

# The Narrow Bridge

## גשר צר מאד

# PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

### Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Yisro

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לע'ג פועל בת ישראל מנוח / לזכות חילינו

#### LISTENING EAR

##### Kotzker Rebbe

*“And Yisro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel His people.” (18:1)*

What Yisro heard, others heard as well. But there are those who hear but do not listen, as the words do not penetrate their ears, hearts, and minds. Yisro’s attribute was that he heard and he knew what he heard!

#### PURSUING INSPIRATION

##### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*“And Yisro heard...” (18:1)*

Rashi quotes the Gemara (Zevachim 116a) that wonders what Yisro heard. The Gemara answers that Yisro heard about *Krias Yam Suf* and the war against Amalek. After hearing about these two incredible episodes, Yisro chose to join the Jewish people.

Rav Eliyahu Lopian (Lev Eliyahu) asks why Yisro was the only person affected by the events which had just occurred. Why weren’t other people from other nations motivated to join the Jewish people the way Yisro was?

Rav Lopian explains that Yisro was looking for the truth. He had practiced many forms of idolatry and other religions and was continually dissatisfied. As a result, he was on high alert waiting for *emes* to be presented in front of him. Therefore, when Yisro heard about the miracles performed that highlighted Hashem’s existence, Yisro had the cognizance to run towards them. The other nations of the world, however, were not searching for *emes*, and, as a result, the miracles that took place had absolutely no impact on them.

In life, we often sit and wait to be inspired. We hope that something will jump out and excite us. Rav Lopian is teaching us that we can’t expect to be inspired but instead have to *get* inspired. Like Yisro, we need to actively pursue opportunities to recharge ourselves spiritually so that when those chances present themselves, we can make best use of them.

#### FIGHTING FOR LOVE

##### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*“And Yisro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel His people.” (18:1)*

G-d punished the Egyptians not for having violated His will, but for the sake of Moshe and His people, Yisrael. For this reason, a previous verse says, “For G-d is waging war *for them* against Egypt,” specifically mentioning “for them.” (That is, G-d fought on behalf of Moshe and the Jewish people as an expression of His love for them rather than an act of vengeance against Egypt.)

#### DAILY REVELATIONS

##### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“And Yisro heard...”*

The Splitting of the Sea, the war with Amalek, and Yisro’s conversion to Judaism were all prerequisites to the Giving of the Torah.

We must relive these events in our daily lives, for G-d gives us the Torah anew each day, granting us new and higher insights into life every day from the infinite well of the Torah. But before this can happen, we must first subdue our inner Amalek, i.e., silence our doubts about Divine providence. Then, we must convert our inner Yisro, i.e., win over the part of us that still prefers to serve the idols of excessive material desires.

But in order to take these steps, we must first “split the sea and enter it,” i.e., temporarily immerse ourselves totally in holiness, through our morning prayers and regular Torah study. The Divine consciousness we experience this way enables us to bring a higher awareness into all aspects of our daily lives: eating, earning a living, interacting with others, and so on. Then, when we make time during our day to study the Torah, we will be able to uncover new insights that make it eternally relevant, thus hearing G-d’s voice from Sinai on a day-to-day basis. (Based on Likutei Sichot, vol. 11, pp. 74) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## SPEAKING TO THE HEART

### Rebbe Nachman

*“And Yisro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel His people.” (18:1)*

Only Yisro allowed the message to enter his heart. From this, we may infer that a teacher should transmit Torah only in a way that enters his student’s heart. (See Likutey Moharan I, 47)

## TRUTH SEEKER

### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

*“And Yisro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel His people.” (18:1)*

The verse tells us that Yisro heard everything that Hashem had done for the Jewish People. But what did Yisro hear exactly? Rashi explains that he heard about the splitting of the sea and the war which Amalek waged, and therefore he came.

The obvious question is, the whole world heard about these events, so why does the Torah say that only Yisro heard?

(The entire world would have known what had happened, as we see from the Midrash [Yalkut Shimoni, Shemos Chap. 14, Remez 234] which explains that when the sea split for the Jewish People, all of the water in the whole world split too, even the water contained in a small bottle. And regarding the battle with Amalek, we learn that Moshe caused the sun to stand still in order to prevent Amalek from using astrology to determine their moment of victory [see Rashi, Shemos 17:12].)

And since everyone heard the same as Yisro why did they not come too?

Rashi (Shemos 18:11) explains that Yisro had tried every form of idol worship that existed in the world before committing to the Torah. We see from here that Yisro was someone who was constantly in an honest pursuit for the truth. Everyone else was not interested in the truth; rather, they were happy living a blissfully ignorant and idolatrous lifestyle. So, when they heard about all of the miracles performed for the Jewish People, it did not have a great impact on their lives. Yisro, on the other hand, was actively searching for the truth, and therefore when he heard everything that Hashem had done for the Jewish People, he recognized that this was coming from the ultimate source of truth, and because this is what he was genuinely searching for, his whole life was changed forever.

And perhaps this is why Yisro’s Torah *parsha* contains the topic of choosing judges; for it is only fitting that someone who spent his whole life searching for truth at all cost merits to have the portion of judges affiliated with his name, for that is the role of a judge - to seek out the truth.

## DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*“And Yisro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel His people.” (18:1)*

Commenting on the first *pasuk* of Parshas Yisro, Rashi writes that Yisro, Moshe’s father-in-law, had seven different names. Rashi proceeds to list all the names and explain their meanings. One of the names, Rashi writes, is יתר אחთ פרשה ב תורה - a section of the Torah was added in his merit. As we read later, Yisro observed Moshe spending the entire day singlehandedly resolving the people’s disputes, and he recommended appointing a network of judges to work alongside Moshe. This story was included in the Torah, such that an “extra” (יתר) portion was added due to Yisro.

In presenting this explanation, Rashi refers to the added section in the Torah as the section of תחזה. These are the words that Yisro used in offering his recommendation that Moshe appoint competent and worthy individuals to serve as judges - ואתה תחזה מכל העם (18:21).

Rav Moshe Shternbuch, in Ta’am Va’daas, notes that these words do not actually begin the story. Yisro opened his advice to Moshe with the words לא טוב הדבר אשר אתה עושה - “That which you are doing is not good” (18:17). However, the title Rashi chose for this section is not these words, but rather תחזה, the content of Yisro’s recommendation. The reason, Rav Shternbuch explains, is that we do not earn credit for simply saying לא טוב, for pointing out problems. Sitting around and complaining does not help. The real praise for Yisro is that he said תחזה, that he did not just criticize, but offered a solution, giving constructive advice.

It is easy to sit around a Shabbos table and point out problems that we see in the shul, in the school, in the community, and so on. But pointing out problems isn’t enough - we need to get involved to help solve them. If somebody truly wishes to help, then instead of just complaining, he should take the initiative, sit on committees, volunteer, brainstorm and work toward finding effective solutions. We make our mark not by complaining about problems, but by going out there and trying to solve them.

## VARYING REACTIONS

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*“And Yisro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel His people.” (18:1)*

Parshas Yisro opens by telling us that Yisro, Moshe’s father-in-law, heard of what Hashem had done for *Bnei Yisrael*, and decided to join them. This section immediately follows the story of Amalek’s unprovoked attack on *Bnei Yisrael*.

Both Yisro and Amalek heard about the great miracles which Hashem had performed for *Bnei Yisrael*, how He had brought supernatural plagues upon Egypt, the mightiest empire in the world, and then drowned the Egyptian army at sea. And yet, whereas Amalek reacted by waging war against *Bnei Yisrael*, Yisro decided to come and join them.

Rav Soloveitchik elaborates on this contrast between Yisro and Amalek. He describes Yisro's reaction as follows:

*Jethro was a gentile; essentially, he was the Archbishop of Midian. He came to the Jewish camp with an open mind. He wanted to observe for himself what the Jews had accomplished and were about to engage in. He was so overwhelmed by their conduct that he renounced paganism and embraced Judaism. Chazal did not describe Jethro as a saintly gentile; rather, he is portrayed as a decent person, whose positive reaction should have been emulated by other gentiles who witnessed the exhibition of Matan Torah.*

Amalek, however, responded by seeking to destroy *Bnei Yisrael*, as the Rav explains:

*They believed that a nation which could defy Egypt and Pharaoh, gain freedom from Pharaoh, and defeat the Egyptian regime, while having different laws from those which prevailed all over the world, should be exterminated. Amalek came and attacked the Jews. The Jews had not threatened Amalek in any manner, yet Amalek attacked them anyway. This was their reaction to Matan Torah.*

Rav Soloveitchik observes that these two diametrically opposite reactions to the phenomenon of *Am Yisrael* set a precedent for what would happen through our nation's history - and it is precisely for this reason that these stories are told as introductions to the event of *Matan Torah*. The Rav writes:

*The purpose of the public spectacle of Matan Torah was so G-d could eventually convert the entire universe to become the residence of G-d. All will accept the reign of G-d. The time will come when the whole world must realize that the Tablets given to Jews contain the truth, and it is worthwhile to accept them - just as the Jews accepted them so many years ago. The purpose of Matan Torah was not for the individuals, but to convert the entire cosmos, the whole universe, into a divine residence...*

*The Jews were sensitive, understanding the exaltedness and beauty of a life which is lived in compliance with the laws of the Torah. No other nation understood this concept. Still, G-d exposed all of humankind to this event to allow them the opportunity to accept it. Will humankind eventually accept this reality and ultimately realize the greatness of a Torah lifestyle? The Torah answers in the affirmative and offers the story of Jethro as proof. In the eschatological era, this same event will occur on a universal scale.*

*The Torah however also wants us to know that there are certain people who will never be converted. They understand that the Jew represents something unique, but their response to that realization is one of malice, vicious hate and a desire to destroy. Amalek was the incarnation of evil and regarded Matan Torah in a completely different manner. He attacked us without provocation and for no reason, other than that we were a unique and separate entity. Amalek and their descendants will continue to react this way throughout history.*

*The gentiles will react to us in one of two ways, either as Jethro or as Amalek, and we must be prepared for both reactions.*

I can personally attest to the timelessness of this message, in light of my experiences over the last year, as we and the world have watched the extraordinary events that have unfolded since October 7, 2023.

On the one hand, of course, we have seen a resurgence of "Amalek," of irrational and obsessive Jew-hatred, what the Rav described as "vicious hate and a desire to destroy." Many around the world see the greatness of the Jewish People and the miracles that have occurred and are moved to work even harder to oppose us and seek our destruction.

At the same time, however, our *Beis Din* for conversions here in South Florida has never been busier. Prospective converts are knocking down our door to join the Jewish People. Just as we are witnessing the frightening and unfortunate rise of "Amalek," so we are seeing the beautiful, inspiring rise of "Yisro," of people who see the greatness of *Am Yisrael* and are eager to join our special nation.

## **REBBE REQUIRED**

### **Reb Elimelech of Lizensk**

*"And Yisro heard..." (18:1)*

Even when there is so much literature on morality and spiritual behavior, there is still great significance of going to the Rebbe to understand serving Hashem.

It says in the Torah: "And Yisro heard." Rashi asks what is it that Yisro heard, and Rashi answers, "He heard about the splitting of the *Yam Suf* and about the war against Amalek." If he heard, why did he have to go to Moshe?

Although Yisro heard about the greatness of Hashem, the splitting of the *Yam Suf*, and the war against Amalek, nevertheless he went to see Moshe, who was the Rebbe at that time. It shows the meaning of the statement, "There is no comparison of hearing to seeing." When one goes to the Rebbe, one sees the greatness of Hashem and it remains with the individual forever.

Even though we learn and *hear* about the greatness of Hashem, we go to the Rebbe to *see* from his actions the greatness of Hashem.

## TEACHER NEEDED

### Sichos Tzaddikim

"And Yisro heard..." (18:1)

What was the report that he heard so that he came [to visit Moshe]? The splitting of the *Yam Suf* and the war with Amalek. (Rashi)

Why did Yisro have to go to Moshe? Couldn't he have become and remained a believer in G-d in his home?

However, he went to Moshe because he was disturbed by the news that such a revelation of Divine Providence as the splitting of the Red Sea could be followed by a withdrawal of Divine favor such as Amalek's attack. This report convinced him that the Torah cannot be understood properly by studying it by oneself.

Yisro realized that he must receive instruction from a teacher and that he must never cease to strive for the improvement of his character to be able to overcome the forces of evil that seek to blind our eyes to truth and righteousness.

## SELFLESS PEACE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And Yisro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel His people." (18:1)

The word *Midian* in Hebrew means "contention" and "strife." Allegorically, then, Yisro was "the priest of strife."

We are taught that Yisro, in his search for spirituality, had tried practicing every form of idolatry then known. A major difference between idolatry and the service of G-d is that idolatry promotes self-awareness and egocentricity - for a person only manufactures gods in order to satisfy his needs and desires - whereas serving G-d promotes self-effacement and selflessness. This is why Yisro, the arch-idolater, was the "prince of strife": egocentricity causes us to clash with others, whereas selflessness enables us to get along with our fellows. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5647, pp. 72 ff; BeSha'ah SheHikdimu 5672, vol. 2, pp. 861- 862; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5737, pp. 157-162; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5745, pp. 102-106) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## A BADGE OF HONOR

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"And Yisro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel His people." (18:1)

Parshas Yisro begins by telling that Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, came to join *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert, at Mount Sinai, after hearing of all the miracles that Hashem performed for them.

Rashi poses the question of מה ששמע ובע - which pieces of news in particular motivated Yisro to come join *Bnei Yisrael*. He heard all that Hashem did for them, but Rashi wonders which specific miracles drove Yisro to make the decision to join them. Rashi answers: קריית ים סוף ומלחמת עמלק - the miraculous splitting of the sea, and the war against Amalek.

We can easily understand why the great miracle of קריית ים סוף would inspire Yisro. But what was so unique about the war against Amalek that moved him to such an extent that he decided to join *Bnei Yisrael*?

I would suggest an answer by noting that Rashi speaks here not of *Bnei Yisrael*'s victory over Amalek, but rather the war itself - מלחמת עמלק. The reason why Rashi doesn't mention the victory is obvious - *Bnei Yisrael* did not really defeat Amalek. The Torah (17:13) tells, ויחלוש יהושע את עמלק - *Bnei Yisrael*'s army led by Yehoshua succeeded only in "weakening" Amalek, warding off the attack, but they did not achieve an outright victory. And yet, the war itself motivated Yisro to leave his home in Midyan and join *Bnei Yisrael*. Why?

Amalek was the most wicked nation on earth. It represents the pinnacle of evil, the lowest depths of wickedness. The fact that such a nation felt it necessary to attack *Bnei Yisrael* says a great deal about *Bnei Yisrael*.

*Bnei Yisrael* did not do anything to Amalek, but Amalek nevertheless launched an attack, because it could not tolerate *Bnei Yisrael*'s mere presence. And if an evil nation like Amalek could not tolerate *Bnei Yisrael*'s very existence - this must mean that *Bnei Yisrael* is something special. That they were the target of Amalek's animosity is a badge of honor, as it shows that they represent the very opposite of all that Amalek embodies - goodness, morality, and G-dliness.

The same can be said about Am Yisrael's enemies today. So much of the world is irrationally obsessed with the Jewish People and, in particular, the Jewish State. We comprise such an infinitesimally small percentage of the world population, and Israel comprises such an infinitesimally small territory. There is no reason why such large numbers of people around the world are so consumed by hatred for such a tiny group.

But when we look at Israel's enemies, we see how they are the worst that humanity has to offer. And the irrational hatred and hostility directed toward Israel by the evilest people on earth should be seen as a badge of honor.

Of course, it's a badge which we would happily decline if we could. But when evil seeks to eliminate something, and pursues this goal so obsessively, that something must be very special and precious. Thus, rather than be discouraged by the irrational animosity shown to Israel, we should feel reassured that we are doing something right, that we are the force of good which the forces of evil cannot tolerate.

## AVOIDING ASSIMILATION

### Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

*"And her [Tzipporah's] two sons, the name of one was Gershom for he [Moshe] said, 'I am a foreigner in a strange land.' The name of the other was Eliezer because 'My father's G-d saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.'" (18:3-4)*

Several questions arise in these verses: For one thing, the order of events seems to be reversed - first Moshe was saved from Pharaoh and then he sojourned in Midian, so his first son should have been named Eliezer and the second Gershom. Also, why should he have named a son in commemoration of his sojourn in Midian? What manner of benefit was there in his living in a strange land? It almost seems to imply a complaint about his plight. Surely Moshe would not have entertained such a grievance against Hashem, and even less so would he have alluded to it in his son's name. How, then, are we to understand this name?

We can say that in naming his first son Gershom, Moshe was praising Hashem for giving him the strength to remain in Midian as an alien sojourner, someone who did not wish to settle into permanent citizenship. Had he wished to involve himself in the affairs of the country, the Midianites would surely have recognized his exceptional abilities and made him an honored leader. Moshe, however, wanted only to live in seclusion so that he could serve Hashem without disturbances and be protected from the temptations to adopt the ways of Midian.

For this reason he named his first son Gershom, since being saved from Pharaoh's sword had value to him only if he would then be able to remain aloof from the influence of his surroundings in Midian; had he assimilated into the life of Midian he would have had no reason to rejoice over having been saved in Egypt.

## PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*"And her [Tzipporah's] two sons, the name of one was Gershom for he [Moshe] said, 'I am a foreigner in a strange land.' The name of the other was Eliezer because 'My father's G-d saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.'" (18:3-4)*

The Torah recounts Yisro bringing his daughter, Tzipporah, and his grandsons, Gershom and Eliezer, to reunite with Moshe. In the context of this story, the Torah shares the meaning behind Gershom's and Eliezer's names.

Rashi comments that when Moshe thanked Hashem for saving him, he was referring to when Dasan and Aviram had told Pharaoh that Moshe killed a *Mitzri*. Pharaoh tried to kill Moshe with a sword against his neck, but Moshe's neck turned into marble, which saved him.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck (Eish Tamid) wonders why Moshe's sons were named out of order. It would seem that his first son should have been named Eliezer, which reflects when he was still in Egypt and was saved after killing the *Mitzri*, and his second son should have been named Gershom, which highlights when he arrived in Midian afterwards. Why did Moshe reverse the order when naming his children?

Rav Druck explains that Moshe would not name his first son in a manner in which he was thanking Hashem for being saved while his brothers and sisters were still suffering and enslaved. How could he celebrate when *Klal Yisrael* was experiencing such hardship? Therefore, he named his first son Gershom, which represented his current position as a stranger. Moshe's second son was born when he had already been charged with liberating *Bnei Yisrael* from *Mitzrayim*. Once he was commanded to lead the Jewish people and was able see their salvation on the horizon, Moshe was then comfortable expressing his own personal salvation by naming his second son Eliezer.

As Jews, it is incumbent upon us to realize that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. When other Jews celebrate, we need to be right there with them experiencing their joy. When other Jews are suffering, we need to sit beside them and feel their pain as though it is ours.

Let us follow the ways of our great leader Moshe Rabbeinu and make sure that we are always with our brothers and sisters of *Klal Yisrael* throughout all the ups and downs of life!

## LIFE OF OUTREACH

### Rebbe Nachman

*"The name of the other was Eliezer because 'My father's G-d saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.'" (18:4)*

A *tzaddik* must be great enough to show those who are spiritually accomplished that they have not yet begun to fathom the Infinite G-d, and to show those on a relatively low spiritual level that G-d's glory fills the entire world and therefore they are close to G-d. Moshe was such a *tzaddik*.

Those who are spiritually accomplished are represented by Moshe's "son" (i.e., his descendant) Rabbi Eliezer the Great, (רבי אליעזר הגדול), whose name is an acronym for the phrase עין לא ראתה אלקים זולתך יעשה but You, O G-d, Who acts" (Yeshayahu 64:3). This phrase alludes to the World to Come, indicating Rabbi Eliezer's spiritual greatness.

Those on a relatively low spiritual level are represented by Rabbi Yehoshua (רבי יהושע), whose name is an acronym for יקוםון הקיצו ורכנו שכני עפר, "Arise, awake and sing out, you who dwell in the dust" (ibid., 26:19). (See Likutey Moharan I, 7:14)

"The name of the one" - the one and only. (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:7)

Although this verse refers to Moshe's son, it has a secondary meaning as well. Moshe's lifework was to bring as many people as possible to recognize and serve G-d. This was also the mission of his descendant, Rabbi Eliezer the Great, who was "one" in the sense of being uniquely gifted. (See Likutey Moharan I, 215)

## HONORED DWELLING

### Chasam Sofer

*"Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, brought Moshe's sons and wife to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the Mountain of G-d."* (18:5)

The place where Moshe camped became a "mountain of G-d." It was through Moshe's presence that it became a dwelling place for the *Shechinah*. A place is honored by the person who dwells there.

## DON'T PROCRASTINATE

### Belzer Rebbe

*"Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, brought Moshe's sons and wife to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the Mountain of G-d."* (18:5)

While the Torah typically says "went" and not "came" when discussing going to a destination, in the case of Yisro, it states that Yisro heard and he came. Yisro had made no plans for a journey, but as soon as he heard of the Exodus, he immediately wanted to join Moshe.

Had Yisro taken time to consider his decision, he might have hesitated to take his family through the hardships of the desert, and that would have caused him not to join the Israelites in accepting the Torah.

From this we learn that when the opportunity arises to perform a *mitzvah*, we should do so without deliberation.

## GOING DOWN TO HIS LEVEL

### Kotzker Rebbe

*"And he said to Moshe, 'I, your father-in-law Yisro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons with her."* (18:6)

Yisro requested, "Go on my account." (Mechilta)

What is meant by this statement in the Mechilta? Yisro asked Moshe to "go," to descend a little from his own high station, "on my account," for Yisro's sake, to enable Yisro to establish a connection with him so that when Moshe rose again to his lofty place, Yisro would rise with him. This is what Yisro meant by the request: "Go on my account."

## BUILDING CONNECTIONS

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"And he said to Moshe, 'I, your father-in-law Yisro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons with her."* (18:6)

Moshe's father-in-law, Yisro, hears of all the wonderful things that G-d has done for the Jews and brings Moshe's wife and sons to meet Moshe in the desert.

The Torah tells us that when Yisro arrives with Moshe's wife and children, Moshe goes out to greet him (18:6). Why does Yisro need to notify Moshe that he is arriving? Why do we need to know that Yisro wants to be picked up?

Also, when describing Moshe and Yisro's reunion, the Torah mentions no less than seven times that Yisro is Moshe's father-in-law (18:1-12). Why is there such a focus on Yisro's relation to Moshe?

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig suggests that Yisro's subsequent implementation of a judicial system not only taught Moshe how to delegate authority but also empowered people to develop relationships with those who know more than them.

Yisro realized that the best way for people to achieve growth is to have mentors and leaders that inspire them along that path.

Yisro is referred to as Moshe's father-in-law because he valued and strove for that intrinsic connection to someone greater than him, a connection he personally maximized from the moment he arrived.

The judicial system functionally eased Moshe's burden and ultimately gave access to each other's knowledge and expertise, inspiring us to grow and connect with each other.

## WARMTH TOWARDS ALL

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law, and he bowed and he kissed him, and they inquired, one man to the other, about the other's well-being; then they came to the tent."* (18:7)

Yisro was an idolater; there was no idolatry in the world that he had not served.

Moshe was a *tzaddik* who would receive the Torah directly from G-d.

The distance between the two was very great. Nevertheless, Moshe was extremely amicable towards Yisro, treating him like an old friend.

This is the way of the *tzaddik*: to be friendly and warm to all who wish to draw close to G-d. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 464)

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## FRIGHTENED WITH DISBELIEF

### Chiddushei HaRim

*"And Yisro rejoiced for all the goodness that Hashem had done to Israel, in that He had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians."* (18:9)

His flesh shivered with horror. (The Hebrew word *va'yichad* - "and he rejoiced" is related to *chiddudin*, an expression denoting prickling with horror.) (Rashi)

Yisro was stung with horror that the Egyptians did not mend their ways but had to be destroyed because of their corruption.

## UNIFYING JOY

### Rebbe Nachman

*"And Yisro rejoiced for all the goodness that Hashem had done to Israel..."* (18:9)

In general, people experience the joy of an event in a fragmented fashion. For example, at a wedding, some people are happy for the couple, some because of the festivities, others due to the food, and still others as a result of the music. But the main reason for joy is that at their source, all the fragmentary manifestations are one.

*Va'yichad Yisro* (Yisro rejoiced) can also be translated as "Yisro made a unity." That is, Yisro made a unity of all the joy that he had experienced. He saw beyond its material manifestations and recognized that it all came from G-d, the Source of joy. (See Likutey Moharan II, 34)

## THANKING FOR OTHERS

### Radomsker Rebbe

*"Yisro said, 'Blessed is Hashem, Who rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh.'"* (18:10)

Those few words of Yisro taught us the importance of thanking Hashem for the kindness He shows others.

## REJOICING FOR EACH OTHER

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"Yisro said, 'Blessed is Hashem, Who rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh.'"* (18:10)

When Yisro arrived at *Bnei Yisrael*'s camp at Mount Sinai, Moshe Rabbeinu told him about everything the nation had experienced, and all the miracles which Hashem had performed for them. Yisro exuberantly responded, 'ברוך ה' אשר הצל אתכם ממצרים ומיד פרעעה' "Blessed is G-d who has saved you from the hand of Pharaoh and the hand of Egypt" (18:10).

גנאי: הוא למשה וששים ריבוא שלא אמרו ברוך עד שבא יתרו ואמר ברוך ה' - it is a mark of dishonor for Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* that nobody proclaimed ברוך ה' until Yisro came along and made this proclamation, praising Hashem for His miracles.

Surprisingly, Chazal here found fault in Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* for never having praised Hashem the way Yisro praised Him. We must wonder - did Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* not sing the beautiful *אֵל יָשָׁר* song of praise after the miracle of the sea? Didn't they jubilantly thank and sing to Hashem for saving them? What was so special about Yisro's praise that was lacking in theirs?

Rav Shlomo of Radomsk, in *Tiferes Shlomo*, explains that the unique feature of Yisro's praise was that he praised Hashem for a miracle performed for somebody else. *Bnei Yisrael* had sung praises after their own salvation, thanking Hashem for rescuing them. Yisro gave praise to Hashem for saving not him, but for saving *Bnei Yisrael*.

This is what made his praise so special, and so unique. As important as it is to feel grateful for and appreciate all that Hashem does for us, it is a much higher level to feel gratitude for what He does for others, to rejoice in the blessings and successes of our fellow. This is what we learn from Yisro's reaction - the importance of celebrating the joys of other people.

The *Tiferes Shlomo* cites in this context the *pasuk* in *Shir HaShirim* (2:14) - *הַשְׁמַעַנִּי אֶת קֹולךְ בַּי קֹולֶךְ עַרְבָּה*, "Sound your voice, because your voice is pleasant." Our prayers are especially precious and cherished by G-d when our voice is *ערבה* - "pleasant." The *Tiferes Shlomo* explains that this word is related to the word *ערבות*, which refers to a guarantor, someone who takes responsibility for his fellow. When someone guarantees a loan, he essentially makes someone else's needs his own needs that he is now committed to filling. When we take responsibility for other people, genuinely feeling their pain and celebrating their successes, then *קֹולֶךְ עַרְבָּה* - our voices are sweet and pleasant, we add sweetness to the world, and our *tefilos* become especially valuable.

This is the great quality we learn from Yisro - the ability to experience other people's struggles as our own, and to celebrate other people's joys as though they are our own.

## PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"Aharon and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with Moshe's father-in-law." (18:12)*

Moshe himself, however, did not eat at this meal; he was busy hosting and serving his guests (Rashi).

The lesson here is that regardless of our social status (and who can claim a higher social status than Moshe's?) we should consider it more important to take care of others' needs than to see to our own.

This applies both to other people's physical needs and to their spiritual advancement. (Sichot Kodesh 5741, vol. 2, p. 519) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnepsky

## INFINITE ASCENTS

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"On the day following [Moshe's descent from Har Sinai], Moshe sat to judge the people." (18:13)*

When our spiritual lives seem to flow smoothly, we may think that we have overcome the challenges of life and can sit back and relax. For the proper response to this sentiment, we need only of spirituality, yet, as soon as he rejoined the people, he plunged directly into his new task of judging the cases that the people brought before him.

Similarly, even when it feels as though we have reached the pinnacle of holiness, there is still tomorrow - when, like Moshe, we should set our sights even higher. (Hitva'aduyot 5742, vol. 2, pp. 871-872) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnepsky

## TRUTHFUL VITALITY

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"[Yisro said,] 'What are you doing to the people? Why are you sitting by yourself and letting all the people stand around you from morning to evening?'" (18:14)*

One who arbitrates a true judgment is considered G-d's partner in Creation. For here it states: "From morning to evening," and there it states: "It was evening, and it was morning" (Bereishis 1:5). (Rashi)

Rebbe Nachman teaches that only when the beginning, middle and end are all absolute truth can something be called true. When a judge studies the case before him and filters out falsehood so that only absolute truth remains, he rectifies faith (which implies faithfulness and honesty).

When faith is rectified, prayer is rectified, since faith and prayer are synonymous. And when prayer is rectified, vitality and bounty flow to all levels of creation. Therefore, a judge who arbitrates a truthful judgment is considered G-d's partner in Creation, for he brings vitality to all the worlds. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 2)

## ROLE OF THE LEADER

### Ramban

*"And Moshe said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to seek G-d, when they have a matter, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his fellow, and I make known to them the statutes of G-d...'" (18:15-16)*

A Jewish leader has three tasks to fulfill: first, to pray for any Jewish person in trouble ("Because the people come to me to seek G-d"); second, to act as arbitrator in financial disputes in accordance with the laws of the Torah ("and I judge between a man and his fellow"); and finally, to teach his people about G-d and His law ("and I make known to them the statutes of G-d").

Since Moshe had to discharge all these obligations single-handedly, the people "stood about him from morning to evening" (Shemos 18:14).

## IMPARTIAL JUDGEMENTS

### Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

*"And Moshe said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to seek G-d, when they have a matter, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his fellow, and I make known to them the statutes of G-d...'" (18:15-16)*

Why doesn't the text read: "When they have a matter, look at Moshe's example. While on *Har Sinai*, Moshe reached the peak *they come to me*?"

Because Moshe viewed each case as if the matter, rather than the individuals involved, had come before him. This means that he treated each "matter" impartially and objectively, without regard to personalities or other extraneous considerations involved.

## JUDGING WITH EMPATHY

### Reb Asher Horowitz of Rimanov

Moshe meant that when a Jew had a problem, a disappointment, or a conflict with someone, Moshe wanted him to come because he could feel his pain, and therefore understand the problem. This outlook gave him the ability to judge his people.

## ELEVATING WISDOM

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"Moshe's father-in-law told him, 'The thing that you do is not good.'" (18:17)*

Moshe embodied Divine wisdom, whereas Yisro embodied natural, worldly wisdom. By taking Yisro's advice, Moshe elevated natural wisdom and accepted it into the sphere of Divine wisdom.

On a cosmic level, this process was a prerequisite to the Giving of the Torah, since the wisdom of the Torah is meant to encompass and elevate all forms of natural, worldly wisdom. This is part of G-d's vision of bringing Divine spirituality into all reality - even its most "secular" aspects - thereby transforming it into His "home."

Our era has been blessed with an explosion of natural, secular knowledge. In order to truly "receive the Torah" from G-d, we must seek out the Divine sparks within secular knowledge. We thereby enable it to enhance our relationship with G-d and increase our awareness of G-d's presence in all aspects of our lives. (Ma'amarei Admor HaZaken, Parashiyot, vol. 1, p. 300) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"[Yisro told Moshe,] 'For this matter is too much for you; you will not be able to do it alone.'" (18:18)*

Being a consummately righteous individual has both its advantages and its disadvantages. Someone who has never had to repent has never felt estranged from G-d, but neither has he tasted the sweetness of reconciliation. A penitent - precisely because he has experienced spiritual "darkness" and has successfully transformed that darkness into light - is able to serve G-d with more drive, and at times more insight, than someone who has never experienced spiritual darkness.

Yisro therefore told Moshe to delegate aspects of his leadership to individuals of lesser spiritual stature than him. These people would then be able to contribute their talents and experiences - which Moshe himself lacked - toward leading the people.

The lesson for us is that we must not let the established leadership assume sole responsibility for the material and spiritual welfare and the future of the world. Each of us has unique talents and experience to contribute, and therefore each of us has a unique role to play in guiding the Jewish people in particular and the world in general toward fulfilling its Divine mission. (Hitva'aduyot 5726, vol. 1, pp. 359-361) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## BASED ON EXPERIENCE

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Now, listen to my voice. I will give you advice, and G-d will be with you..." (18:19)*

Yisro came from an idolatrous background and had experienced much evil, yet he was able to reject that evil, purify himself, and draw close to G-d.

Thus, it was specifically Yisro who advised Moshe about setting up a judicial system, because he had exercised judicial intelligence by knowing when to draw close and when to reject. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 210)

## DELICATE CRITICISM

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*"Now, listen to my voice. I will give you advice, and G-d will be with you..." (18:19)*

Yisro came to Moshe and the first thing he did was criticize him! Doesn't that seem strange? However, Rav Yerucham Levovitz zt'l says that the true greatness of Yisro was not just his ability to criticize, but to criticize constructively. In fact, it was this discerning quality that actually brought him closer to the truth of Yiddishkeit. Yisro had tried out every single type of idol worship in the world and was critical of each one. This led him to the belief in the One and only true G-d. His critical eye enabled him to view the unadulterated truth.

The trait of criticism is extremely powerful for good and for bad. One must discern where criticism is coming from. Does it stem from a place of truth or from jealousy and negativity? This is what we must ask ourselves before we attempt to "help" others and "set them straight." Even if we truly have the other person's best interest at heart, we must realize that words of criticism can be powerful and damaging. The words **קורת** (criticism) and **קבורת** (burying) employ the same letters because we can really bury someone with harsh and critical words, even when we mean well.

We must remember to encourage and build. We may suggest improvements, as long as we do not strip the recipient of his honor.

Similarly, the word **תיתְעַד**, which means encouragement, comes from the root **תִּתְעַד**, which means more. Only through encouragement and positive criticism can we expect more positive behavior and willingness to accept criticism. This great lesson is learned from Yisro, the father-in-law of Moshe.

## AUTHORITATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

### Rebbe Nachman

*"And you should seek out from among all the people men of wealth, men who fear G-d, men of truth, who despise gain and you shall appoint them officers of thousands, officers of hundreds, officers of fifties, and officers of tens." (18:21)*

*Techezez* (you should identify) literally means "you should see." Moshe could see the true spiritual level of each of his followers. With that ability, he could assign to each the proper level of responsibility within the community.

Furthermore, just by looking at his followers, a *tzaddik* can transmit his own intellect to them and illuminate their minds. (See Likutey Moharan II, 72)

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Every person has a level of authority. At the very least, an individual has authority over himself. He must strive to control his evil inclination.

As for the person who wields power over others, he must use that authority not for his own benefit but solely for the sake of G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 56:1)

## RECEIVING IN PARTS

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“And you shall appoint them officers of thousands, officers of hundreds, officers of fifties, and officers of tens.”* (18:21)

The Torah is a very great light which cannot be attained in its entirety; it must be divided into smaller units to be received. By subdividing the nation, Moshe taught the people that the only way to receive the entire Torah is to acquire a measure at a time until it builds into a whole. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 32)

## WISE JUDGES

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*“And you should seek out from among all the people men of wealth, men who fear G-d, men of truth, who despise gain...”* (18:21)

Mashal: Two litigants presented their case before Rav Binyamin Diskin zt'l and placed five thousand rubles in escrow with him pending resolution of their dispute.

Several days later, one of the parties approached the rabbi, asking him to release three thousand rubles for just a few days. He was in a tight squeeze for cash, and he assured the rabbi that he was an honorable person who would return the money shortly. R' Diskin shook his head.

“I’m so sorry I can’t help you,” the rabbi responded shrewdly. “You see, just two days ago the other claimant was here and also requested three thousand rubles. But don’t worry, he promised me he would have it back within a few days.”

At this news, the man pounded his fist angrily on the table. “What? You released escrow money that was entrusted to you? You have no right to do that!”

“Oh, I didn’t give it to him, of course,” the rabbi said calmly. “I just told you that he had asked for it. But now you yourself have effectively ruled out my giving you any money either.”

The embarrassed man left without another word.

Nimshal: The great advice that Yisro gave to his son-in-law, Moshe Rabbeinu, was that he choose worthy individuals to assist him in judging the nation and teaching them the laws by which they should live. He gave four qualifications to locate these worthy men: “Men of wealth, G-d-fearing men, men of truth, men who despise money.”

He did not say “wise men” or “learned men” for it is understood that like the *rav* in the story, men who have these characteristics are truly wise and learned in all matters - in Torah law as well as in worldly affairs.

## LEARNING FROM ALL

### Degel Machaneh Ephraim

*“And you should seek out from among all the people men of wealth, men who fear G-d, men of truth, who despise gain and you shall appoint them officers of thousands.”* (18:21)

Yisro remarked to Moshe, saying: “When you, Moshe, who are the wisest of all and a teacher, will listen to all people, then you will emphasize for all time the statement: ‘Who is wise? One who learns from all people.’”

## GLEANING AT THE TZADDIK

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“And you should seek out from among all the people men of wealth, men who fear G-d, men of truth, who despise gain...”* (18:21)

Techezeh (you should identify) literally means “you should see.” You should look carefully at the *tzaddik*, at his writings, etc. Then you will see... (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 96a)

## POSSIBILITY FOR COMPROMISE

### Rabbi Chaim Berlin

*“If you shall do this thing - and G-d commands you - so then you shall be able to endure, and all this people also shall arrive at its destination in peace.”* (18:23)

The Sages term a compromise “peace” because in such an arrangement neither of the disputing parties emerges as the loser. However, according to Jewish law, a compromise can be made only in cases where the Court of Law has no clear directives as to how the law of the Torah is to be applied. Once it is known to the Court “how the law of the Torah is inclined” compromises are not permissible.

In view of this rule, Yisro said to Moshe: If you decide all legal questions single-handedly you will not be able to arrange a compromise, for to you the Torah is always abundantly clear. But if you delegate some of the authority to lesser judges, it will be possible for them to arrange compromises since the Torah will not always be clear to them, and then “all this people shall arrive at its destination in peace” - they will be satisfied with the compromise arbitrated in their disputes.

## COMPLICATED CASES

### Rabbi Chaim Berlin

*“...the difficult cases they brought to Moshe, but each easy matter they judged themselves.”* (18:26)

Yisro said to Moshe, “Every significant matter they shall bring to you” (Shemos 18:22), but the narrative states that “the difficult cases” were brought to Moshe.

These two statements show the difference between other nations and Jews regarding settling legal disputes.

In other nations, a case's importance is dependent on the amount of money involved. Thus, litigation involving "significant" amounts is assigned to a higher court of justice, whereas cases with smaller amounts at stake are left to lower courts.

In Jewish religious law, however, the amount of money involved in a dispute is of no concern, for "the law concerning one penny is the same as that concerning a hundred *maneh* (1 *maneh* equals 150 common shekels)."

Instead, a case's importance is determined by its difficulty. "Difficult cases," i.e., more complex questions, are referred to judges more knowledgeable than those qualified to render judgment in less complicated disputes.

Thus, the Jews brought "the difficult cases" before Moshe even when the dispute was not "significant" in terms of the amount of money involved.

## GRASPING THE DIVINE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"Moshe sent forth his father-in-law, and he went off to his homeland." (18:27)*

Yisro had formerly been known as Yeser (Shemos 4:18), which means "more," reflecting his superior, keen intellect. Yeser used his intellect to seek out the meaning of life, and he acted on his conclusions.

Nonetheless, human intellect is inherently limited, so it can never reach the Divine awareness that nullifies the ego and enables us to be transparent channels of Divinity into the world. For this, we need the Torah.

This is why the letter *vav* [ו] was added to Yeser's name [YESER], making him *Yisro* [ישראל], when he accepted the Torah. The letter *vav* can be seen as a *yud* [י] sitting atop a straight line, indicating how when we possess self-effacement (indicated by the *yud*, the smallest letter), we can bring the most abstract knowledge down into concrete reality and apply it. By accepting the Torah, we can reach beyond our own intellect and bring Divine intellect into the world. (Sefer Ma'amarim Melukat, vol. 3, p. 59) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## COMPLETE RELIANCE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"In the third month of the Children of Israel's departure from the land of Egypt, on this day they arrived at the Sinai desert." (19:1)*

In order to receive the Torah, the Jewish people had to venture into the desolate desert, trusting that G-d would provide for them. To their credit, they did this without hesitation.

Just as our ancestors could easily have balked at the notion of following Moshe into the desert, we too can easily find reasons to postpone, minimize, or even excuse ourselves altogether from studying ("receiving") the Torah. Sometimes we may feel that we are discharging our obligations to G-d in other ways; at other times we may feel that we are too distracted, hungry, tired, or so on to concentrate. In such cases, we can learn from our ancestors example that the proper approach to studying the Torah is total immersion in it, abandoning all other considerations and worries.

When we rely on G-d, studying the Torah devotedly, He will provide for all our material and spiritual needs, just as He provided for our ancestors when they relied on Him by "following" Him out of Egypt and into the desert. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, pp. 308-309) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## REACHING EXALTED LEVELS

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*"In the third month of the Children of Israel's departure from the land of Egypt, this day they arrived at the Sinai desert. They had journeyed from Rephidim and had come to the desert of Sinai." (19:1-2)*

The Torah describes how, in the third month after being redeemed from slavery in Egypt, *Bnei Yisrael* arrived at *Har Sinai* and prepared themselves for the great and awesome day on which they were to receive the Torah. What is unusual is the wording of the *pasuk*: "In the third month... they came to the Sinai desert. They traveled from Rephidim and came to the Sinai desert." Why is their arrival at *Har Sinai* heralded not once, but twice?

R' Shloime Kluger zt'l gives us a penetrating insight into the makeup of the Jewish Nation at the time that Hashem gave them the Torah. This is based on the Gemara (Berachos 34): "In the place where *Ba'alei Teshuvah* stand, even great *tzaddikim* are unable to stand there." As unbelievable as it may sound, one who sincerely repents his sins and dedicates his life to overcoming his past misdeeds, is rewarded with a merit and standing that the greatest and most righteous people in the illustrious history of the Jewish people are unable to attain! If a person is able to channel his considerable strength of character to turn away from a life filled with what modern society has to offer, he is deemed a towering personality within the folds of Torah-true Yiddishkeit.

Chazal tell us that *Bnei Yisrael* sinned in Rephidim; "*Sherafu yedeihem min ha'Torah* - They softened their hands (and minds) from the Torah." However, immediately after that, they did repent and were thus deemed worthy of the greatest of treasures: *kabbalas ha'Torah* - accepting the Torah on *Har Sinai*.

This, then, says R' Shloime, is what the *pasuk* is coming to teach us:

"In the third month... they came to the Sinai desert" - arriving righteous and worthy of this treasure. And how did they reach this ultimate level of purity and exaltation? It was only because, "They traveled from Rephidim and came to the Sinai desert" - when they sinned deeply and, in turn, did a full and thorough repentance. This alone allowed them to attain the lofty level of *Ba'alei Teshuvah*, the highest degree that a mortal can attain. Then, and only then, *ויתן שם ישראל נגد ההר* - "Yisrael camped by the mountain."

## PUTTING IN THE EFFORT

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"In the third month of the Children of Israel's departure from the land of Egypt, on this day they arrived at the Sinai desert." (19:1)*

Rashi comments that the Torah, seemingly, should have written that *Bnei Yisrael* encamped at Mount Sinai *בימים ההוא* - "on that day." Instead, it says that they arrived at the mountain *ביום זהה* - "on this day." The reason, Rashi explains, is that the Torah seeks to teach us *שיהיו דברי תורה חדשים עלייך באילו נתנו לך הימים* - "that the words of Torah should be new for you, as though He gave them today." The Torah speaks of our ancestors arriving at Sinai "on this day" to receive the Torah in order to instruct that for all time, we must always perceive the Torah as being given to us *בימים זהה*, on this day, today.

At first glance, this refers to our feelings of affection and excitement. We should view the Torah as something "new" in the sense that we should be enthusiastic about Torah and eager to learn it and practice it each and every day of our lives, without ever getting bored or tired of it.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz, however, explained that Rashi is teaching us something more. Just as Moshe went to the heavens to bring the Torah down into this world, so must we each day work to "ascend" to the "heavens" in order to take hold of the Torah.

Each and every day, we must be prepared to put in the work, to invest effort, to exert ourselves to learn and practice the Torah to the best of our ability. We mustn't think that once we've received the Torah once, we can now "take it easy," that learning and observance no longer require effort. Each day, we are presented the Torah anew - but we need to put in the work to access it.

Moshe Rabbeinu, just before his passing, famously describes the Torah as *מורשה קהילת יעקב* - an "inheritance for the congregation of Yaakov" (*Devarim 33:4*). The word *מורשה* is commonly translated as "inheritance," but this term differs from the more familiar word for "inheritance" - *ירושה*. One explanation, given by Rav Soloveitchik and others, is that a *מורשה*, unlike a *ירושה*, must be preserved and transmitted to the next generation.

When a person receives an inheritance, he may use the property however he wants; he has no legal obligation to save any of it for his own inheritors.

*מורשה*, by contrast, is something that a person receives and is obligated to preserve so it can be passed to his children. The Torah is a *מורשה* in that we have the responsibility to carefully preserve our *mesorah* (tradition) and transmit it intact to the next generation.

The Chasam Sofer, however, offered a different explanation for the distinction between *מורשה* and *ירושה*. He posited that whereas a *ירושה* is received effortlessly, a *מורשה* requires toil and exertion.

When a person inherits money or property from somebody who passed on, he might have to fill out some forms and provide documentation, but basically, he receives the inheritance without having had to work for it. A *מורשה* differs from a standard inheritance in that it is something that is made available to us, but which we must work hard to obtain.

*תורה צוה לנו משה* - Moshe brought us the Torah from atop Mount Sinai, but he then gave it to us as a *מורשה*, not as a *ירושה*. In order to receive the Torah, we have to invest a great deal of effort, each and every day. The Torah is the most precious of all assets, more valuable than anything else in our lives, but it's not "for free." It is available to us *בימים זהה*, today, and every day, and it is up to us to invest the effort to access it and bring it into our lives.

## PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"They had journeyed from Rephidim and had come to the desert of Sinai, and they had come to the desert of Sinai and camped in the desert. Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain." (19:2)*

The Torah tells that *Bnei Yisrael* journeyed from Refidim and then arrived at *Har Sinai*, *ויתן שם ישראל נגד ההר* - and they encamped opposite the mountain (19:2). Rashi famously notes the singular form of the word *ויתן*, that the Torah chose not to write *ויתן* - that "they" encamped and instead spoke of *Bnei Yisrael* as a single entity. This indicates, Rashi writes, that *Bnei Yisrael* encamped at Sinai *באיש אחד בלב אחד* - "as one person, with one heart." They arrived at Sinai in a state of unity, without conflicts or tension among the people.

Rav Shmuel of Sochatchov, the Sheim Mi'Shmuel, cites his father, the Avnei Neizer, as explaining the meaning of Rashi's description of *Bnei Yisrael*'s state of unity at *Har Sinai*. He writes that *באיש אחד בלב אחד* means something far more than refraining from fighting. Rashi isn't saying that the different groups and factions among *Bnei Yisrael* agreed not to fight for a few days in honor of the occasion, in order to not ruin *Matan Torah*. Rather, *באיש אחד בלב אחד* means, in the words of the Sheim Mi'Shmuel, *ביטול מוחות* - the nullification of the individual's essence. At *Har Sinai*, every member of the nation recognized that they were part of something much larger than themselves, that although they each had a unique role to fill, they filled these roles for the sake of the joint entity of *Klal Yisrael*.

Of course, each and every one of us is special and distinct, and no two people are intended to live exactly the same way, or fill the same role. At the same time, however, we are called upon to transcend ourselves, to blend our identity with that of all our fellow Jews, to define ourselves not only as unique individuals, but as proud, contributing, and unconditionally loyal members of the Jewish Nation.

The greatest examples of ביטול מהות in our times, perhaps, are our precious IDF soldiers. Each soldier wears a dog tag with a special number, and each one has a special role to fill. However, they all see themselves not as individuals, but as messengers serving the holy mission of protecting *Am Yisrael*. Their quality of ביטול מהות, of nullifying their individual essence, is the only thing that can explain the extraordinary selflessness and self-sacrifice that we've been witnessing with unbridled awe and pride over the last sixteen months.

We in our community hosted the father of a fallen soldier, who shared that he has another son who is enlisting in a combat unit in the IDF. Siblings of a fallen soldier require special permission from their parents to enlist in a combat unit, and this brother implored his parents to sign the form so he would be allowed to assume a combat role.

What drives a young teenager who lost his brother in battle to join a combat unit, to put his life on the line the way his brother did?

The answer is found in Rashi's description of *Bnei Yisrael* at Mount Sinai: *באייש אחד בלב אחד*.

These remarkable Israeli youth understand that they are part of something much larger than themselves, and proudly and joyfully put their own personal wishes and aspirations to the side in order to serve their beloved nation.

These youths should be an inspiration to us all, and we should learn from their example of selfless devotion to *Klal Yisrael*.

## ENCOURAGING THOUGHTS

### Shem MiShmuel

*"They had journeyed from Rephidim and had come to the desert of Sinai." (19:2)*

How was it in the case of their arrival in the wilderness of Sinai? They were in a repentant mood. Thus, too, they left Rephidim in a repentant mood. (Rashi)

Since the Jews realized their weakness, that they had become lax in the observance of the Torah and were therefore discouraged and dejected, they gained strength from the thought that they "had come to the wilderness of Sinai," that they were on their way to *Har Sinai* to receive the Torah.

It was the anticipation of the Revelation that gave them new courage and strength to face the tasks ahead.

## UNITED STRENGTH

### Kobriner Rebbe

*"Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain." (19:2)*

*Bnei Yisrael* camped there, as one man with one heart. (Rashi)

It is only with unity that we can oppose the strong mountain of wickedness that is constantly surrounding us.

## NO PLACE FOR ARROGANCE

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*"And they had come to the desert of Sinai and camped in the desert. Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain." (19:2)*

Mashal: There was once a young man who was an outstanding Torah scholar. However, he possessed an exceptionally great character flaw - that of extreme vanity. He rejected every offer suggested to him by shadchanim, since he felt that he could not find a kallah who was good enough for him. The years went by, and gradually the shadchanim stopped calling. This outstanding bachur became a rapidly aging bachelor.

One day, his friends came to him and told him bluntly that he must overcome his haughtiness if he ever hoped to find a wife. They suggested that he concentrate on the study of *mussar*, character development, since this might help him to change his outlook.

The bachelor took his friends' advice to heart and began a serious study of *mussar* texts. Soon, he reported to his friends that he was a changed person, and that he was ready to try again. Word spread, and once again the shadchanim approached him with offers of fine marriage proposals.

The first of these offers was a young lady who had been suggested to him once before, whom he had rejected. The shadchan believed that the prospective bridegroom, now that he had come to his senses, would see her in a different light.

But he was sadly mistaken. The boy was angry with the shadchan for suggesting the same person again and remarked, "How dare you offer me the same shidduch again!" The young man bristled with indignation. "When I was almost perfect, only lacking the attribute of modesty, I rejected her; now that I have added modesty to my array of talents, so that I am completely perfect - she is certainly even less suitable for me!"

Nimshal: The Midrash describes how all the different mountains expected the Torah to be given on their peaks. One was regal in its height. Another had majestic peaks. Yet Hashem chose *Har Sinai*, since it was the smallest of the mountains. The lesson is clear: The Torah can only be acquired by one who thinks of himself as small, humble and modest. Arrogance has no place in a G-d-fearing, Torah Jew.

## LEAVING OUR COMFORT ZONE

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*“They had journeyed from Rephidim and had come to the desert of Sinai, and they had come to the desert of Sinai and camped in the desert. Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain.” (19:2)*

Parashas Yisro is the first time we are introduced to the Ten Commandments, often overshadowing other important messages conveyed in our *parashah*. One such message can be found when the Torah describes the Jews leaving Rephidim and leading to *Har Sinai* (Mount Sinai), where they would end up accepting the Torah. Why does the Torah tell us that they left Rephidim, when it seems rather obvious that they left where they were in order to get to Sinai?

Rephidim was not only where the Jews were attacked by Amalek, but it was also known to be the only oasis in the region. Once the battle was over, the Jews were able to enjoy the comforts of that oasis. It is therefore important for us to know that the people were not only willing but excited to leave the comforts of their environment to accept a Torah with many unfamiliar and sometimes difficult rules and attributes. Comfort sometimes breeds complacency, a lesson easily overlooked but also a key to personal change and growth, a lesson the people understood and we can appreciate.

## UNITED DIFFERENCES

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“And they had come to the desert of Sinai and camped in the desert. Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain.” (19:2)*

G-d's presence refuses to dwell amid discord and disharmony. Only when the Jews were unified in harmony with each other could they achieve the harmony with G-d necessary in order to receive His Torah.

The same applies today. Anyone can study the Torah, of course, but the Divine inspiration that grants us additional insight and allows us to sense G-d's presence in the Torah is ours only when we are actively concerned for our fellow human beings.

There is an additional lesson here. The Jews were able to unite at *Har Sinai* because they were “facing the mountain” - i.e., focused on the Torah. Since we all possess different intellectual faculties, emotions, character traits, and viewpoints, there is no natural way that we can maintain our individuality and still function as one unified body.

Only if we are focused on G-d do our differences suddenly cease to be obstacles to unity. Our differences still exist, for they are all necessary in order to fulfill our collective Divine mission. But our shared devotion to G-d's Will transforms these differences into stepping-stones toward our goal rather than barriers to it. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 11, p. 250) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## EMPOWERED BY UNITY

### Reb Yaakov Abuchatzeira

*“And they had come to the desert of Sinai and camped in the desert. Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain.” (19:2)*

We know that every *gadol ha'dor* (leader of the generation) is helped by the merit of the people of his generation.

When the Jews came to *Har Sinai* and “Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain,” it was as if they all came together as one large stone, with absolute unity.

Thus, when Moshe went up and “Hashem called to him from the mountain” - it was only in the merit of *Klal Yisrael* who came together by the mountain.

## SPIRITUAL DESERT

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“They had journeyed from Rephidim and had come to the desert of Sinai, and they had come to the desert of Sinai and camped in the desert. Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain.” (19:2)*

The primary Torah that a person attains is that which he acquires in the “desert” - i.e., with struggle and with difficulty. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 205a)

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The desert is an inhospitable place, devoid of physical comforts and full of dangers to life. In such a place, seemingly bereft of G-dliness, the only advice is to call out to G-d and ask Him to reveal Himself. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 51a)

## LIFTING THE LEADER

### Reb Yaakov Abuchatzeira

*“Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain. And Moshe went up to G-d...” (19:2-3)*

If the Jews, united “as one man of one mind,” can successfully confront the evil impulse, which is like a high mountain, then their leader, too, can rise in G-dliness (“and Moshe went up to G-d”).

## TORAH EDUCATION FOR ALL

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*“And Hashem called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘So shall you say to the House of Yaakov and relate to the Children of Israel...’” (19:3)*

When the Jewish people received the Torah, Moshe taught the general principles of the Torah to the Jewish women, the *Bais Yaakov*, after which he learned the minutiae of the laws with the men. The general principles came first, after which the details and particulars followed.

In his later years, a group of men came to the home of the Chafetz Chaim zt'l to inform him about a new "breach" in the ramparts of Torah tradition: the Bais Yaakov women's seminary that had been established in Krakow. They argued that the Torah forbids all such innovations and cited the Gemara that teaching a girl Torah is like teaching her *tiflus* (folly) (Sotah 20a).

While they were trying to persuade the Chafetz Chaim to condemn the seminary, a second group arrived to ask for his blessing for the same institution.

The first group was confident that they had proven conclusively that the existence of such a seminary was strictly forbidden, and they were sure that the elderly sage would denounce the newcomers in no uncertain terms. His response, however, was the exact opposite of what they expected. "Oy," he cried, "such a holy undertaking, and I have no part in it!"

The Chafetz Chaim explained how he could say such a thing, even after hearing all the arguments of the first group.

"True," he began, "Chazal did compare teaching a girl Torah to teaching her *tiflus*, but they were talking about a time when girls absorbed an outlook of pure and simple faith in their homes from earliest childhood. In such times, Chazal said that girls should continue to receive an upbringing at home and not go out to study Torah in a school setting."

"Now, however, the choice is no longer between an education at home or in school. Girls cannot avoid being exposed to profane influences that are found everywhere in contemporary society. This seminary is providing the only way of saving girls from those influences, and there is not the slightest question that all Jewish girls should be required to attend!"

## INFLUENTIAL WOMEN

### Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

*"And Hashem called to him from the mountain, saying, 'So shall you say to the House of Yaakov and relate to the Children of Israel...'" (19:3)*

In this verse, in which Hashem directs Moshe to transmit the Torah to the Jewish people, Rashi comments that the term *Beis Yaakov*, "the House of Yaakov," refers to the women, while "the Children of Israel" refers to the males. If so, it seems that Moshe was told to give the Torah to the women first, and only afterwards to the men.

This is very strange: Since it is the men who have the *mitzvah* of studying Torah and are responsible for mastering its many detailed provisions and teaching them to the people, including the women, they should have been taught Torah first.

Why did Hashem tell Moshe to give the Torah first to the women?

Hashem gave the Torah, only once - at Mount Sinai - and it was His intention that the Torah He gave at that time be passed on throughout all future generations (see the commentaries on Devarim 6:19). Torah can be perpetuated in this way only if each individual and each family takes on the responsibility of transmitting the Torah to their offspring, so that they in turn will keep the *mitzvos* and pass them on to their offspring after them.

Clearly this can be done only if Torah education is started in earliest childhood, when an individual's mind and heart are most receptive; when he grows up, his mindset become fixed and it is much more difficult, if not impossible, to inculcate such a fundamental and pervasive value system as the Torah provides. The Sages relate (Bava Basra 21b) that it was customary at one time for boys to start studying Torah only at the age of sixteen or seventeen, at which time the slightest setback was enough to make them reject their teachers and leave the way of Torah.

Thus, in order to ensure that the Torah will be preserved in perpetuity, we must begin to train our children from their earliest childhood, so that the observance of Torah and *mitzvos* will not seem like a burden to them as they grow up. This can be done only by mothers, who care for the children's physical needs and are in the best position to begin the process of their spiritual training at the same time.

Now we can understand why Hashem told Moshe to give the Torah to the women first, since they are first to have influence on the future generations, without whom Torah cannot survive. Only after children have had the fundamentals of faith in Hashem and the desire to learn Torah and perform *mitzvos* instilled in them by their mothers are they ready to learn the ways of Torah and *Mussar* from their fathers and teachers, who in turn prepare them to learn from the great *Roshei Yeshivos* and *tzaddikim* of their generation. In this way, they too will learn to educate their children in the way of Torah and *mitzvos* so that Torah will be preserved throughout all the generations.

## THE 5-BY-5 RULE

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me." (19:4)*

Before *Matan Torah*, Hashem spoke to Moshe and instructed him to convey to *Bnei Yisrael* the basic terms of the covenant into which they would now be entering. Hashem introduced His remarks by recalling the miracles of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*:

אתם ראייתם אשר עשיתו למצרים, ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים וABIOT אתיכם אל.

*You saw what I did to Egypt, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles, and brought you to Me. (19:4)*

Rashi explains the metaphor על כנפי נשרים ("on the wings of eagles") to mean that G-d protected *Bnei Yisrael* from the Egyptians the way an eagle protects its young. An eagle soars higher than other birds, and so it places its young on its wings, where they are safe, and if a hunter fires an arrow, it will pierce the body of the parent, instead of harming the young. Hashem protected *Am Yisrael* the same way, shielding them from the arrows fired by the Egyptian soldiers as they pursued them after they left Egypt.

Rav Shaul Alter shlit'a, the Gerrer Rosh Yeshiva, offered an additional explanation of this metaphor.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Avodah Zara 3:1) relates that Alexander the Great flew to the heavens, riding on the back of an eagle while holding a stick with an animal carcass in front of it. The eagle tried reaching for the carcass, flying higher and higher, until it reached outer space. Alexander looked down at the earth and was unimpressed. It appeared to him as a tiny orb, and he felt he could just hold it in his hand. This is why statues of Alexander commonly depict him as holding a globe in his hand - because when he reached the heavens, he looked down on earth and saw it as a tiny, insignificant ball that he could just grab with his hand.

Of course, this experience should have had the precise opposite effect on Alexander. Flying into space ought to be humbling, as one catches a glimpse of the vastness of the universe and the smallness and powerlessness of man. However, in one sense, Alexander was correct - when we rise to the heavens, things which appear very large here on earth suddenly seem tiny. Many of us experience this awareness when we fly in airplanes. We look down at the buildings and structures which are grand and impressive when seen down here, but from the skies, they seem minuscule.

Rav Shaul Alter explained that this might be the meaning of the phrase על כנפי אתכם ואשא אתכם as part of G-d's introduction to *Matan Torah*. One of the purposes of the Torah is to lift us high into the heavens, as it were, to give us a more accurate perspective on the world and on life. Many things that would otherwise seem large and critically important become trivial and hardly worthy of attention when seen from the prism of the Torah. When we immerse ourselves in the Torah, we are able to perceive events and experiences in our life from a different perspective, such that they become less troubling and less deserving of our time and energy.

There is a concept called the "5-by-5 rule," which says that anything which will not bother us in five years should not occupy our minds for more than five minutes now. Sometimes, upsetting things happen, and it is natural to feel troubled and frustrated. But if something happened that will not upset us in five years, then it is not worth our attention. It is only natural to keep it on our minds for five minutes - but not for any longer. Such matters are simply undeserving of our mental or emotional energy.

The Torah helps us develop this "5-by-5" perspective. When our priorities and concerns are molded by the Torah, then upsetting and frustrating situations become smaller and less significant. They weigh less on our minds and hearts, because we see them from "the wings of eagles," from the perspective of the lofty ideals and values of the Torah, such that the day-to-day problems and frustrations become so much less important and so much easier to handle.

## **WINGS OF PROTECTION**

### **Chiddushei HaRim**

*"You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me." (19:4)*

Rashi says, "The eagle carries his offspring above his wings, as if to say: If an arrow be shot in my direction, let it enter into me, and not into my son."

According to the Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 21:7), the Attribute of Justice complained that Israel did not merit deliverance at the expense of the Egyptians, since at that time both were pagan.

However, Hashem responded to the Attribute of Justice, saying, "I have lifted Israel above the wings of strict justice. If you question my act, direct your arrows at Me, not at My children."

## **SHIELDED BY HASHEM**

### **Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**

*"You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me." (19:4)*

Before *Matan Torah*, G-d commanded Moshe to deliver a message to *Bnei Yisrael*, beginning with the following pronouncement: "You saw what I did to Egypt, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles, and brought you toward Me."

Rashi explains the meaning of the metaphor על כנפי נשרים, which likens *Bnei Yisrael*'s journey to a flight "on the wings of eagles." Other birds, Rashi writes, fly while holding their young with their legs, rather than atop their wings, to protect them from birds that fly above them. Eagles, however, fly at a higher altitude than all other species, and so they have no reason to fear other birds. Their only fear is from the arrows of hunters. They therefore place their young on their wings, so that any arrows that are fired pierce the body of the adult eagle, instead of killing the offspring.

Similarly, Rashi writes, when the Egyptians trapped *Bnei Yisrael* against the sea, they were hurling stones and firing arrows at them, but the miraculous cloud which G-d placed behind *Bnei Yisrael* absorbed the arrows, protecting the people - like the eagle receiving the arrows to protect its young.

The Chiddushei HaRim offers a deeper understanding of Rashi's comments, explaining that G-d protected us not only from the Egyptians' actual "arrows" and stones, but also from their "arrows" in the allegorical sense.

The Midrash teaches that as *Bnei Yisrael* stood trapped against the sea, the prosecuting angels in the heavens argued that *Bnei Yisrael* were not worthy of being miraculously saved. After all, the angels claimed, *Bnei Yisrael* worshipped idols just as the Egyptians did. Why, then, should *Bnei Yisrael* be saved while the Egyptians drown? This argument was an "arrow" hurled at *Bnei Yisrael* at that critical time. Hashem, is His boundless love for His people, shielded them from these "arrows," from these attacks. He saw the people's faith and commitment at that moment, and so He protected them from the "arrows" of the past, from the guilt incurred by their prior misdeeds.

The Chiddushei HaRim writes that this is why Hashem tells the people in the very next *pasuk*, ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקולי - "And now, if you heed My voice..." What matters is ועתה - what happens now, the commitment that we make right here at the present moment to obey Hashem. The *avodah zara* which *Bnei Yisrael* had worshiped back in Egypt did not matter once they wholeheartedly placed their trust in G-d now as they found themselves trapped.

As long as ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקולי, we make a sincere commitment now, in the present, Hashem puts us on His back, so-to-speak, and protects us from the "arrows" of our past. A person should never feel unworthy of learning Torah, of performing *mitzvos*, of getting involved, of taking on a role, or of living an observant lifestyle because of the mistakes of his past.

A person might naturally fear the "arrows" that will be thrown at him because of his past history. He might think to himself, or fear that others will think, "Who are you kidding? Remember what you did in high school? Remember how you used to speak? Remember all those fights you got yourself into? Remember what you used to watch? Remember how you used to spend your free time? Remember who you used to hang out with?"

Hashem here declares that He protects us from these "arrows," from these questions regarding our worthiness. It doesn't matter what happened yesterday - or even what happened this morning. As long as we are genuinely committed ועתה, in the present, then Hashem shields us from all claims of unworthiness, and lovingly embraces us accepts our efforts to grow and improve.

## WELL-TESTED TREASURE

### Sefas Emes

"*You shall be a special treasure to Me among all the nations, for all the earth is Mine.*" (19:5)

I am no expert in treasures, but there is one treasure that I know of, and it has already been well-tested: the Jewish nation.

## ALWAYS TREASURED

### Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"*You shall be a special treasure to Me...*" (19:5)

Rav Dovid Lelover explained this *pasuk* homiletically. When Hashem describes *Klal Yisrael* as a treasure (סגול), this alludes to the Hebrew vowel *segol* (סגול). A *segol*, with its two dots on top and one dot directly below the center between them, looks the same no matter how you turn it. Turn it sideways, it still looks the same.

So too, every Jew, no matter what situation you are in, even if you completely turned from Hashem, you remain a Jew in His eyes. Don't give up hope. Hashem treasures you.

## THE ONLY MASTER

### Shem MiShmuel

"*Now, therefore, if you will indeed listen to My voice, you shall be a special treasure to Me...*" (19:5)

Why did G-d wait until this point to admonish the Jews to listen to His commandments? Because it was only then that the Jews were entirely free from the physical and mental enslavement to which the Egyptians had subjected them. People cannot truly accept the sovereignty of the kingdom of Heaven while they are in the service of mortal masters. Dependence on others does not allow for complete faith in G-d's Unity.

Thus, according to the Talmud, Canaanite slaves in the land of Israel were exempt from reciting the *Shema*, the acknowledgement of the Unity of G-d, because they had another master beside Him, and as long as they were beneath the yoke of the mortal master they could not fully accept the "yoke of the kingdom of Heaven."

Thus, too, G-d did not demand complete obedience from the Jews until they had left Egypt far behind them and had encamped before *Har Sinai*. Only then did He say to them: I have removed you from slavery in Egypt and have caused you to be higher than the Egyptians; "I have borne you on eagles' wings" (*Shemos* 19:4) so that now you no longer have any mortal master above you. Now you are in a position to accept the Kingdom of Heaven's sovereignty and I expect you to "listen to My voice."

## LOVED BEYOND LOGIC

### Sefas Emes

"*You shall be a special treasure to Me among all the nations, for all the earth is Mine.*" (19:5)

*Segulah* (special treasure) refers to a quality that is beneficial but whose properties are ineffable, because they devolve from a high spiritual level called transcendental intellect. The reason why G-d chose the Jews to be His special nation is ineffable and beyond explanation. (See *Likutey Moharan I*, 21:9)

## SHABBAT TREASURES

### Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

*"You shall be a special treasure to Me among all the nations, for all the earth is Mine." (19:5)*

The first letters of the words *shamoah tishmeun b'koli* (if you will indeed listen to My voice) spell out *Shabbat*. It was as though Hashem had said to the Israelites: "If you will listen to Me, obey My Covenant, and observe Shabbat, you will then be a treasure to Me."

## TIMELESS TREASURE

### Yakar Mipaz

*"You shall be a special treasure to Me among all the nations, for all the earth is Mine." (19:5)*

G-d said to the Jews: You will be "My special treasure," not only when other nations worship idols - as that would be no strong distinction.

Your distinction lies in that even when the time will come when "all the earth will be Mine," when all the world will turn to Me and all nations will acknowledge G-d's sovereignty, you - the Jews - will still be My favorite people from among all the nations.

## OVERTURNING DECREES

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov

*"You will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel." (19:6)*

This verse can be understood on the basis of a saying of our Sages (Moed Katan 16b), "Who rules over Me? The righteous. I decree, but the righteous have the power to nullify the decree." See there.

Thus, the entire Jewish nation, who are all righteous, enjoy the attributes of sovereignty, as it were, and are able to overturn a negative decree issued from Above, transforming it, and instead eliciting kindness for the Jewish people.

Our verse, "you shall be to Me a kingdom of *Kohanim*," alludes to this idea. A kingdom implies sovereignty, and "to Me" implies on a deeper level that the Jewish people will enjoy sovereignty over G-d, as it were. It implies that they can overturn or cancel a decree from Above.

Yet the sovereignty that the Jewish people enjoy is qualified. The verse specifies "a kingdom of *Kohanim*" - that is, those who, like the *Kohanim*, exemplify the attribute of kindness (see Zohar 1:266b). "Only then," G-d declares, "you have sovereignty over Me. But do not, Heaven forbid, try to overturn beneficial decrees from Above for the Jewish people. In this regard, you have no sovereignty (see Bereishis Rabbah 53:4). Only for eliciting kindness do you exercise sovereignty."

## INHERITED SANCTITY

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov

*"You will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel." (19:6)*

Another explanation of this verse: There are three crowns - the crown of Torah, the crown of Kehunah, and the crown of sovereignty, but the crown of a good name surpasses them all (Avos 4:13). Now, none of these crowns, with the exception of the crown of Kehunah, can be inherited.

The crown of Kehunah is passed down from father to son, and all the children receive their father's lineage as a Kohen. The crown of sovereignty is indeed inherited, but not all of the king's children inherit the crown. The Kehunah, by contrast, is inherited by all the Kohen's children.

Now, the Jewish people possess the sanctity of the Avos, as the verse states (Devarim 32:9), "For a portion of G-d is His nation, Yaakov a rope of His inheritance." G-d chose the Jewish people because of the sanctity that their fathers bequeathed to them. This is what the verse means when it says "a kingdom of *Kohanim*."

Just as a Kohen passes on the sanctity of his Kehunah to his children, each Jew receives an inheritance of sanctity from the Avos.

## DEPENDENCE ON EACH OTHER

### Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk

*"And all the people answered together and said, 'Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do!'" (19:8)*

It is impossible for everyone to perform all the *mitzvot*. There are *mitzvot* for the *Kohanim*, some for the Levites, others for the Kohen G-del, and others for owners of fields or private property.

That is why the Israelites "answered together" - we are partners in the observance of all the commandments, and not individuals.

## FAITH IN THE SOURCE

### Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

*"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Behold! I come to you in the thick of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever.' Moses told the words of the people to Hashem." (19:9)*

The faith in Moshe's prophetic powers spoken of here appears to be more profound than that mentioned in the preface to the Song at the Sea (14:31): "and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant."

In what way was the faith engendered at the Giving of the Torah greater than that at the Splitting of the Sea?

From this point on, the Jews were commanded to believe solely in the Torah that Hashem gave to Moshe at Mount Sinai. Even a *ben Noach* is required to keep his seven *mitzvos* only in the belief that these *mitzvos* were given to Moshe at Mount Sinai (see Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 8:11, that observance of them that stems only from the dictates of his intellect and not because of Hashem's commandment is insufficient).

It was this point that led the Rambam to reject such great philosophers as Aristotle and Plato, who he otherwise praises, and to say that they were not to be counted among the wise or pious ones of the nations of the world because they lacked this faith in the Torah of Moshe.

Surely, then, we as Jews will receive reward for the *mitzvos* we observe only if we do so in the belief that Hashem commanded them through Moshe, and not because of any rational or utilitarian arguments.

This principle applies even to the first of the Ten Commandments, the *mitzvah* to believe in Hashem's existence, and also to the *mitzvah* of believing in His unity, which is derived from the first verse of *Shema*: "Hashem is One."

These fundamental *mitzvos* must also be fulfilled only because they were received through Moshe at Mount Sinai, not because of any philosophic arguments or proofs.

Thus, the many leading Torah scholars who have engaged in philosophical investigations to prove the fundamentals of our faith, such as Hashem's existence or His unity, did so not to establish our faith in these matters, since this faith is established only by Moshe prophetic announcements at Mount Sinai, but merely as ways of buttressing and strengthening our faith (see the peirush on Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah, 1:1).

## SEEING THE TZADDIK

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"*Hashem said to Moshe, 'Behold! I come to you in the thick of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever.' Moses told the words of the people to Hashem.*" (19:9)

One of the differences between Moshe Rabbeinu and the other *neviim* was that the *neviim* were unable to speak to Hashem; they simply heard His message. Moshe, however, could converse directly with the Almighty.

This distinction between Moshe and the other prophets is made by the Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 6:7), who further notes that *Bnei Yisrael* did not have complete faith in Moshe until they witnessed the events at *Har Sinai* (ibid. 8:1).

Hence, Moshe's uniqueness was clearly demonstrated at that time, when the people saw with their own eyes how he approached the mountain and heard him speak directly to Hashem.

Every year, at the annual Agudath Israel Convention, a large crowd gathers to hear and be inspired by words of Torah and *hashkafah* from *gedolei Yisrael*, rabbanim and important lay leaders. One of the regulars at the annual convention in years past was a man who came in from out of town especially to hear the speech delivered by Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l. Year after year, at great expense and effort to himself, he would arrive in time to hear R' Moshe speak and then he would leave.

Many people knew him, as he was an annual participant, but what most people did not know was that this man did not speak a word of Yiddish - and R' Moshe addressed the crowd only in Yiddish! And yet, he came, every year without fail, and sat through R' Moshe's keynote address, concentrating and seemingly appreciating every single word.

Someone who knew him finally asked him, "Why do you come here especially to hear R' Moshe, when you don't even understand what he is saying?"

"What? Do you think I need to understand what R' Moshe is saying?" retorted the man. "When Moshe Rabbeinu spoke at *Har Sinai*, it says "*Moshe yidaber*," but only Hashem could hear him. Obviously, the words are not important. I just need to look at the *tzaddik* and my *neshamah* understands everything he says!"

## PINTELE YID

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"*Hashem said to Moshe, 'Behold! I come to you in the thick of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you, also forever.' Moses told the words of the people to Hashem.*" (19:9)

Before *Matan Torah*, Hashem informed Moshe that He would be revealing Himself *העבורי ישמעו העם בדבורי עמי*, *וגם בר יאמינו לטולם* - "so that the nation will hear when I speak with you, and also they will believe in you forever" (19:9).

One of the purposes of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* was *וגם בר יאמינו לטולם*, that *Am Yisrael* would for all time would believe in Moshe Rabbeinu as Hashem's prophet, that all he taught us was commanded by Hashem and is thus eternally binding.

We must ask, can it truly be said that this goal was achieved? Throughout history, there have always been heretical groups of Jews who denied the belief in the Torah, who rejected the laws given to us through Moshe. And of course, in our times, unfortunately, the majority of the Jewish Nation does not accept the Torah that Moshe brought us as binding.

How, then, could Hashem have promised at the time of *Matan Torah*, *וגם בר יאמינו לטולם* - that *Am Yisrael* would forever believe in Moshe's prophecies and teachings?

Rav Shmuel Berenbaum, in *Tiferes Shmuel*, answers that in fact, even to this day, every Jew believes in the Torah in the inner recesses of his soul.

Deep within the heart of every Jew there is a “*pintele Yid*,” a sincere, believing Jew. Even those who openly reject the Torah, and do not accept Jewish faith, have an inner spark of belief deep within their souls.

The promise of *וְגַם בַּךְ יָמִינוּ לְעוֹלָם* is fulfilled, even when it does not appear to be so.

The challenge, of course, is to get past the *ערלת הלב*, the covering over the heart which does not allow that inner spark to be ignited.

The Kotzker Rebbe famously noted that in the text of *קריאת שמע*, the Torah commands us to place the words of the Torah *על לבך* - “upon our hearts” (*Devarim 6:6*). We would have expected the Torah to tell us that its words should be brought into our hearts, and fully internalized, but instead, it teaches us to place them “on” our hearts.

The Kotzker Rebbe explained that very often, the heart is not yet open and receptive to the Torah’s teaching. Deep inside, there is a desire to learn and to serve Hashem, but this spark is not yet ready to be ignited. The job of every parent and educator, and the job of everyone who seeks to draw our fellow Jews closer to Torah observance, is to place the sacred words of the Torah “on the hearts” of the child, the student, and our fellow Jew, so it will be able to penetrate when the time is right.

We must recognize the presence of the “*pintele Yid*” within each and every Jew, believe in every Jew’s capacity to be inspired, to change, and to grow. Once we recognize this potential, we will be motivated to do what we can to help ignite that spark and awaken the inner desire of every Jew to connect with his or her Creator.

## CLEANING OUR CLOTHING

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow. They must wash their clothes [in preparation for the Giving of the Torah].”* (19:10)

Our spiritual “clothes” are our thought, speech, and deed. These are the means by which the soul expresses and presents itself to the outside world, just as we clothe ourselves in accordance with the image of ourselves that we wish to convey to society.

G-d gave Moshe the job of sanctifying the people, but it was the people’s job to cleanse their clothing.

Similarly, it is the role of our teachers and rabbis - the Moshe’s of our generation - to inspire us, direct us, and connect us to G-d.

Ultimate success, however, depends upon our own efforts to cleanse our thoughts, our speech, and our actions, for only then can they serve as means of expression for Divine revelation. (*HaYom Yom*, 5 Sivan; *Sefer HaSichot* 5697, p. 243) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## PERSISTENT HOLINESS

### Pardes Yosef

*“And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow. They must wash their clothes [in preparation for the Giving of the Torah].”* (19:10)

Let their holiness persist not only “today,” when they hear the Torah and G-d’s other moral instructions, but even “tomorrow,” when they will go hence.

## PREPARING FOR UNITY

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“Set boundaries around it for the people...”* (19:12)

Every Jew was at Sinai. When we are united, as we were at Sinai, then we merit the revelation of G-dliness. But it takes preparation and effort to be united and to remain united. (*Likutey Halakhot* I, p. 454)

## KEEP IT SIMPLE

### Malbim

*“Set boundaries around it for the people...”* (19:12)

This is to teach us that Jews must set boundaries to themselves and not delve too deeply into things Divine that are beyond their grasp. Instead, they should retain a simple, unquestioning faith.

## WITH ALL DUE RESPECT

### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

*“Anyone who touches the mountain will surely die.”* (19:12)

The Imrei Emes would bemoan the fact that we are so careful with our *tefillin* that even if we were to knock an empty *tefillin* pouch to the ground, we would rush to pick it up and give it a kiss as a demonstration of our love and respect, yet when it comes to those who actually wear the *tefillin*, we are nowhere near as careful!

The importance of treating all people with respect cannot be exaggerated, but it is especially true when it comes to Torah scholars. For, not only do their merits bring blessings and protection to the entire world (*Sefer Magen Avos L’Rashbitz* - *Pirkei Avos* 3:11), but in many respects, they represent the Torah itself!

This point was aptly demonstrated by the Chofetz Chaim in a letter he wrote to a group of anti-religious doctors from Lithuania who sought to close the *yeshivos* by forming a delegation to “investigate the health and nutrition that *yeshiva* students were receiving.” The Chofetz Chaim immediately realized their true intention and sent them a warm letter detailing the constant care the students receive in addition to three healthy meals each day.

At the end of the letter the Chofetz Chaim signed it with further blessings, but then added the following stark warning:

"I wanted to remind your honors that if it is written in the Torah, 'Anyone who touches the mountain (upon which the Torah will be given) will surely die' - surely, then, someone who touches the Torah itself should be even more concerned!"

We too must be wary of this message and make every effort to treat those who study Torah with great honor. By doing so, we are not only honoring the Torah, we are honoring Hashem Himself (Kesuvos 111b).

## ETERNAL SANCTITY

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"No hand may touch it, for [if one does] he will be stoned or cast down. Whether animal or human, he will not live. When the ram's horn is drawing out, they will ascend the mountain." (19:13)*

The *shofar* blast indicated the withdrawal of G-d's presence and the end of its sanctifying effect on the mountain.

The open revelation of G-d's presence on the mountain temporarily suspended the people's free choice since they could not deny G-d's existence or concern. Once the Divine revelation ended, there was room again for doubt or even rebellion. Thus, the blast signaled the return of free choice and independence of action.

It is precisely because of this independence that our accomplishments count. If there were no alternative to devotion to G-d, it would have little significance. When there is no motivation from heaven, we must muster our own initiative.

The sanctity that G-d infused into the physical world at the Giving of the Torah was superimposed and therefore fleeting. In contrast, the sanctity that we infuse into the world comes from within the world itself, and is therefore permanent. Moreover, G-d created the world for this very purpose. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5745, p. 108; Hitva'aduyot 5724, pp. 110-111) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## FORWARD LOOKING

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud over the mountain, and the powerful sound of the shofar." (19:16)*

This corresponds to the *shofar* of Rosh HaShanah (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 49a-98).

The sounds of the *shofar* are *tekiah*, *teruah*, *tekiah*. Our Sages (Rosh HaShanah 34a) taught that the staccato *teruah* is either a series of short blasts (*shevarim*) or very short sounds (*teruah*).

G-d gave the Torah accompanied by the sounds of the *shofar*. The *tekiah* - a clear, simple blast - represents the goodness and kindness of the gift of Torah, which frees us from the evil inclination. Similarly, the *shofar* will announce the coming of Mashiach. At that future time, we will also be freed of the evil inclination and all troubles will disappear, for the world will experience the joy of Torah.

At present, however, we also hear the *teruah* - the staccato sounds that represent wailing and mourning over our many troubles. We should fix our sights on attaining joy, overcoming the sadness and depression of this world by looking forward to the joy and happiness of the Future. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 165a)

## KEEP PUSHING

### Baal Shem Tov

*"And Moshe brought the people forth from the camp to meet G-d, and they stood at the bottom of the mountain." (19:17)*

As our ancestors prepared to receive the Torah at Sinai, "they stood at the bottom of the mountain." Not at the foot of the mountain, but at its bottom, i.e., underneath the actual mountain, for our Sages taught in the name of R' Avdimi ben Chama ben Chasa: "This verse informs us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, held the mountain over them like a barrel."

Was it necessary for G-d to threaten the Jews by suspending a mountain over their heads? Did they not willingly declare, "*na'aseh v'nishma* - we will do, and we will obey" (Shemos 24:7)?

Rather, this addresses a common obstacle in Torah study: We may be inspired to study Torah and dive into its Divine wisdom with enthusiasm. After some time, we suddenly find our passion waning until we are left spiritually dry. At that point, it is hard to continue, and we are wracked with disappointment over our inability to experience our former enthusiasm for G-d's holy Torah.

The solution is to replicate the Giving of the Torah at Sinai: The Jews arrived with tremendous enthusiasm, but then G-d held a mountain over their heads to impart the message: When your passion fades, apply yourself to your studies as if compelled, as if a mountain were suspended over your heads, for even the words of Torah you utter without enthusiasm remain sacred.

## FULLY COGNIZANT

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d, and they stood at the foot of the mountain." (19:17)*

The Jewish people accepted all of G-d's commandments and were ready to receive the Torah. After three days of preparation, the people assembled at *Har Sinai*.

The Midrash reveals that the Jews slept in and had to be awakened to receive the Torah. How could the Jews seemingly oversleep on such a pivotal day? And why does the Torah express that the Jews וַיַּעֲשׂוּ יְמִינְבָּם, meaning “took their place,” rather than the expected וַיַּעֲשׂוּ יְמִינָם, meaning “and they stood”?

Rav Shimon Schwab suggests that the Jews didn't sleep in; rather, they thought they would receive the Torah as a form of prophecy, typically received while asleep. Moshe had to wake them up so they could understand that the Torah needed to be accepted when fully awake, with a clear and alert mind, standing firmly on one's feet.

The Torah isn't something that just happens to us; it's a living tribute to our relationship with G-d, and its content is meant to guide us on a path to become better people.

## RESTING UP FOR THE BIG DAY

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*“Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.” (19:17)*

The Midrash says: “On the day of the giving of the Torah, the Israelites were in a deep sleep. Moshe had to wake them and bring them to *Har Sinai*.”

G-d forbid that a kingdom of priests and a holy people should fall into a deep sleep because of idleness or laziness on such an eventful day as the time of the acceptance of the Torah.

All they did was for the sake of heaven. From the second day of Sivan, they prepared themselves for that important day. They feared that they might be exhausted from all their preparations and that they might not give their full attention to what would be going on. They wanted to have a clear mind at the acceptance of the Torah. They decided to sleep so that they would awaken with a clear mind to accept the Torah.

## BRINGING THE PEOPLE FORTH

### Imrei Emes

*“Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.” (19:17)*

According to the Chiddushei HaRim, it is the task of the Jewish leader to remove his people from corruption and bring them closer to holy things.

Moshe fulfilled this task, for he “brought the people forth, from the camp” of everyday life and caused them to rise “to meet G-d.”

## HUMBLE MOUNTAIN

### Rabbi Jeremy Finn

*“And the sound of the shofar grew louder and louder. Moshe spoke and G-d responded to him with a voice.” (19:19)*

The Gemara (Sotah 5a) relates that Hashem chose Mount Sinai as the mountain on which to give His Torah to the Jewish people because it was the humblest of all the mountains.

We are familiar with the Midrash that describes how all the mountains assumed that the Torah would be given on them because they were the highest, most significant, most fertile, etc.

Only Mount Sinai was humble and thought that the Torah would not be given on it because it had no advantage over the others.

The Kotzker Rebbe asks that if the idea was to impart a lesson in humility, why give the Torah on a mountain in the first place? Why not give it in a low valley or in a crater? A lowly venue would demonstrate the importance of humility better than any mountain.

The Kotzker Rebbe learns from this that we can only find humility in great people.

A person is not being humble by not boasting about his achievements if he has not achieved anything. A person who has nothing to show off about also has nothing about which to be humble. The lesson of humility could only be taught on a mountain. Although it was an impressive mountain, it maintained its humility.

Hashem wants us to be achievers. He wants us to change and perfect the world and live a life that is full of achievements and contributions to our community and society.

However, at the same time, we should realize that as this is the reason why we are put on this earth in the first place, to boast about it is like bragging that you can breathe air.

Hashem wants us to be a mountain, but a humble one! (Talelei Oros, p. 310)

## STAYING WITHIN OUR BOUNDARIES

### Rebbe Nachman

*“And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Go down, warn the people lest they break [their formation to come nearer] to Hashem to see, and many of them will fall...’” (19:21)*

This warning applies to all people, at all times and on all levels.

Every individual has his own parameters for serving G-d, based on his health, his mental capabilities, and so on.

A person should never go beyond his limitations in his service of G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 72; ibid., II, 5:7)

The obstacles, adversities and limitations that a person faces when serving G-d represent his individual *tzimtzumim*, the parameters that G-d set up for him - just as G-d set parameters when He created the world.

A person must take great care never to go beyond his limitations. (ibid., II, 5:7; ibid., II, 9)

## NEEDED CONNECTION

### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Go down, warn the people lest they break [their formation to come nearer] to Hashem to see, and many of them will fall'... And Moshe said to Hashem, "The people are not able to ascend onto Har Sinai because You warned us, saying 'Make boundaries for the mountain and sanctify it.'" And Hashem said back to him, 'Go descend, then you shall ascend and Aharon with you, but the Kohanim and the people should not break [their formation] to ascend towards Hashem, lest He make a breach against them.'" (19:21-24)

The Midrash explains that when Hashem went around the different nations to offer them the Torah, each nation asked what restrictions they would have to implement if they were to accept it.

Hashem responded to each nation with a specific restriction which that nation felt that they could not keep.

The children of Esav would not accept a Torah which prohibited murder, the people of Amon would not accept it if adultery was prohibited, and Yishmael would not accept a Torah which said not to steal.

However, the Jewish People came along and said "*Na'aseh V'nishma* - we will do and then we will hear what is in it" (Shemos 24:7) and so Hashem gave them the Torah without specifying any restrictions.

Rav Yitzchak Berkovits asked in the name of the Avnei Nezer, if the Jewish People would not have said *Na'aseh V'nishma* and they would have asked Hashem what was in the Torah, what would Hashem have told them?

Which aspect of the Torah runs so contrary to the inner workings of a Jew that he would have refused to be bound by a Torah which contained this prohibition?

The Avnei Nezer answers from the verses mentioned above that we see many times that Hashem warned Moshe to tell the Jewish People not to ascend *Har Sinai*. They even required physical fences in order to prevent them from touching the mountain even though Hashem had already warned them that anyone who touches the mountain will die.

With this, the Avnei Nezer answers his question - What aspect of Torah would the Jewish People have not accepted? They would have rejected any law that limited their spiritual growth and stopped them coming closer to the Ultimate source of Holiness.

This is because a Jew's innate nature is to grow and to seek out and cling to holiness, and anything that would prevent them doing this would not have been accepted as a value system to live by.

## DESCENDING TO THEIR LEVEL

### Kotzker Rebbe

"And Moshe said to Hashem, 'The people are not able to ascend onto Har Sinai because You warned us, saying 'Make boundaries for the mountain and sanctify it.' And Hashem said back to him, 'Go descend...'" (19:23-24)

Because of his modesty, Moshe felt that all Israelites were on his level. He could not understand why anyone would not want to listen to the command of G-d and ascend the mountain.

That is why Hashem told him, "Go, descend." Hashem wanted Moshe to be on the same level as the others, so he would see why extra precautions had to be taken.

## DESCENDING AND ASCENDING

### Reb Noson of Breslov

"I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (20:2)

When G-d wished to give the Torah to the Jews, the angels countered, "Give Your glory [i.e., Torah] to the heavens [i.e., the angels]." G-d told Moshe to respond to the angels and he said to them, "Did you descend to Egypt?" (Shabbat 88b)

Moshe specifically asked, "Did you descend?" The only way to attain Torah is by ascending from level to level. However, each time a person is ready to ascend to the next level, he experiences a descent (see Likutey Moharan I, 22:11).

The descent into Egypt transformed the Jews from being landowners in the Holy Land to slaves in Egypt. Yet that very descent made them worthy of ascending, afterwards, to the level of receiving the Torah.

Angels, in contrast, cannot ascend or descend from the level they are at. Therefore they cannot merit to receive the Torah. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 24b)

## ESCAPING BONDAGE

### Reb Noson of Breslov

"I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (20:2)

Like the revelation of G-d's greatness that took place at the time of the Exodus, G-d's greatness is always revealed when people leave behind their material bondage and opt for spirituality. Therefore, G-d said, "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 280)

When one recognizes G-d and believes in Him, he is freed from servitude and bondage. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 272)

*Mitzrayim* (מצרים, Egypt) is similar to *Meitzarim* (narrow straits, constrictions). Through the Exodus, G-d removed us from material constraints; through the Giving of the Torah, He gave us the ability to transcend limitations. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 366)

## IT'S ALL FROM HASHEM

### Rebbe Nachman

*"I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (20:2)*

YHVH (G-d) indicates compassion. *Elokekha* (your Lord) indicates strict judgments. Both are *Anokhi* (I), for whether a person is basking in good fortune or suffering difficulties, it all stems from the One G-d.

"Out of the land of Egypt" refers to each individual's exile. "From the house of bondage" indicates that when one subdues his "bondage" - his evil characteristics - he can recognize G-d at all times, be they good times or trying times. (See Likutey Moharan I, 4:10)

## UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP

### Shach al HaTorah

*"I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (20:2)*

I took you out so that you would accept the Kingdom of Heaven. (Mechilta)

This commandment was given in the singular ("I am Hashem your G-d, Who brought you") because the knowledge of G-d and the ability to perceive the power and providence of the Creator of the Universe is not given to everyone in equal measure.

Each individual understands these things in a manner commensurate with their mental and spiritual capacities, their knowledge of the Torah and their work on behalf of Judaism, so that every person will have a different conception of G-d Who has proclaimed Himself to be *his* G-d.

## THE CHERRY ON TOP

### Rabbi Jeremy Finn

*"I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (20:2)*

When Hashem offered the Torah to *Am Yisrael*, their unequivocal reply was *נעשה ונשמע* (we did and we heard), where the *נעשה* represents the physical fulfillment of Torah and *mitzvos*, and *שמע* relates to the learning of Torah.

What is the relationship between the two? How much emphasis and importance in that relationship is to be placed on the *תורה*, and how much on the *mitzvot*?

The story is told of the great Reb Zusha, who once arrived in a city where there was a person steeped in Torah knowledge and who spent endless hours learning and studying the texts but had very little time for *gemilus chassadim*.

Reb Zusha approached this gentleman and requested his help in collecting funds for a particular worthwhile cause. The man refused, noting that he did not wish to waste valuable time from his learning. After all, he said, *תלמוד תורה בנגד כולם*!

Reb Zusha sat the man down and told him the following story:

*In a particular village lived a very wealthy man who bought a very expensive, beautiful coat and wore it to shul. After davening, everyone approached the man to tell him how impressed they were with the coat, and the wealthy man went home with many compliments ringing in his ears.*

*Seeing how impressed people were with this coat, one of the town's poor people sold all his possessions and with the money went and bought the identical coat to the one that the rich man had worn to shul. However, when the poor man wore the coat to shul, instead of complimenting him, everyone laughed and ridiculed him.*

*The poor man was at a loss as to why everyone laughed. Wasn't his coat identical to the rich man's?*

*The people replied that under the rich man's coat is a perfectly tailored jacket that sits atop a custom-made shirt that is crisp and clean. The man's pants are made to measure and ironed to perfection, and his shoes sparkle in the sunlight. Therefore, the expensive overcoat perfectly complements all that is underneath it.*

*"You, however," they told him, "are still dressed in rags, and therefore, the coat is out of place, sitting in stark contrast to that which is underneath it."*

So too, said Reb Zusha, when we are taught that *תלמוד תורה בנגד כולם*, it means that Torah learning needs to be the cherry on the top of the cake, i.e., that it complements all the other *mitzvos* that are beneath it. *תלמוד תורה* is the expensive coat that completes the look.

However, if all you have is *talmud Torah* and nothing else, it is akin to placing an expensive coat on top of rags; not only does it not compliment, but it is also out of place!

Our *נשמע* - dedication to Torah study, must complement our *נעשה* - commitment to observing all of the *mitzvos*. They must work hand in hand so that our relationship with Hashem is total, for one without the other is incomplete.

## DUAL ROLES

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*"I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (20:2)*

Now, why did G-d give the Jewish people the Torah only after they left Egypt, not beforehand?

Consider the following principle: One who serves G-d out of fear is like a servant, but one who serves G-d out of love is like His child (Zohar 3:82b). Had G-d given the Jewish people the Torah before they left Egypt, the Jewish people would have received the Torah predicated upon their fear - afraid that if they did not accept the Torah, G-d would not free them. Thus, they would have received the Torah merely as servants. Consequently, G-d first took them out of Egypt and only then gave them the Torah. By then, the Jewish people would receive the Torah out of love, as G-d's children.

This is what is implied by the words of the verse "Who took you out of Egypt": "Now that I have taken you out, I am giving you the Torah, liberating you from the house of slaves, so that you may serve Me as My children, rather than as slaves."

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Another alternative explanation of the teaching of our Sages that at the Sea of Reeds, G-d appeared to the Jewish people as a youth, and at the Giving of the Torah, as an elder:

Youngsters are typically unsettled and wavering; a child does not have the ability to settle on one thing. Similarly, when the Sea of Reeds split, two Divine attributes were exhibited: the attribute of G-d's kindness toward the Jewish people, and the attribute of judgment toward Pharaoh and his people. By contrast, the dominant quality of an older person is that of a settled mind, and he tends to exhibit a single trait - the trait of kindness.

Indeed, at the Giving of the Torah, only the trait of kindness pervaded over the Jewish people, as well as the whole world. As our Sages say (Shabbos 88b), "The whole world was filled with fragrance."

However, the truth is that even when G-d executes judgments against the wicked, He does so only as an expression of His kindness toward the Jewish nation. This, then, is the underlying meaning of the verse "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt." Although at the Exodus and the subsequent Splitting of the Sea G-d displayed His strict judgment, the main trait He exhibited even then was kindness, because even in exacting judgment, He did so as a kindness toward the Jewish people. This, then, is the import of the verse "I am Hashem, your G-d," meaning, "today I am showing the same attributes that I did when I liberated you from Egypt." This is implied by the fact that G-d refers to Himself here both with the Name *Havayah*, which indicates His attribute of kindness, and *Elokim*, which indicates His attribute of judgment. Then, too, everything was, in fact, a kindness.

## GETTING TO KNOW THE AUTHOR

### Reb Baruch HaLevi Epstein

*"I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (20:2)*

In the *Aseres HaDibros*, the first word "אנכִי" is an acronym for the words, "אנְאָ נְפָשִׁי בְּתִיבַת יְהִבָּת" - "I Myself have given the script." The Almighty is saying in this one word that if a person wants to know who I am - My character and My methods, then he should study My writing - My script.

Similar to the concept that by analyzing a person's handwriting and language, one can glean his personality and outlook on life, so too, one who studies the Torah, Hashem's script, will attain a greater knowledge of Hashem.

## MINDFUL MITZVOS

### Kotzker Rebbe

*"Do not make for yourself an idol." (20:4)*

Do not make an idol out of a *mitzvah*. Meaning, we should never have the attitude that a *mitzvah* has only an outer form and not contemplate its intrinsic meaning.

## MAGNIFIED KINDNESS

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*"Who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons to the third and fourth generations, for My enemies; but Who shows loving-kindness." (20:5-6)*

These verses can be interpreted as follows: When G-d exacts punishment for sin, the sin is reduced by the punishment. The word for "punish" in the verse (פְּלִקָּה) means "visits," as in visiting a punishment on a person, and also denotes "a reduction," as in the verse (Shmuel I 20:25) "David's place was left vacant (טְהִרָּה)." Through being visited by punishment, the sin is reduced.

By contrast, when G-d rewards a person for performing a *mitzvah*, the *mitzvah* is not diminished. On the contrary, the *mitzvah* becomes greater since G-d takes pleasure in bestowing goodness. Consequently, by causing G-d to bestow His bounty, the person's performance of the *mitzvah* becomes greater.

This, then, explains the continuation of our verse, "I perform loving-kindness to thousands of generations." When G-d rewards a person, the kindness is magnified.

## PEACEFUL SHABBOS

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it..." (20:8)*

The six weekdays represent work, toil, and dispute, as they correspond to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

They also correspond to the six Mishnaic concepts: permitted and forbidden, fit and unfit, pure and impure. During the weekdays, we toil with these concepts and must struggle to attain a correct decision in matters of law. Shabbat, the day of rest, corresponds to peace. On this day, we clarify all doubts and attain clear perception and inner peace. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 28)

## APPRECIATING SHABBOS

### Rabbi Ari Ciment

*“Remember the Shabbat day to make it holy; six days you shall labor and do all your work.” (20:8)*

“Ten things were created at twilight of Shabbos eve. These are: the mouth of the earth [that swallowed Korach]; the mouth of [Miriam’s] well; the mouth of [Bilaam’s] donkey; the rainbow; the manna; [Moshe’s] staff; the *shamir*; the writing, the inscription, and the tablets [of the Ten Commandments]. Some say also the burial place of Moshe and the ram of Avraham Avinu. And some say also the spirits of destruction as well as the original tongs, for tongs are made with tongs.” (Avos 5:6)

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos says that ten miracles were created on Erev Shabbos at night as Shabbos was about to start. Why did G-d wait until the very last second of the week to create these special miracles to be used in the future? He could have created them any time during the week!

The verse (Shemos 20:8) states, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; six days you shall labor and do all your work.”

A possible trick to appreciate Shabbos is to recognize that Shabbos is made during the week. How so? The answer is in the words: *ועשית במלאתך* - “You shall do all your work [by the arrival of Shabbos!].” An integral part of keeping Shabbos is trying to complete projects before Shabbos arrives, so that you feel accomplished (based on the Mechilta brought by Rashi here). The “rush” to complete tasks is the ultimate motivator, but the subsequent “mission accomplished” just as Shabbos arrives adds to our self-esteem weekly.

To review, Shabbos is the ultimate motivator, and if you keep the Shabbos by looking at it not as a disparate entity but as the culmination of a week’s hard work, with the Shabbos deadline in mind, then it will add to your self-esteem.

And now I can finally understand the following cryptic Mishnah we all say every week right as Shabbos begins after *במה מדליקין*:

“A person is required to examine his clothing just before Shabbos for he may forget (*שמא ישבח*) and go out (*ויצא*) [and inadvertently carry on Shabbos!]. Rav Yosef says: This is a fundamental law of Shabbos!”

At first glance the Mishnah seems to just be talking about not carrying on Shabbos. But then what is so fundamental about this law? The answer is in the homiletic

interpretation: “A person is required to examine himself” - i.e., what did I accomplish this week? Did I think about completing some element of my work by Shabbos? Did I have Shabbos in mind during the week?

This must be done as Shabbos arrives, because if you forget this examination (*שמא ישבח*) then you may lose out (*ויצא*) on the optimal fulfillment of Shabbos!

“Rav Yosef says: That is the great and deep lesson (*הלבטה רבתא*) of Shabbos” - that it is fulfilled by your attention to it during the very preceding week!

**Takeaway Messages:** If you view Shabbos as a culmination of one week’s hard work, with fulfillment contingent on attention to Shabbos during the week, then it will be a motivator and simultaneously add to your self-esteem. One must examine if they specifically worked during the week with Shabbos in mind - *חייב אדם למשמש בגדי בערב שבת* - because otherwise, if they forget, their Shabbos *שמא ישבח ויצא*.

How to appreciate Shabbos? Its fulfillment is contingent on the attention given to it during the week!

## RESTFUL SERVICE

### Rabbeinu Bechaye

*“Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the Seventh Day is a Shabbos to Hashem your G-d.” (20:9-10)*

The Hebrew verb *ta’avod* (“you shall labor”) may also be rendered as “you shall serve (G-d).” Hence, the Fourth Commandment may be taken to convey a message as follows: “Six days you shall serve G-d by doing all your work, but on the Seventh Day you shall serve Him by resting.” (Said in the name of the Rambam.)

## DAY OF REST

### Rebbe Nachman

*“He [Hashem] rested on the Seventh Day.” (20:11)*

The Messianic era will be a great “Shabbat” when we will experience rest from the attacks of our enemies and from other difficulties. Observing Shabbat in the present world is propitious for nullifying one’s enemies and overcoming obstacles. (Likutey Moharan I, 57:8)

## ACQUIRING LONGEVITY

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be lengthened upon the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you.” (20:12)*

Of the Ten Commandments that G-d proclaims to the Jewish people, honoring your father and your mother is the only one that includes the apparent reward of a lengthened life (20:12). Why would this particular commandment include the added benefit of a lengthened life?

The Malbim proposes that by honoring our parents, we are respecting and appreciating their contributions to our lives. After all, they are responsible for bringing us into the world. This focus on the positive changes our outlook on the world, which naturally leads to a longer life. What a powerful flow of energy that begins with positive thinking and enables us to not only enjoy life but extend it.

## BASIS OF ETHICS

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness against your fellow." (20:13)*

The five commandments inscribed on the first of the two tablets deal with our relationship with G-d, whereas the five inscribed on the second tablet deal with our relationship with our fellows.

This juxtaposition teaches us two things: On the one hand, we must learn to treat G-d with the same consideration that we show human beings. We instinctively sense that we must repay the kindnesses shown us by other people, but we often neglect our responsibilities toward G-d; He is easy to forget. On the other hand, our relationships toward our fellows must be based upon our belief in G-d. If our commitment to social decency is based on anything else, there is no guarantee that our actions will not be swayed by self-love or worse.

When G-d is removed from the picture, even the most "cultured" society can commit mass murder. But when the first half of the Ten Commandments, our duties toward G-d, governs our lives, we are sure to overcome any obstacle that stands in the way of goodness and truth. (Reshimot 147) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## PREDESTINED BELONGINGS

### Rabbeinu Avraham Ibn Ezra

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife..." (20:14)*

Many people wonder about the prohibition: "You shall not covet." How can a person be commanded not to covet something which he finds attractive?

The answer is found in a parable about a villager. If we assume he is intelligent, he does not covet the daughter of the king, for he knows that she is out of his reach.

Similarly, an intelligent person understands that whatever Hashem has given to someone else belongs to that other person and is out of his reach. Therefore, it never occurs to him to covet that which belongs to another person.

## FREE OF ENVY

### Rabbi Jeremy Finn

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife..." (20:14)*

The Rosh writes that from the first letter of the Ten Commandments the letter 'א' of אֱלֹהִים - to the last letter - the 'ך' of לְרֹעַ - there are 613 letters, which correspond to the 613 *mitzvos*. (Bein Adam LaParashah, p. 275)

The Maadanei Melech writes that it is no accident that the Ten Commandments finish with the word לְרֹעַ.

The *halachah* is that when one writes a document, one needs to summarize it at the end, just above where the witnesses sign (Choshen Mishpat §44).

Now, when the non-Jew came to Hillel and asked him to teach the whole Torah while he was standing on one foot, Hillel's reply was, "Do not do to others what you would not want to be done to you. This is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary, now go and learn."

Apparently, אהבת לרעך כמוך is the essence of the entire Torah. The word לרעך is the last word of the Ten Commandments because it summarizes all of the commandments - in the form of אהבת לרעך כמוך.

In relation to the prohibition to covet, the obvious question is that people are human. If we see something that is pleasing and it is something that we want, it is only natural that we will desire it. How can we observe לא תחמוד?

The Ibn Ezra draws an analogy to a country lad who travels to the big city and catches a glimpse of the beautiful princess as she passes by in her parade.

The country lad will not covet the princess, as he knows that she is way above his station, and it is unthinkable that their lives would cross paths. So should be our attitude to anything that we desire that isn't ours. It is not ours in the same way that the princess is not for the country lad. It is above our station, we have no way of getting it, and thus there is no point in craving it. It is as futile as coveting a bird's wings because you want to be able to fly.

According to this approach, the first and last of the Ten Commandments are both matters of the heart. אהבי ה' demands that we entrench knowledge of Hashem in our hearts, and the last commandment forbids desiring with our hearts that which isn't ours.

However, a more in-depth perspective is that by fulfilling the first commandment and being conscious of אהבי ה', it means that we appreciate that what we have is all that we're supposed to have. If we're supposed to have what our friend has, we would have it. Therefore, the key to observing לא תחמוד (and all of the other commandments) is to keep אהבי ה'.

In fact, for this reason, the Beis HaLevi rejects the analogy of the Ibn Ezra and suggests that the way to overcome the desire that leads to לא תחמוד is not to consider the item outside of your realm of possibility but to strengthen your relationship with the *mitzvah* of אהבי ה'.

I do want it, but I am not permitted to covet it because Hashem has instructed me not to.

The more יראת ה' a person has, the easier it is to fulfill לא תחמוד and all the other *mitzvos*. (Taam V'Daas, p. 133)

## OVERCOMING ENVY

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife..." (20:14)*

G-d provides each of us with all the resources - possessions, talents, and strengths - that we require to fulfill our unique mission in life. We each achieve our ultimate fulfillment by dedicating these resources to our Divine mission and utilizing them to heighten the awareness of G-d in the world.

Any resources that G-d has not provided us with at any given moment are thus not necessary for fulfilling our mission and would in fact sidetrack us from the development of our fullest potential. Reflecting on this truth will cure us of any envy. (Hitva'aduyot 5742, vol. 3, pp. 1661-1662) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## SEEING G-D'S PRESENCE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"And all the people could see the sounds and the flames, the sound of the shofar and the smoking mountain; the people saw, and they moved and they stood from afar." (20:15)*

This verse implies that the people saw the sound of the shofar, i.e., they saw what is normally only heard.

The difference between seeing and hearing is that once we have seen something, we are sure of its reality. If we only hear something, or hear about something, no matter how much the sound or explanation rings true, we still entertain a certain doubt about it. G-d's presence in this world is normally something we hear about but never see. At Mount Sinai, however, G-d's presence became obvious. We saw it and perceived it as clearly as we normally perceive the physical world.

We can experience something of this consciousness whenever we study the Torah. Studying the Torah allows us to ascend to a level of awareness at which the reality of G-dliness is as evident as is the reality of the world. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 6, pp. 121-129) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnfsky

## ENGRAVING HUMILITY

### Rebbe Nachman

*"Moshe said to the people, 'Do not fear, for G-d came only to raise you up, so that fear of Him will be on your faces and you will not sin.' (20:17)*

Moshe attained this level of fear and humility and was able to instill it within every Jew (see Likutey Moharan II, 72).

Moshe is called *mechokek* (see Devarim 33:21), which means "engraver." Moshe was able to "engrave" his spiritual attainments into the Jewish people.

The numerical value of the word *mechokek* (מְחֹקֵק) is 248, the same as the number of limbs in the human body. To this day, his spirit calls out to each limb of every individual's body, reminding it to serve G-d. (See Likutey Moharan II, 26)

## PROPER FEAR

### Reb Pinchas Koritzer

*"Moshe said to the people, 'Do not fear, for G-d came only to raise you up, so that fear of Him will be on your faces and you will not sin.' (20:17)*

The true fear of G-d is shown through fear of sin, not fear of punishment.

## SEEING THROUGH THE CLOUDS

### Rebbe Nachman

*"The people stood at a distance while Moshe approached the thick cloud where G-d was." (20:18)*

The difference between Moshe and the Jews was that when the people saw "thick clouds" and obstacles, they remained at a distance. But Moshe never wavered.

Even when things looked difficult, even when his objectives seemed distant and clouded, he always knew that he would find G-d - because G-d is always present, even in the "thick clouds" and confusions that a person faces. That is how Moshe attained his exalted level. (See Likutey Moharan I, 115)

## CHOOSING KINDNESS

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"And when you will make an altar of stones for Me, do not build them hewn, lest you wave your sword over it and defile it." (20:22)*

The *pasuk* says, "If you make for Me an altar of stones, you shall not build them of hewn stones [stones cut by metal]" (20:22). Rashi quotes Rabbi Yishmael, who explains that this "if" is one of three instances in the Torah that means "when." The other two times the word *ונִ* is used to mean "when" is in reference to lending money to those in need, and *omer* offerings, both of which are mandatory.

In that case, why does the Torah use a term that makes it seem optional?

Rav Avraham Wolfson suggests that the way these actions are performed is just as important as the actions themselves. When we erect an altar, lend money, or bring an offering, we should perform it like it was our choice to do it, not as though we are forced.

Just one word in the Torah teaches us that performing *mitzvos* and helping others should be done with kindness and compassion.

## FOR THE RIGHT REASONS

### Reb Elimelech of Lizensk

*“And when you will make an altar of stones for Me, do not build them hewn, lest you wave your sword over it and defile it.” (20:22)*

The sefer Yetzirah (a Kabbalistic text from the third and fifth centuries C.E.) calls letters “stones.”

“When you will make an altar of stones for Me” means “When you will sacrifice your evil inclination by occupying yourself in the study of Torah.”

“Do not build them hewn” means “Do not flaunt your learning through sophistry and hair-splitting arguments, for they become like hewn stones.”

For you have “waved your sword over it” is showing your sharpness for your own honor and ego, and you will “defile it,” G-d forbid, for you will show your “nakedness” (Shemos 20:23), meaning your arrogance. Your intent should be for the sake of Heaven and to praise Him.

## RISKS OF ARROGANCE

### Reb Elimelech of Lizensk

*“Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it.” (20:23)*

The Hebrew word *ma’alos* - “steps” can be rendered also as “virtues.” Beyond its literal implications, this commandment symbolically reminds us that one who thinks highly of oneself and boasts of one’s virtues will thereby cause one’s shortcomings to be exposed. For by one’s arrogance, one reveals one’s foolishness and faults.

## PURE SACRIFICES

### Reb Yisroel Friedman of Ruzhin

*“Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it.” (20:23)*

During the days of the Temple, when a Jew brought a sacrifice, he confessed to the Kohen and regretted his wrongdoing, showing his modesty and humility. Today, we do not have the Temple, the altar, nor sacrifices. We have substituted study and prayer. Therefore, one should have in mind that his studying and prayer must be as pure as the sacrifices of old.

## SHOWING RESPECT

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it.” (20:23)*

The priests wore trousers under their tunics, so their bodies would not have been exposed to the altar even on a staircase. Nonetheless, since walking up a staircase gives the impression of exposing one’s uncovered body, it is more modest to use a ramp.

If G-d requires us not to offend unfeeling stones, all the more so does He require us to respect the feelings of our fellow human beings.

The requirement to show respect to the stones of the altar teaches us to safeguard the honor of other people even when they are not aware that they are being disrespected, even when we do not mean to offend them. Thus, this last verse of this section of the Torah sums up the message of G-d’s revelation at *Har Sinai*: G-d is found in even the most mundane things. Our relationships with other people are part and parcel of our relationship with G-d. And in a positive sense, loving other people is in truth loving our Creator. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 21, p. 124) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## HAFTORAH

## WILLING TO HEAR AND SEE

### Malbim

*“Surely you hear but you don’t understand, and surely you see but you don’t comprehend.” (Yeshayahu 6:9)*

In the beginning you must “hear,” even though you may not be able to “understand”; and you must “see,” even though you may be incapable of perceiving. For there is hope that those who are willing to “hear” and to “see” will gradually also come to “understand” and to “comprehend” until “understanding with their heart, they will return and be healed” (Yeshayahu 6:10).

## DO IT FOR HASHEM

### Malbim

*“Surely you hear but you don’t understand, and surely you see but you don’t comprehend.” (Yeshayahu 6:9)*

You are to listen to G-d’s commandments and not seek at all costs to understand the reasons for them. For too strong of a desire to know the reasons for a commandment may lead you to neglect its observance and disregard it until you find a satisfactory reason for obeying it.

The fact is that no one reason can be considered the basis for any of the commandments; the fundamental point to remember in the case of each commandment is that it is G-d’s will.

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