20:19) The Mekhilta elaborates: "'You shall not make with Me' -- "Rabbi Yishmael said: You shall not make the form of My servants which serve Me on high: not the form of the angels, nor the form of the ofanim, nor the form of the keruvim.

"Rabbi Natan said, You shall not say, 'I shall make a sort of image of Him and then prostrate myself to it' -- therefore it says, 'You shall not make with Me.' And it is written (Devarim 4:15), 'You shall guard yourselves exceedingly well, for you did not see any image....'"

Similarly, concerning the prohibition of idolatry, we find the following verses: "Guard yourself lest you be ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and lest you inquire after their gods, saying: 'How did these nations serve their gods? I shall do likewise.'" (Devarim 12:30)

The statement, "I shall do likewise" may be understood in two different ways. The simple understanding is that this person seeks to serve idols in the same way that the nations do. However, Ibn Ezra offers an interesting understanding: "'I shall do likewise' -- [meaning] 'in my service of G-d,' and you will think that you are acting well. You shall not do so, for G-d

abhors all of their actions." In other words, Ibn Ezra warns us against adopting defective norms that belong to idolatry, and trying to use them in our service of G-d.

This is also explained in the Mekhilta (following on from the above):

"Nor shall you make for yourselves' -- You shall not say, 'Since the Torah permits [the keruvim] to be made in the Temple, I shall do the same in the synagogue, or the beit midrash.' The verse therefore teaches, 'You shall not make for yourselves.'

"Another explanation for the words, 'You shall not make for yourselves' -- you shall not say, 'We shall make [idols] for decoration, just as others do in other places.' The verse therefore teaches, 'You shall not make for yourselves' [i.e., for your own esthetic purposes]."

To clarify this, we must examine the prohibition of idolatry. This prohibition can be transgressed in one of two ways -- "in its usual manner," and "not in its usual manner." The Gemara (Sanhedrin 60b) teaches that the actions forbidden under the category of "in its usual manner," including the particular actions that represented the service of Ba'al Pe'or, or casting a stone at Mercury, etc., apply only to that specific form of idolatry. The prohibitions that fall under the category of "not in its usual manner," such as offering sacrifices or incense, libations, prostration, etc., apply to all forms of idolatry.

These two models of idolatry in fact represent two negative elements which may attract a person's interest and lead to sin. A person may be attracted in a trivial manner. During the period of the settlement of Eretz Yisrael and the period of the kings, Bnei Yisrael repeatedly sinned and repented. However, there is one sin which recurs over and over again throughout that period, as we read:

"Only the people sacrificed in the high places, because no House for G-d's Name had been built until those times. And Shlomo loved G-d, walking in the ways of David, his father; only he sacrificed and offered incense in the high places." (I Melakhim 3:2)

This theme reappears several times over the course of Sefer Melakhim. The Mishna (Zevachim chapter 14) mentions various situations in which the 'bamot' (high places) were permitted and forbidden. We find that these bamot, which were actually used lawfully during a certain period in history, were a very strong temptation for Am Yisrael. Apparently, the bamot gave people the ability to communicate with G-d in every situation and in every place. Man needs some connection with G-d that goes beyond place, and the bamot represented a distorted fulfillment of that need. This is idolatry that is "not in its usual manner." It is a type of behavior which does not belong directly to idolatry, but may be considered part of its accessories.

There is yet another type of idolatry. This is where a person wants to perform actions that are not

normative by any standard, believing that this will help his connection with G-d.

What we learn from our parasha is that the path to G-d is not given over to man. One's own subjective good intentions are not the proper criterion. Rather, performing actions which G-d Himself defines as good must be the basis for one's orientation. The attempt to seek G-d in a unilateral manner, based only on one's own personal initiative, is not only missing the mark, but a form of idolatry. (*This sicha was delivered on Shabbat Parashat Yitro 5769 [2009].*)

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Yitro describes Yitro hearing of the travels and trials of the Jews, Yitro being moved to convert, coming to Moshe for the conversion, and then leaving Moshe. If Yitro was so moved, why would he ever leave a situation where he's surrounded by G-d, clouds, heavenly food, and Moshe as a teacher? And how could Moshe, as a leader, allow Yitro to just leave the camp? After all, he was the only Jew NOT to have witnessed the giving of the Torah.

Rabbi Leibowitz asked this question in Majesty of Man, and answers by explaining that Yitro was SO moved by G-d, the Torah and the Jews that he felt that he had to go back to his home to try to convert his family and friends. Yitro was willing to give up being surrounded by what he obviously believed in and WANTED to be around, just for the sake of others. If this was the determination of someone that had no responsibilities toward the people he was trying to help, how much more determination should we demonstrate when we actually HAVE a responsibility to help one another!? The Parsha is named after Yitro because he was willing to change his life for Judaism. He was so proud of it that he didn't hide his Judaism, but went out and told others how beautiful it was. If we expressed the Yitro that we undoubtedly have within us. ©2012 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

