



GENESIS

Bereishit
Noach
Lech Lecha
Vayeira
Chayei Sarah
Toldot
Vayeitzei
Vayishlach
Vayeishev
Mikeitz
Vayigash
Vayechi

EXODUS

Shemot
Vaeira
Bo
Beshalach

Yitro יתרו

17

Mishpatim
Terumah
Tetzaveh
Tisa
Vayakheil
Pekudei

LEVITICUS

Vayikra
Tzav
Shemini
Tazria
Metzora
Acharei Mot
Kedoshim
Emor
Behar
Bechukotai

NUMBERS

Bemidbar
Naso
Beha'alotecha
Shelach
Korach
Chukat
Balak
Pinchas
Matot
Masei

DEUTERONOMY

Devarim
Va'etchanan
Eikev
Re'eh
Shoftim
Teitzei
Tavo
Netzavim
Vayeilech
Ha'azinu
Vezot Habrachah



17 יִתְרוֹ Yitro

Overview

The central event of *parashat Yitro* is the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. All the events recorded in the Torah, beginning with the creation of the world, have been leading up to this point. Through giving the Torah, God is about to fulfill the purpose for which He created the world: to make it into His home.

Yet, before God gives the Torah to the Jewish people, one more event must occur—and according to the *Zohar*, had it not occurred God could not have given the Torah: Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, prince and high priest of Midian, must convert and join the Jewish people.

What was so special about Jethro, and what was so significant about his conversion that it served as the final, critical prerequisite for the giving of the Torah?

In this *parashah*, Jethro tells Moses that “now I know that God is greater than all other deities.”² The sages tell us that this means that Jethro was acquainted with all forms of idolatry (for otherwise he could not have made such a statement). As we have explained previously,³ idolatry arose out of the erroneous belief that since God chose to delegate some of His powers to the forces of nature, it is proper to revere these forces. Eventually, people came to worship these intermediary forces themselves and, in most cases, forgot about God. Thus, Jethro's acquaintance with all forms of idolatry was the result of having studied all the forces of creation—from the physical forces of nature up to and including the most abstract and subtle spiritual powers and energies. He had worshipped all of these as intermediaries between God and creation.

If Jethro was so smart, why didn't he realize on his own that all these intermediaries have no power of their own but are rather just tools in God's hand?

In fact, the nature of reality in Jethro's time was more conducive to the pagan outlook than to the truth. Ever since the primordial sin in the Garden of Eden, the world had become increasingly hostile to holiness and God's presence had been further and further banished from the world; it seemed that God really *had* given His powers over to the forces of nature.

Abraham and his successors reversed this trend, and their work was now about to be consummated. The breach that had developed between Divinity and worldly reality was

1. 2:67b. 2. Exodus 18:11. 3. Genesis 4:26.

OVERVIEW OF YITRO

about to be healed, enabling Godliness to permeate all reality and enabling all reality to sense Divinity.

This was why the ten plagues and their culmination, the Splitting of the Sea, were a necessary precursor to the Giving of the Torah. When the sea split, the hidden, spiritual dimension of reality (evinced by the sea, which hides all forms of life within it) became revealed; Divinity became temporarily obvious and self-evident throughout all creation.

But the Splitting of the Sea was not enough. True, the power of evil—the denial of God’s omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence—was temporarily neutralized. But it was not uprooted entirely, since the philosophical underpinnings of idolatry still existed. As soon as the sea reverted to its natural state, it was once again possible to live under the delusion that God’s power extends only throughout the realms of holiness but that nature is somehow beyond His control.

This is why Amalek could attack Israel even after the Splitting of the Sea, when “all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away [from fear].” The nation of Amalek is the personification of doubt and its resulting apathy. As long as there is room to think that God and life are two separate compartments of reality, we can entertain the notion that we can live life without God’s full involvement. This undermines our natural enthusiasm for Judaism; the Torah and its commandments become a burden to be discharged so that we can get on with the business of living. Certainly there is no point in giving the Torah to the Jewish people in this kind of climate.

Only when Jethro—the embodiment of anti-Torah philosophy and spiritualism—concedes that “God is greater than all other gods,” thereby crowning Him king over *all* aspects of life down to the most mundane and seemingly natural details, is the stage set for the Torah to descend from heaven.

This is also why Jethro waited to join the Jewish people until the sea had been split and Amalek had been deterred. The Splitting of the Sea demonstrated that the time had come for the breach between Divinity and worldly reality to be healed. But the only partially-successful battle with Amalek showed that the world was still not completely ready, that reality retained lingering doubts about the extent to which this would be possible. Jethro therefore realized that now was the time for him to do what only he could do.

Being the arch-idolater he was, Jethro was in a unique position to negate the belief that any natural force or process, physical or spiritual, is independent of God. By acknowledging that God’s providence pervades all corners of creation, that there is no aspect of life that can possibly be construed to be void of Him, Jethro readied the world for the consciousness of God’s omnipresence that was achieved by the Giving of the Torah.

It is therefore fitting that the *parashah* that describes the giving of the Torah be named after Jethro, the idolatrous priest, for it is his conversion that expresses most eloquently the power of the Torah to permeate and transform all reality into God’s chosen home.

The lessons to be learned from the above are applicable to each of us in our daily lives, and are reflected in the way in which Jewish practice requires us to organize our daily affairs:

God gives us the Torah anew each day: each day, if we make the proper efforts, we can glean new and higher insights into life from the inexhaustible well of the Torah. But before this can be, we must ensure that we are willing to let the Torah influence every recess of our lives. This requires us to subdue the Amalek and convert the Jethro within us. Subduing the inner Amalek means silencing our doubts about Divine providence; converting

OVERVIEW OF YITRO

the inner Jethro means convincing the part of us that, despite what we know to be the truth, still prefers to serve the idols of material desires to abandon its wanton animalistic pursuits and truly accept the Godly path of Torah and its commandments.

But in order to do *this*, we must first immerse ourselves—totally, even if only temporarily—in holiness. Experiencing undiluted consciousness of Divinity anew each day in our daily morning prayers and daily Torah study sessions that follow our morning prayers enables us to tackle the materialism of the world afterwards. Once we have planted ourselves firmly on this ground, we can safely bring Divine awareness into all aspects of our material lives during the ensuing day: eating, earning a living, interacting with other people, and so on. Then, when we make time throughout the day to study Torah, we will be able to uncover the new insights that make it eternally relevant, so that we may hear God’s voice from Sinai on a day-to-day basis.⁴

4. Based on *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, pp. 74 ff and vol. 4, pp. 1271-1272.

— ONKELOS —

18:1 וישמע יתרו חתן משה את כל אשר עשה אלהים למשה ולישראל עמו כי הוציא יהוה את ישראל ממצרים: 2 ויקח יתרו חתן משה את צפרה אשת משה אחר שלוחיה: 3 ואת שני בניה אשר שם האחד גרשם כי אמר גר היתי בארץ נכריה: 4 ושם האחד אליעזר כי אלהי אבלי בעזרי ויצלני מחרב פרעה: 5 ויבא יתרו חתן משה ובניו ואשתו אל משה אל המדבר אשר הוא חנה שם הר האלהים: 6 ויאמר אל משה אני חתנך יתרו בן אליד ואשתך ושני בניה עמה: 7 ויצא משה לקראת חתנו וישתחו וישקלו וישאלו איש לרעהו לשלום ויבאו האלה:

18:1 וישמע יתרו חתן משה את כל אשר עשה אלהים למשה ולישראל עמו כי הוציא יהוה את ישראל ממצרים: 2 ויקח יתרו חתן משה את צפרה אשת משה אחר שלוחיה: 3 ואת שני בניה אשר שם האחד גרשם כי אמר גר היתי בארץ נכריה: 4 ושם האחד אליעזר כי אלהי אבלי בעזרי ויצלני מחרב פרעה: 5 ויבא יתרו חתן משה ובניו ואשתו אל משה אל המדבר אשר הוא חנה שם הר האלהים: 6 ויאמר אל משה אני חתנך יתרו בן אליד ואשתך ושני בניה עמה: 7 ויצא משה לקראת חתנו וישתחו וישקלו וישאלו איש לרעהו לשלום ויבאו האלה:

— RASHI —

לוי: זו היא אשתי שנשאתי במדין, ואלו בני. אמר לו: והיכן אתה מוליכן? אמר לו: למצרים. אמר לו: על הראשונים אנו מצטערים, ואתה בא להוסיף עליהם? אמר לו: לבי לבית אבי! נטלה שני בניה והלכה לה: 4 ויצלני מחרב פרעה. כשגלו דתן ואבירם על דבר המצרי, ובקש להרוג את משה, נעשה צוארו כעמוד של שיש: 5 אליהמדבר. אף אנו יודעים שבמדבר היוזא אלא, בשבחו של יתרו דבר הכתוב, שהיה יושב בכבודו של עולם, ונדבו לבו לצאת אל המדבר, מקום תהו, לשמע דברי תורה: 6 ויאמר אל משה. על ידי שליח: אני חתנך יתרו וגו'. אם אין אתה יוצא בגיני — צא בגין אשתך, ואם אין אתה יוצא בגין אשתך — צא בגין שני בניה: 7 ויצא משה. כבוד גדול נתפכד יתרו באותה שעה, כיון שיצא משה — יצא אהרן ונרב ואביהוא, ומי הוא שראה את אלו יוצאין ולא יצא: וישתחו וישקלו. איני יודע מי השתחוה למי. כשהוא אומר: "איש לרעהו" — מי הקרוי "איש"? זה משה, שנאמר: "והאיש משה":

1 וישמע יתרו. מה שמועצה שמע ובא? — קריעת ים סוף, ומלחמת עמלק: יתרו. שבע שמות נקראו לו: רעואל, יתר, יתרו, חובב, חכר, קיני, פוטיאל. יתר — על שם שיתר פרשה אחת בתורה: "ואתה תחזה". יתרו — לכשנתגיר וקים המצות, הוסיפו לו אות אחת על שמו. חובב — שחבב את התורה. וחובב הוא יתרו, שנאמר: "מבני חובב חתן משה".² ויש אומרים: רעואל, אביו של יתרו היה. ומהו אומר: "ותבאנה אל רעואל אביהן"? שהתינוקות קורין לאבי אביהן אבא. בספרי: חתן משה. כאן היה יתרו מתכבד במשה: אני חתן המלך. ולשעבר היה משה תולה הגדלה בחמיו, שנאמר: "וישב אל יתרו חתנו": למשה ולישראל. שקול משה כנגד כל ישראל: את כל אשר עשה להם בירידת המן, ובבאר, ובמעמלק: כי הוציא ה' וגו'. זו גדולה על כלם: 2 אחר שלוחיה. כשאמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא במדין: "לך שוב מצרים",³ ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וגו',⁴ ויצא אהרן לקראתו ויפגשו ביה האלהים. אמר לו: מי הם הללו? אמר

1. להלן פסוק כא. 2. שופטים ד, יא. 3. שמות ב, יח. 4. שמות ד, יט. 5. שמות ד, כ. 6. במדבר יב, ג.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

About all God had done...that God had brought Israel out of Egypt: Alternatively, "all that God had done" refers to the exile in Egypt, which was an act of Divine severity designed to purify the people and prepare them for receiving the Torah. Inasmuch as this was an act of Divine severity, the Name *Elokim* is used

in this phrase. In contrast, "that God had brought Israel out of Egypt" refers to the Exodus itself, an act of Divine mercy. As such, the Name *Havayah* is used in this phrase.¹⁰

7 Moses prostrated himself and kissed Jethro: Moses embodied Divine wisdom, whereas Jethro embodied

10. Or HaTorah, Yitro, pp. 723-724.

Jethro

18:1 As will be recounted shortly, the people left Refidim and journeyed a short distance to Mount Sinai.¹ Because of all that had happened since Moses left him, **Jethro**, the former **priest of Midian**, took special pride in being **Moses' father-in-law**. When he **heard** about the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek, he came to meet the Israelites shortly after they camped at Mount Sinai. The Splitting of the Sea had greatly enhanced the people's reputation among the nations of the world,² but Amalek's attack had somewhat abated this respect, even though the Israelites had repelled the attack. In order to reinstate the Israelites' esteem among the nations, Jethro—who was still highly respected, despite his excommunication³—went into the desert to meet them and honor them.⁴ In general, Jethro heard **about all God had done**, half in **Moses' merit** and half in **His people Israel's merit** (for Moses' merits were equal to those of the rest of the people combined): how He provided them with the manna and the well, how He repulsed Amalek, and most of all, **that God had brought Israel out of Egypt**.

2 So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife, Zipporah, after she had been sent away,⁵

3 and her two sons. The name of one was Gershom, because Moses had said, "I have been a stranger in an alien land."⁶

4 The name of the other one was Eliezer ["my God is an aid"], because Moses had said, "the God of my father came to my aid, and He rescued me from Pharaoh's sword."⁷

5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came to Moses, together with Moses' sons and his wife, leaving the comfort of his home to go into the desert where Moses was encamped, to the Mountain of God, Mount Sinai.

6 He sent word to Moses: "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am on my way to you, so please come out to greet me. If you do not consider my being your father-in-law sufficient reason for you to honor me, please be informed that I am coming **together with your wife**, so for her sake you should come out to greet us. If this is still not enough, know that she is coming **with her two sons**. Come out for their sakes."

7 Moses went out to greet his father-in-law. When Aaron and his sons saw Moses go out, they followed him, and the rest of the people then followed suit. Jethro was thus accorded great honor. Moses **prostrated himself and kissed Jethro**, they **asked about each other's welfare**, and they went into the tent.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

1 **Jethro...priest of Midian:** The word *Midian* literally means "contention" or "strife." By calling Jethro the "priest of Midian" even though he had long since renounced idolatry and relinquished the Midianite priesthood, the Torah alludes to the fact that he had once practiced all forms of

idolatry.⁸ Whereas the Torah helps a person to unite with God, idolatry enhances his sense of ego—even if in very subtle, almost unconscious ways—and thus estranges him from God. By being the idolater *par excellence*, Jethro was thus the "priest of strife."⁹

1. Below, 19:1; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, p. 77, note 32. 2. See above, 14:21, 15:14-16. 3. Above, 2:16. 4. *Sichot Kodesh* 5725, vol. 1, pp. 348-354; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, p. 77, note 33. 5. Above, 4:27. 6. Above, 2:22. 7. Above, 2:15. 8. See Overview. 9. *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.

— ONKELOS —
 8 ואֲשַׁעֲי מֹשֶׁה לְחֻמּוֹתֵי יִתְּ
 כְּלִי־עֵבֶד יִי לְפָרְעָה וּלְמִצְרָאִי
 עַל עֵיטֶסֶק יִשְׂרָאֵל יִתְּ כָּל־עֲקָתָא
 דִּי אֲשַׁכְחֵתְנִין בְּאַרְחָא וְשִׁיזְבִּנִין
 יִי: 9 וְחֻדֵי יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל־טַבְתָּא דִּי
 עֵבֶד יִי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל דִּי שִׁיזְבָּה מִיָּדָא
 דְּמִצְרָאִי: 10 וְאָמַר יִתְרוֹ בְּרִיךְ יִי
 דִּי שִׁיזִיב יִתְכוֹן מִיָּדָא דְּמִצְרָאִי
 וּמִיָּדָא דְּפָרְעָה דִּי שִׁיזִיב יִתְּ עֻמָּא
 מִתְּחֻת מְרוֹת מִצְרָאִי: 11 כְּעַן
 יִדְעָנָא אֲרִי רַב יִי וְלִית אֱלֹהֵי בֵּר
 מִנָּה אֲרִי בְּתַגְמָא דִּי חֲשִׁיבִי
 מִצְרָאִי לְמִידָן יִתְּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַ
 דְּנִגְנוֹן:

8 וַיִּסְפֹּר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתָנָו אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה לְפָרְעָה
 וּלְמִצְרַיִם עַל אוֹדֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל־הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר
 מָצְאָתֶם בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיֵּצֵאֵם יְהוָה: 9 וַיַּחֲדֵי יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל־הַטּוֹבָה
 אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה יְהוָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֲצִילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם:
 10 וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הֲצִיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד
 מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פָּרְעָה אֲשֶׁר הֲצִיל אֶת־הָעָם מִתַּחַת יַד־
 מִצְרַיִם: 11 עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־גָדוֹל יְהוָה מִכָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים
 כִּי בִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עָלֵיהֶם:

RASHI

הַאֲרִיץ מִסְגֶּרֶת, וְאֵלֹו יֵצְאוּ שְׁשִׁים רְבֹוא: 10 אֲשֶׁר הֲצִילוֹ
 אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם. אֵמָּה קָשָׁה: וּמִיַּד פָּרְעָה. מֶלֶךְ קָשָׁה:
 מִתַּחַת יַד־מִצְרַיִם. בְּתַרְגּוּמוֹ, לְשׁוֹן רִדְי וּמְרוֹת, הָרִד
 שְׁהִיוּ מִכְבִּידִים עָלֵיהֶם, הִיא הָעֲבוּדָה: 11 עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי.
 מִכִּירוֹ הֵייתִי לְשֹׁעֲבֵר, וְעַכְשָׁו בֵּיתִי: מִכָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים.
 מִלְמַד שְׁהִיָּה מִכִּיר כָּל־עֲבוּדָה זָרָה שְׁבָעוּלָם, שְׁלֹא
 הֵנִיחַ עֲבוּדָה זָרָה שְׁלֹא עֲבָדָה: כִּי בִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עָלֵיהֶם.
 בְּתַרְגּוּמוֹ, בְּמִים דְּמוּ לְאֶבֶדֶם וְהֵם נֶאֱבָדוּ בְּמִים: אֲשֶׁר
 זָדוּ. אֲשֶׁר הִרְשִׁיעוּ. וְרִבּוּתֵנוּ דְרִשְׁוֵהוּ לְשׁוֹן "וַיִּזְדֶּ" יַעֲקֹב
 נִזְדִּי"10 — בְּקִדְרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׁלוֹ, בְּהַ נִתְבַּשְׁלוּ:

8 וַיִּסְפֹּר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתָנָו. לְמִשְׁוֹף אֵת לְבֹו, לְקַרְבֹו לְתוֹרָה:
 אֵת כָּל־הַתְּלָאָה. שְׁעַל הֵיִם וְשָׁל עֲמֹלֶק: הַתְּלָאָה. לְמִ"ד
 אֶל־יִי מִן הַיָּסוּד שֶׁל תְּבָה, וְהַתִּי"ו הוּא תְקוּן וַיִּסּוּד
 הַנּוֹפֵל מִמֶּנּוּ לְפָרְקִים, וְכֵן: "תְּרוּמָה" "תְּנוּפָה" "תְּקוּמָה"
 "תְּנוּגָה": 9 וַיַּחֲדֵי יִתְרוֹ. וַיִּשְׁמַח יִתְרוֹ. וְהוּא פְּשׁוּטוֹ. וּמִדְרַשׁ
 אֲגָדָה: נִעְשָׂה בְּשָׁרֵי חֲדוּדִין חֲדוּדִין, מִיִּצֵּר עַל אֲבוּד
 מִצְרַיִם. הִינֵנו דְּאֶמְרֵי אִינְשֵׁי: גִּיּוֹרָא, עַד עֲשָׂרָה דְרִי
 לֹא תְבִיז אֶרְמָאָה בְּאִפְּהָ: עַל כָּל־הַטּוֹבָה. טוֹבֶת הָפֶן,
 וְהַבָּא, וְהַתּוֹרָה. וְעַל כֵּלָן — "אֲשֶׁר הֲצִילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם",
 עַד עַכְשָׁו לֹא הִיָּה עֵבֶד יָכוֹל לְבְרוּחַ מִמִּצְרַיִם שְׁהִיָּתָה

8. ילקוט שמעוני שמות יח, רמז רסח. 9. סוטה יא, א. 10. בראשית כה, כט.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

God's essence transcends both the infinite and the finite, meaning that it can be infinite and finite at the same time. Jethro showed that following secular knowledge to its end results ultimately in obscurantism, distortion, disinformation—in idolatry. By declaring that all the world's wisdom—even what we normally consider finite and "secular"—is darkness unless it is seen as part of God's wisdom, Jethro revealed the essential transcendence of the Torah. He showed how the Torah, as a window to God's essence, encompasses all reality and is the means through which all reality can be absorbed into Godliness and be made to express Godliness. And this is how God Himself can be brought into all aspects of life, making the world into His true home.²⁰

The Hebrew word for "the deities" or "the gods" is the same as the Name *Elokim*. Allegorically, then, this means that Jethro now knew that the Name *Havayah* is greater than the Name *Elokim*.

Jethro understood that the exile was a manifestation of the power of the Name *Elokim*, God's attribute of judgment and severity. When he heard that God took the Jews out of Egypt, he understood that God's mercy, signified by the Name *Havayah*, can override His attribute of judgment.²¹

In addition, as noted above,²² the purpose of the plagues was to demonstrate that God transcends nature—in other words, that the Name *Havayah* can be manifest in the world, which the Egyptians thought was only under the influence of the Name *Elokim*, the powers of nature. Thus, after he heard about the details of the Exodus, Jethro could understand how the Name *Havayah* can override the Name *Elokim*.²³

This was when he changed his name from Jether to Jethro: The name *Jethro* is formed by adding the letter *vav* to the name *Jether*. The letter *vav* can be seen as a *yud* sitting atop a straight line, indicating how a person possessing self-effacement (indicated by the *yud*,

20. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5647, p. 72 ff; *BeSha'ah SheHikdimu* 5672, vol. 2, pp. 861-862; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5679, pp. 289 ff; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5709, pp. 52 ff; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5737, pp. 157-162; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5745, pp. 102-106; *Sefer HaMa'amarim Melukat*, vol. 3, pp. 58 ff. 21. *Ma'amarei Admor HaZaken, Ithalech Liozna*, pp. 81-82. 22. On 6:2. 23. *Siddur Im Dach*, 271c.

8 In order to encourage him to join the ranks of the Jewish people, **Moses told his father-in-law everything that God had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for the sake of Israel, as well as all the travail that had befallen them on the way, at the Sea of Reeds and in the attack of Amalek, and that God had rescued them.**

9 **Jethro rejoiced over all the good that God had done for Israel** by providing them with manna and the well and teaching them parts of the Torah. But he rejoiced most that God **had saved them from the hands of the Egyptians.** It was reputedly impossible to escape Egypt, yet here an entire nation had succeeded in fleeing. At the same time, Jethro was pained over the suffering of the Egyptians for, being a Midianite, he was of Egyptian stock.¹¹

10 When Jethro heard how the Egyptians had drowned in the Sea of Reeds and had suffered the very fate that they had wished to inflict on the Jews, **he said, "Praised be God who rescued you from both the hands of the Egyptians, a difficult people, and of Pharaoh, a difficult king, who liberated the people from the authority of the Egyptians.**

11 **Now I know that God is greater than all the deities**—and I am familiar with them all¹²—**for He has done what no other deity can do: in the very matter that the Egyptians plotted against Israel they have been foiled!"** Until this point, Jethro had not considered converting to Judaism and joining the Jewish people, feeling that it was sufficient for him to renounce idolatry and establish a relationship with God individually. Now, however, he decided to convert.¹³ This was when he changed his name from Jether to Jethro.¹⁴

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

natural, worldly wisdom. By bowing down to Jethro, Moses elevated natural wisdom and accepted it into the sphere of Divine wisdom. This, as we have seen,¹⁵ was a prerequisite to the Giving of the Torah.¹⁶

They asked about each other's welfare, and they went into the tent: Moses and Jethro exchanged greetings before Moses recounted the details of God's miracles to Jethro. We normally exchange greetings before launching into even holy conversation, because "encouraging peace between people takes precedence over recounting God's praise."¹⁷ But here, something more significant was happening.

As mentioned above, Jethro was formerly the "priest of Midian," which means "the purveyor of dissension." Jethro, the arch-idolater, had represented the factiousness and sectarianism that arises from allegiance to many gods and that destroys peaceful life. By first inquiring about each other's welfare, Jethro and Moses repudiated this cynical view of humanity. This further paved the way for the Giving of the Torah, for "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its

paths are peace."¹⁸

11 **Now I know that God is greater than all the deities:** As mentioned previously,¹⁹ Jethro had researched the workings of creation from top to bottom and possessed expert knowledge of all the spiritual and scientific lore of his age. By declaring that all this knowledge led ultimately to the acceptance of the God's wisdom, Jethro paved the way for the Giving of the Torah.

Besides doing away with the delusion that creation is a jumble of disparate and opposing forces vying for our loyalty on the one hand and attempting to control us on the other, Jethro's declaration enabled the Giving of the Torah in a much more profound way. The purpose of the revelation at Mount Sinai was not simply to inform the world of God's *will*; to a great extent, this had already happened: ever since the creation there was always a circle of individuals who studied the Torah. Rather, the revelation at Mount Sinai was meant to make God's *essence* accessible to the world via the Torah.

11. See Genesis 25:2, where Midian is listed as one of the sons of Keturah, who is the same as Hagar, who was an Egyptian (Genesis 16:1). 12. See Overview. 13. *Sichot Kodesh* 5725, vol. 1, p. 349. 14. Rashi on v. 1, above. 15. In the Overview. 16. *Ma'amarei Admor HaZaken, Parashiot*, vol. 1, p. 300. 17. *Reishit Chochmah*, end. 18. Proverbs 3:17. *Or HaTorah, Yitro*, pp. 724, 729. 19. In the Overview.

— ONKELOS —

12 וְקָרַיב יִתְרוֹ חֲמוּהִי דְמִשָּׁה
עֲלֹן וְנִכְסֵת קִדְשִׁין קָדָם יְיָ וְאֵתָא
אַהֲרֹן וְכָל־סִבֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִיכָל
לְחָמָא עִם חֲמוּהִי דְמִשָּׁה קָדָם
יְיָ: 13 וְהָיָה מִיּוֹמָא דְבִתְרוּהִי
וְיִתֵּב מִשָּׁה לְמִידָן יֵת עֲמָא וְקָם
עֲמָא עֲלוּהִי דְמִשָּׁה מִן צִפְרָא עַד
רִמְשָׁא: 14 וְחֹזָא חֲמוּהִי דְמִשָּׁה יֵת
כְּלִידִי הוּא עֲבִיד לְעֲמָא וְאָמַר מַה
פְּתִגְמָא דְהִדִּין דְּאֵת עֲבִיד לְעֲמָא,
מַה דִּין אֵת יִתֵּיב בְּלַחוּדָךְ וְכָל־
עֲמָא קְרִימִין עֲלֹךְ מִן צִפְרָא עַד
רִמְשָׁא: 15 וְאָמַר מִשָּׁה לְחֲמוּהִי
אַרִי אַתָּן לִוְחִי עֲמָא לְמַתְבַּע אֲלִפָן
מִן קָדָם יְיָ: 16 כִּד הָוִי לְהוֹן דִּינָא
אַתָּן לִוְחִי וְדִאִין אָנָּא בֵּין גְּבָרָא
וּבֵין חֲבֵרָה וּמַהוּדִעְנָא לְהוֹן יֵת
קְרִימָא דִּי יֵת אֲוִרִיתָהּ:

12 וַיִּקָּח יִתְרוֹ חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה עֹלָה וּזְבָחִים לֵאלֹהִים וַיָּבֵא
אֹהֶרֶן וְכָל אֶזְרָאֵל לְאֹכְל־לֶחֶם עִם־חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה
לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים:

◆ שני 13 וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה לְשַׁפְטֵת אֶת־הָעָם
וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה מִן־הַבֹּקֶר עַד־הָעֶרֶב: 14 וַיֵּרָא
חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה לָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר
מַה־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה לָעָם מִדּוּעַ אַתָּה
יוֹשֵׁב לְבִדָּךְ וְכָל־הָעָם נֹצֵב עֲלֶיךָ מִן־בֹּקֶר עַד־עֶרֶב:
15 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְחֲתָנוֹ כִּי־יָבֵא אֵלַי הָעָם לְדָרֹשׁ
אֱלֹהִים: 16 כִּי־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם דָּבָר בָּא אֵלַי וְשַׁפְטֵתִי
בֵּין אִישׁ וּבֵין רֵעֵהוּ וְהוֹדַעְתִּי אֶת־חֲקֵי הָאֱלֹהִים
וְאֶת־תּוֹרָתוֹ:

— RASHI —

הַדְּגֻלִּים שָׁאָמַר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה: "נִסְעִים אֲנַחְנוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם
וְגו' אֶל־נָא תַעֲזֹב אֲתָנּוּ"¹³, וְאִם זֶה קָדָם מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה
— מִשְׁשִׁלְחוֹ וְהִלָּךְ, הֵיכָן מְצִינוּ שְׁחוּזָה? וְאִם תֹּאמַר:
שֵׁם לֹא נֶאֱמַר "וְיִתְרוֹ" אֶלָּא "חֹבֶב", וּבְנוֹ שֶׁל יִתְרוֹ
הֵיזָה? הוּא חֹבֶב הוּא יִתְרוֹ, שְׁהָרִי כְתוּב: "מִבְּנֵי חֶבֶב
חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה"¹⁴: וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה וְגו' וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם.
וְכָלֵן עוֹמְדִים. וְהִקְשָׁה הַדָּבָר לִיתְרוֹ, שֶׁהִיָּה מְזוּלָל
בְּכַבּוּדָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְהוֹכִיחוֹ עַל כֵּךְ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "מִדּוּעַ
אַתָּה יוֹשֵׁב לְבִדָּךְ, וְכוּלָם נֹצֵבִים"¹⁵: מִן־הַבֹּקֶר עַד־
הָעֶרֶב. אֲפֹשֶׁר לֹא־מֵר כֵּן אֶלָּא, כִּלְדִּין שְׁדִין דִּין אֲמַת
לְאֻמָּתוֹ אֲפֹלוּ שְׁעָה אַחַת, מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כֹּאֲלוֹ
עוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָה כְּלִיּוֹם, וְכֹאֲלוֹ נַעֲשֶׂה שְׁתֵּף לְהַקְדוּשׁ
בְּרוּךְ־הוּא בְּמַעֲשֶׂה בְּרָאשִׁית, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בּוֹ: "וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב
וְגו'"¹⁶: 15 כִּי־יָבֵא. כְּמוֹ: "כִּי־בָא", לְשׁוֹן הוֹוֶה: לְדָרֹשׁ
אֱלֹהִים. כְּתִירָגוּמוֹ: "לְמַתְבַּע אֲלִפָן" — לְשֹׁאֵל תִּלְמוּד
מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה: 16 כִּי־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם דָּבָר בָּא. מִי שִׁיְהִיָּה לוֹ
הַדָּבָר, בָּא אֵלַי:

12 עֹלָה. בְּמִשְׁמָעָה, שְׁהִיא עוֹלָה כְּלִיל: וּזְבָחִים.
שְׁלָמִים: וַיָּבֵא אֹהֶרֶן וְגו'. וּמִשָּׁה הֵיכָן הִלָּךְ? וְהִלָּא הוּא
שִׁיִּצָא לְקִרְאָתוֹ וְגָרָם לוֹ אֶת כָּל־הַכְּבוֹד? אֶלָּא, שֶׁהִיָּה
עוֹמֵד וּמִשְׁמֵשׁ לְפָנֶיהֶם: לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים. מִכָּאן שֶׁהִנְהִיָּה
מִסְעוּדָה שֶׁתִּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים מְסִבִּין בָּהּ, כֹּאֲלוֹ נִהְיָה מִזִּיו
הַשְׂכִּינָה: 13 וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת. מוֹצָאֵי יוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים הִיָּה.
כֵּךְ שְׁנִינֵי בְּסִפְרִי. וּמַהוּ "מִמָּחֳרָת"? — לְמַחֲרַת רִדְתּוֹ
מִן הָהָר. וְעַל בְּרִיחָךְ, אִי אֲפֹשֶׁר לֹא־מֵר אֶלָּא מִמָּחֳרַת
יוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים, שְׁהָרִי קָדָם מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה אִי אֲפֹשֶׁר לֹא־מֵר
"וְהוֹדַעְתִּי אֶת־חֲקֵי וְגו'"¹¹ וּמִשְׁנִתְּנָה תּוֹרָה עַד יוֹם־
הַכְּפוּרִים לֹא יוֹשֵׁב מִשָּׁה לְשַׁפְטֵת אֶת הָעָם, שְׁהָרִי בִי"ו
בְּתַמּוֹ יָרַד וְשִׁבֵּר אֶת הַלּוּחֹת, וְלִמְחֹר עָלָה בְּהַשְׁכָּמָה
וְשָׁהָה שְׁמוֹנִים יוֹם וַיֵּרַד בְּיוֹם־הַכְּפוּרִים. וְאִין פְּרָשָׁה
זֶה כְּתוּבָה בְּסִדְרָה, שְׁלֹא נֶאֱמַר "וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת" עַד שְׁנֵה
שְׁנִיָּה, אִף לְדַבְּרֵי הָאוֹמֵר: יִתְרוֹ קָדָם מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה בָּא.
שְׁלֹחוֹ אֶל אֶרְצוֹ לֹא הִיָּה אֶלָּא עַד שְׁנֵה שְׁנִיָּה, שְׁהָרִי
נֶאֱמַר כָּאן: "וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־חֲתָנוֹ"¹² וּמִצִּינוֹ בְּמִסְעֵ

11. לחלן פסוק טו. 12. לחלן פסוק כז. 13. במדבר י, כטלא. 14. שופטים ד, יא. 15. ע"פ לחלן פסוק יד. 16. בראשית א, ח.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

13 On the following day: There are times when we feel spiritually "connected," when we are imbued with Godliness and everything about our spiritual life seems to flow smoothly. At such times we may wonder: "Maybe I have reached the point where I can

relax; maybe I have finally overcome the challenges of my mission in life." For the proper response to this sentiment, we need only look at Moses' example. While on Mount Sinai, Moses reached the peak of spiritual "connectedness." He learned the Torah di-

After Moses descended Mount Sinai

12 In order to complete the story of Jethro, the Torah now²⁴ jumps ahead four months, to the 10th of Tishrei of the following year, 2449, when Moses descended Mount Sinai for the last time.²⁵ When Moses descended the mountain, **Jethro offered up an ascent-offering and peace-offerings to God, and Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law** while Moses served them. The religious atmosphere and discussion at this meal rendered it a holy event; as such, it was as if the participants were eating **in the presence of God**.

- ◆ **Second Reading** 13 **It was on the following day, the 11th of Tishrei, that Moses sat to judge the people,** assisted by Aaron, his sons, and the seventy elders. All the people stood respectfully around Moses as he judged the litigants. Moses spent only part of the day adjudicating disputes, but since he did so honestly and correctly, God considered it as if he had toiled in this task **from morning to evening**. The same holds true for any honest judge.

14 **When Moses' father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing to the people,** letting them stand while he sat, **he said, "What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why are you alone seated, while all the people stand around you as if from morning until evening?"** It is only in a *king's* presence that everyone is required to stand;²⁶ in a *judge's* presence only the litigants are required to stand."²⁷

15 **Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is not because I want to comport myself like a king; it is because the people come to me to seek instruction from God.**

16 **Whenever one of them has a legal matter he comes to me, and I judge between a man and his fellow, and I make known God's rules and teachings.** I received the teachings directly from God, and by teaching the people myself I can share with them something of my own experience of Divine revelation. My objective is not to simply teach them the dry laws, but rather to impart to them the underlying Divinity of these laws. This is why I teach them myself and have them stand in my presence."

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

the smallest letter) can bring the most abstract knowledge down into concrete reality and apply it.

As noted above,²⁸ Jethro was originally called Jether because he was gifted with a keen intellect, he used it to seek out the meaning of life, and he acted on his conclusions. Nonetheless, since human intellect is inherently limited, it can never reach the intense Divine awareness that nullifies the ego and enables us to be transparent channels of Divinity into the world. For this, we need the Torah. Thus, when Jethro accepted the Torah, the *vav* was added to his name, indicating

that he was now able to reach beyond his own intellect and bring Divine intellect into the world.²⁹

12 **Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law while Moses served them:** Rather than focusing on his own meal, Moses ensured that the others were provided for. The lesson here is that regardless of a person's social status (and who can claim a higher social status than Moses?) he should consider it more important to take care of someone else's needs than to see to his own. This applies both to physical needs as well as to spiritual advancement.³⁰

24. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6, p. 213. 25. Below, 34:29 ff. 26. *Mishneh Torah*, *Melachim* 2:5. 27. *Shevuot* 30ab; *Mishneh Torah*, *Sanhedrin* 21:3. *Maskil LeDavid* here. 28. On 1:10. 29. *Sefer Ma'amarim Melukat*, vol. 3, p. 59. 30. *Sichot Kodesh* 5741, vol. 2, p. 519.

— ONKELOS —

17 וַיֹּאמֶר חֲמוּדֵי דְמִשְׁה לָּהּ
לֹא תִקֵּן פִּתְגָמָא דִּי אֶת עֲבִידִי:
18 מִלָּאָה תִּלְאִי אִף אֶת אִף עֲמָא
הָדִין דִּי עֲמָר אָרִי יִקֵּר מִנָּה פִּתְגָמָא
לֹא תִבּוּל לְמַעֲבָדָה בְּלִחוּדָה:
19 בְּעֵין קִבְּל מִנִּי אִמְלִכְנָךְ וַיְהִי
מִיִּמְרָא דִּי בְּסַעֲדָךְ הָיִי אֶת
לְעֲמָא תִּבְעֵי אֶלְפָן מִן קִדְּם יִי וַתְּהִי
מִיִּתִּי אֶת יִת פִּתְגָמִיָּא לְקִדְּם יִי:
20 וַתִּזְהַר יִתְהוּן יִת קִימִיָּא וַיִּת
אוֹרִיָּתָא וַתְּהוּדַע לְהוּן יִת אֲרִיָּה
דִּי יִהְיוּן בְּהָ יִת עוֹבְדָא דִּי יַעֲבִידוּן:
21 וְאֶת תַּחֲוִי מִכָּל-עֲמָא גְבָרִין
דְּחִילָא דְּחִילָא דִּי גְבָרִין דְּקִשׁוּט
דְּסָנָן לְקִבְּלָא מִמּוֹן וַתִּמְנִי עֲלֵיהוֹן
רַבְּנִי אֶלְפִין רַבְּנִי מְאֹתָא רַבְּנִי
חֲמִשִּׁין וְרַבְּנִי עֶשְׂרִיָּתָא: 22 וַיִּדְּנוּ
יִת עֲמָא בְּכָל-עֵדֶן וַיְהִי כָל-פִּתְגָם
רַב יִתְנוּ לְוִתָּךְ וְכָל-פִּתְגָם זְעִיר
יִדְּנוּ אֲנָן וַיִּקְלוּן מִנָּה וַיִּסְבְּרוּן
עֲמָר:

17 וַיֹּאמֶר חֲמוּדֵי דְמִשְׁה לָּאִי לֹא־טוֹב הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה
עוֹשֶׂה: 18 נָבֵל תִּבְּל גַּם־אַתָּה גַּם־הָעַם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עִמָּךְ
כִּי־כִבֵּד מִמֶּךָ הַדָּבָר לֹא־תוֹכֵל עֲשׂוֹהוּ לְבִדְךָ: 19 עַתָּה
שָׁמַע בְּקִלִּי אִיעֲצָךְ וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים עִמָּךְ הִיָּה אַתָּה לְעַם
מוֹל הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִבֵּאתָ אֶתָּה אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֱלֹהֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים:
20 וְהִזְהַרְתָּ אֶתָּה אֶת־הַחֲקִים וְאֶת־הַתּוֹרָה
וְהוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם אֶת־הַדָּרֶךְ יִלְכוּ בָּהּ וְאֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה
אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּן: 21 וְאַתָּה תַּחֲוֶה מִכָּל־הָעַם אֲנָשֵׁי־חֵיל
יִרְאֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲנָשֵׁי אִמָּת שְׂנָאִי בָּצַע וְשִׁמְתָּ עֲלֵהֶם
שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת:
22 וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת־הָעַם בְּכָל־עֵת וְהָיָה כָל־הַדָּבָר הַגָּדֹל
יָבִיאוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְכָל־הַדָּבָר הַקָּטָן יִשְׁפְּטוּהֶם וְהָקֵל מֵעֲלֶיךָ
וְנִשְׁאָו אַתָּה:

— RASHI —

צָרִיכִין לְהַחֲנִיף וּלְהַכִּיר פָּנִים: אֲנָשֵׁי אִמָּת. אֵלֹו בְּעֵלִי
הַבְּטָחָה, שֶׁהֵם כְּדָאִי לְסִמּוּף עַל דְּבָרֵיהֶם, שֶׁעַל יְדֵי כֵן
יְהִי דְּבָרֵיהֶם נִשְׁמָעִין: שְׂנָאִי בָּצַע. שֶׁשׁוֹנְאִין אֶת מְמוֹנָם
בְּדִין, כִּהְיָא דְּאִמְרִינֵן: כָּל־דִּינָא דְּמִפְקִין מִמוֹנָא מְגִיָּה
בְּדִינָא — לֹא דִינָא הוּא: שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים. הֵם הָיוּ שֶׁשׁ מֵאוֹת
שָׂרִים לְשֶׁשׁ מֵאוֹת אֲלָפִים: שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת. שֶׁשֶׁת אֲלָפִים הָיוּ:
שָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים. שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר אֲלָפִים: שָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת. שְׁשִׁים
אֲלָפִים: 22 וְשִׁפְטוּ. "וַיִּדְּנוּ", לְשׁוֹן צוּי: וְהָקֵל מֵעֲלֶיךָ. דָּבָר
זֶה לְהָקֵל מֵעֲלֶיךָ. "וְהָקֵל" — כְּמוֹ: "וְהַכְּבִיד אֶת־לְבוֹ" 22,
וְהַכּוֹת אֶת־מוֹאֵב" 23, לְשׁוֹן הוֹדָה:

17 וַיֹּאמֶר חֲמוּדֵי דְמִשְׁה. דָּרֶךְ כְּבוֹד קוֹרְאוֹ הַכְּתוּב חוֹתֵנוּ
שֶׁל מֶלֶךְ: 18 נָבֵל תִּבְּל. כְּתוּבָא וְלִשְׁוֹנוֹ לְשׁוֹן כְּמִשְׁה,
פְּלִישְׁטִי־ר', כְּמוֹ: "וְהָעֵלָה נָבֵל" 18, "כְּנָבֵל עָלָה מִגִּפְּוֹן
וְגו'" 19, שֶׁהוּא כְּמוֹשׁ עַל יְדֵי חֲמוּדָה וְעַל יְדֵי קָרָח, וְכִחוֹ תֵּשׁ
וְנִלְאָה: גַּם־אַתָּה. לְרִבּוֹת אֲהֲרֹן וְחֹרֹן 20 וְשִׁבְעִים וְקָנָם: כִּי־
כִבֵּד מִמֶּךָ. כְּבָדוֹ רַב יוֹתֵר מִכְּחָךְ: 19 אִיעֲצָךְ וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים
עִמָּךְ. בָּעֲצָה אָמַר לוֹ: צֵא הִמָּלֵךְ בְּגִבּוֹרָה: הִיָּה אַתָּה
לְעַם מוֹל הָאֱלֹהִים. שְׁלִיחַ וּמְלִיץ בֵּינוֹתָם לְמָקוֹם וְשׂוֹאֵל
מִשְׁפָּטִים מֵאֲתוֹ: אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים. דְּבָרֵי רִיבּוֹתָם: 21 וְאַתָּה
תַּחֲוֶה. בְּרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ שֶׁעָלֶיךָ: אֲנָשֵׁי־חֵיל. עֲשִׂירִים, שְׁאִין

17. לְכַמוֹשׁ, לְנָבֵל. 18. יִרְמִיָּה ח, יג. 19. יִשְׁעִיָּה ל, ד. 20. עֵינֵי מִזְרָחִי, חֲזָקוֹנִי, דְּבָרֵי דוד, גִּיּוֹר אֲרִיָּה, שְׁפָתֵי חֲכָמִים, בָּאֵר בְּשִׁדָּה, וְשִׁי לְמוֹרָא. 21. בָּבֵא בְּתָרָא
ח, ב. 22. שְׁמוֹת ח, יא. 23. מְלַכִּי־ב, ג, כד.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

rectly from God's mouth and subsisted on spirituality so completely that he did not need to eat or drink for forty days and nights. Yet, immediately upon rejoining the people he plunged directly into his new work. On the morrow after what seemed to be the pinnacle of his career, he found yet higher ways to serve God, and attacked them with the very same energy and vitality.

The day Moses descended from the mountain after having received the second tablets was the 10th of Tishrei, which would be later designated as Yom Kippur,

the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. The lesson here is that even after we reach the supreme holiness of Yom Kippur, there is still another tomorrow, when we should set our sights even higher.

One year, immediately after the conclusion of Yom Kippur, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson turned to his father, Rabbi Shalom Dovber (the fifth Rebbe of Lubavitch), and asked: "What now? After having achieved such sublime levels of spirituality, what is the service required of us on the morrow?" Answered the Rebbe: "Now the work of repentance truly begins!"³⁴

34. *Hitva'aduyot* 5742, vol. 2, pp. 871-872.

17 Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good.

18 **You will surely wear yourself out, you yourself as well as Aaron, the seventy elders, and this entire people that is with you, for this matter is too weighty for you; you will not be able to do it alone.** The people are not on your spiritual level, and although you can temporarily elevate them to your level when they are in your presence, you cannot *keep* them at that level, since in the final analysis they were not privy to the Divine revelation to which you were. Moreover, they will soon enter their land, where they will have to spend much of their time earning a living, forcing them to abandon the intensely spiritual lifestyle they enjoy here in the desert. This will cause them an additional descent in Divine consciousness. Furthermore, the day will come when you will not be present to lift them to your level of Divine consciousness. You must prepare them for this eventuality.

19 **Therefore, listen to me; I will give you advice, and** you should then consult with God as to whether to accept it. Implement my plan only **if God agrees with you** as you present it. Here is my plan: **You be the people's representative before God, and you shall convey the cases** they bring you **to God** when it is necessary to inquire of Him how to judge a case.

20 **You shall caution** the people **regarding the rules and the teachings, and inform them of the path they should follow and the deeds they should do** in general. You should indeed *teach* the Torah to the people yourself, in order, as you said, to impart to them your experience of having received it directly from God.

21 But when it is time to *apply* the Torah's teachings to legal cases, this should be done by individuals who are on the people's level and can therefore relate the Torah to them. Nonetheless, in order to ensure that these teachers—and their successors throughout all ensuing generations—transmit your teachings faithfully, *you* must select these teachers with your prophetic vision.³¹ Thus, **you shall discern from among all the people men who are well-established**, not needing to ingratiate themselves with anyone, and who possess the following seven qualities: they are **God-fearing**; they are **men** who command respect on account of their **integrity**; they **'hate' money**, that is, they are sufficiently unattached to their wealth that if they owe someone something it is not necessary to bring them to court to get them to pay (anyone more attached to his money than this will be easy to bribe and therefore unfit to be a judge³²); they are righteous; wise; understanding; and of good reputation.³³ **Appoint** these individuals **over the people as leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, and leaders of tens.** The leaders themselves should also have access to judicial authority in case they need it.^{33a} Thus, since there are 600,000 adult men, appoint 600 leaders of thousands, 6,000 leaders of hundreds, 12,000 leaders of fifties, and 60,000 leaders of tens.

22 **They shall judge the people at all times: every major case they shall bring to you, and every minor case they shall judge themselves—to ease your burden by sharing it with you.**

31. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 203-209. 32. Cf. Rashbam on Bava Batra 58b, s.v. *Umafkin minei*. 33. Deuteronomy 1:13; Rashi on Deuteronomy 1:15. 33a. *Midrash Tanchuma, Mishpatim* 6.

— ONKELOS —

23 אַם ית פתגמא הדין תעביד
ויפקדנך יי ותכול למיקם ואף כל-
עמא הדין על אתרה יתך בשלם:
24 וקבל משה למימר חמוהי
ועבד כל די אמר: 25 ובחר משה
גברין דחילא מכל ישראל ומני
יתדון רישין על עמא רבני אלפין
רבני מאותא רבני חמשין ורבני
עשוריתא: 26 ודינין ית עמא
בכל עדן ית פתגם קשי מיתין לות
משה וכל פתגם זעיר דינין אנון:
27 ושלח משה ית חמוהי ואזל
לה לארעה:

23 אַם אַתְּ הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה תַּעֲשֶׂה וְצֹנֶךְ אֱלֹהִים וַיְכַלֶּת עַמּוֹד
וְגַם כָּל־הָעָם הַזֶּה עַל־מִקְמוֹ יָבֹא בְּשָׁלוֹם:

◆ שְׁלִישִׁי 24 וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה לְקוֹל חֲתָנוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר
אָמַר: 25 וַיִּבְחַר מֹשֶׁה אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִּל מִכָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן
אֹתָם רָאשִׁים עַל־הָעָם שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שָׂרֵי
חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת: 26 וַיִּשְׁפְּטוּ אֶת־הָעָם בְּכָל־עֵת
אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַקָּשֶׁה יִבְיֹאוּן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְכָל־הַדָּבָר הַקָּטָן
יִשְׁפְּטוּ הֵם: 27 וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־חֲתָנוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ לוֹ אֶל־
אֶרְצוֹ: פ

— RASHI —

וכן "לא תעבורי" ²⁴ — כמו "לא תעבורי". ותרוממו:
"דינין אנון". מקראות העליונים הם לשון צווי, לכה
מתרגמין "ידונון" "ייתנון" "ידונון", ומקראות הללו
לשון עשיה: 27 וילך לו אל-ארצו. לגיר בני משפחתו:

23 וְצֹנֶךְ אֱלֹהִים וַיְכַלֶּת עַמּוֹד. הַמִּלֶּכֶּת בְּגִבּוֹרָה, אִם מִצָּדָה
אוֹתָךְ לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּךְ — תּוֹכֵל עַמּוֹד, וְאִם יַעֲכֹב עַל יָדְךָ —
לֹא תּוֹכֵל לַעֲמֹד: וְגַם כָּל־הָעָם הַזֶּה. אֲהֲרֹן נָדָב וְאַבְיָהוּא
וְשִׁבְעִים זְקֵנִים הַנִּלְוִים עִתָּה עִמָּךְ: 26 וַיִּשְׁפְּטוּ. "וְדִינִין
יִתְּעֲמָא": יִבְיֹאוּן. "מִיתִין": וַיִּשְׁפְּטוּ הֵם. כִּמוֹ "וַיִּשְׁפְּטוּ".

24. רות ב, ח.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

his overpowering presence and spiritual stature, and might therefore have considered themselves unworthy or "outside the pale" of the Torah's jurisdiction.

Yet, in a sense, it is particularly for these simple, unpretentious folk that the Torah was given. It is to the Torah's credit, and a demonstration of its true transcendence, that it contains the laws that govern not only our most sublime moments but also to the seemingly trivial concerns that crop up in our daily affairs.⁴¹

26 They will judge the people at all times: "Judgments" (*mishpatim*) are the aspects of the Divine Will that can be logically understood. Had the Torah not instructed us concerning these laws, our own logic would have dictated that we institute them.

The Torah's account of the revelation on Mount Sinai is both preceded and followed⁴² by *mishpatim*—logical and self-attainable precepts of the Torah. The giving of the Torah itself, however, was a Divine revelation that was so totally above and beyond human grasp that the Jews begged Moses to act as their intermediary and thereby mitigate their experience of this supernatural transcendence.

The new insights we constantly glean from the Torah as we continue to study it constitute the ongoing revelation of God at Mount Sinai. Often, the profundity of these insights is so powerful that we sense that they come from someplace far beyond us—which indeed they do. Because of this, we can easily fall into the trap of thinking that such Divine revelations are spiritual experiences so completely beyond us that it is pointless to try to prepare for them. We erroneously assume that we may as well do nothing, for if it is meant to happen it will happen anyway.

To demonstrate the fallacy of this argument, God prefaced the account of the giving of the Torah with a reference to the judiciary process—*mishpatim*—reminding man that Divine revelation, despite its transcendence, is granted only to those who have prepared for it on their own human level.

Furthermore, Divine revelation must also be followed by *mishpatim*. This teaches us that we must not accept God's gifts complacently; if we do, they will remain abstract and transcendent, having no impact at all upon us. Rather, we must immediately integrate and assimilate every spiritual experience so that it becomes a part of us.⁴³

41. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 209-210. 42. See Exodus 21:1. 43. *Sichot Kodesh* 5719, pp. 128-129.

23 If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to bear up, and all the people who are presently helping you judge the people **as well**—Aaron, his sons, and the seventy elders—**will arrive at their destination in peace.**”

- ◆ *Third Reading* **24** When the Torah was given, Moses wanted the people to continue to hear God’s word directly even after the initial revelation on Mount Sinai.³⁵ Here too, he felt it would be preferable for them to hear God’s teachings directly from him rather than from his pupils. Furthermore, Moses assumed at this stage that he was going to lead the people into the Land of Israel himself, and as soon as he did so the people would attain the same level of Divine consciousness that he already possessed. He therefore thought Jethro’s concerns about what would happen after his demise were unfounded—which is why he had not suggested setting up a judicial system before Jethro did.³⁶ Nonetheless, **Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said.** He consulted with God and God approved Jethro’s plan. This was the significance of his former name, Jether (“one who adds”): he caused God to add the section containing his plan to the Torah.³⁷

25 Moses then told the people that God has made them the noblest nation on earth; because of this lofty stature, He has made the inadvertent misjudging of even a civil case of theirs a capital crime. But, Moses continued, they complicate the legal process by always bringing new evidence and witnesses, they are mistrustful, and they are quarrelsome. For these reasons, he does not wish to be the people’s sole judge. The people agreed readily—even though they should have protested, insisting that they prefer that Moses, rather than his pupils, instruct them—because they believed that they would be able to bribe judges of lesser stature. Moses sought out people with the seven qualities Jethro enumerated, but only found a sufficient number individuals with three of these qualities: righteous, wise, and of good reputation.³⁸ **Moses chose these well-established men from among all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people: leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, and leaders of tens.**

26 From this point on, **they judged the people at all times: every difficult case they would bring to Moses, and every minor case they would judge themselves.**

27 Jethro remained with the Israelites for over seven months after this, in order to supervise the implementation of his plan. When they were about to leave Mount Sinai on Iyar 20, 2449, he decided to return to Midian to convert his family to Judaism before rejoining the people on their journey into the Land of Israel. Satisfied that Jethro had successfully completed the task of setting up a judicial system for the people,³⁹ **Moses sent away his father-in-law to convert his family, and thus Jethro went his way to his homeland.**⁴⁰

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

24 God approved Jethro’s plan: True, this meant that the people would from now on be under the judicial authority of people beneath Moses’ stature. Nonetheless, God approved of this, because this way even the

simplest among the people would be able to relate to the Torah’s legal system and submit their lives to its authority. If Moses had remained the people’s sole judge, some of them would have been overly intimidated by

35. Below, 21:16-18. 36. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 203-209. 37. Rashi on v. 1, above. 38. Deuteronomy 1:9-15. 39. *Sichot Kodesh* 5733, pp. 335-340. 40. Numbers 10:29-32.

ONKELOS

19:1 בִּירְחָא תְּלִיתָאָה לְמִפְק בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ דְּמִצְרַיִם בְּיוֹמָא
הַדִּין אֲתוּ לְמִדְבָּרָא דְּסִינַי:

רביעי 19:1 בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ

מִצְרַיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי:

RASHI

1 בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה. בְּרֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ. לֹא הָיָה צְרִיךְ לְכַתֵּב אֶלָּא
"בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה", מֵהוּ "בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה"? — שִׁיחִיו דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

God had given the Torah in a settled area, that would have implied that it was tied somehow to the locale, that it belonged specifically to the people of that place. He therefore gave the Torah in the ownerless desert, making it clear that it does not belong to anybody in particular; anybody that so chooses can make the Torah their own.

According to the Talmud⁴⁹ God gave the Torah in the desert because He wanted to teach us a fundamental truth about the nature of the *study* of the Torah. "If a person humbles himself like the wilderness, which everybody treads upon, then the Torah is given to him as a gift."

However, the question still remains: The Sinai desert was not only ownerless but also *barren*; there was no

water and no vegetation to provide food or clothing. Why couldn't God have given the Torah in an ownerless but fertile plain, prairie, or the like?

God wanted to teach us yet another truth about the nature of the study of the Torah. In order to receive the Torah, the Jews had to venture into the desolate desert and trust that God would provide for them. To their credit, they did this without hesitation.

Today, as well, the proper way to study the Torah is to immerse oneself in it completely and abandon all other worries. When we devote ourselves to the Torah in this way, we are guaranteed success; in addition, God promises that He will also provide for all our material needs.⁵⁰

INNER DIMENSIONS

[1] On the first day...of the month: It is no accident that the people arrived at Mount Sinai on the first day of the month. The moon is a metaphor for the Jewish people,⁵¹ and the first day of the month is the day on which the moon is its smallest. This day thus signifies the true selflessness that is required for receiving and learning the Torah.

In particular, we are taught that the people knew they would receive the Torah fifty days after the Exodus and were preparing themselves by refining another facet of their emotional makeup each day. (There are seven emotional *sefirot*, each subdivided into seven additional sub-*sefirot*, for a total of 49.) By the 1st of Sivan, they had refined most of the *sefirah* of *malchut*, and were thus ready to receive the Torah.⁵²

In the third month: Specifically, the two opposites that were reconciled with the Giving of the Torah were the right and left axes of the *sefirot*: *chochmah*, *chesed*, and *netzach* on the right axis and *binah*, *gevurah*, and *hod* on the left axis. Until the Torah was given, it was fundamentally impossible to unite both of these axes in any particular act; an act could be either an act of *chesed* or an act of *gevurah*, but not of both. The Torah introduced the third, central, harmonizing axis — *da'at*, *tiferet*, and *yesod*.

These *sefirot* enabled the *sefirot* of the right and left axes to unite productively.

(It is true that the patriarch Jacob personified the middle axis of the *sefirot*, but—as was the case with all the spirituality channeled by the patriarchs—this was but a precursor of what was to really happen with the Giving of the Torah. Jacob was able to blend the two opposite axes of the *sefirot* in his own life, but he was not able to bequeath this ability to his progeny or to the world at large in any permanent way.)

Similarly, the Giving of the Torah enabled the "upper" and "lower" aspects of reality, i.e., spirituality and physicality, to blend for the first time into a single continuum and influence one another. The same is true for the dynamics associated with the duality of upper and lower: ascent and descent. With the Giving of the Torah, it became possible for the first time for an ascent into the spiritual and a descent into the physical to be complementary and mutually enhancing.

The significance of the "third" is evinced in our sages' statement⁵³ that "the threefold Torah [the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings] was given in the third month [Sivan] to the threefold people [priests, Levites, and laymen]."⁵⁴

49. Eiruvin 54a. 50. Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 4, pp. 2113-2115; Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, pp. 308-309. 51. Shemot Rabbah 15:22; Midrash Tehilim 22. 52. Torah Or 66c-67c. 53. Shabbat 88a. 54. Sefer HaMa'amarim 5732-5733, pp 341-346.

From Refidim to Mount Sinai

- ◆ **Fourth Reading** The Torah now returns to the historical narrative before the episodes with Jethro. Before God offered the Torah to the Jewish people, He offered it to the Edomites and the Ishmaelites, but they refused to accept it.⁴⁴

19:1 On the first day of Sivan 2448, the third month after Nisan, in which the Israelites had left the land of Egypt they came to the Sinai Desert, where God told them He would give them the Torah. The anticipation they felt on this day over receiving the Torah is to be re-experienced daily, for we are to relate to the Torah as if God gives it anew every day.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

1 In the third month: The Torah was given specifically in the third month, for the number three symbolizes the threefold unity the Torah creates.

“One” obviously represents unity—there is no separate entity to dissent or disagree—but it is an inherent unity, not a created one. The only true unity of this sort is God’s; He was, is, and will be one, for there is in truth nothing other than Him.

“Two” signifies the duality, discord, and separation we experience within God’s world, the constant dichotomy of body and soul, physical and spiritual, and good and evil.

“Three” introduces a third element that reconciles and unites these discordant concepts. It does not choose one way or the other, for that would be returning to one, the duality of two combatants no longer existing. Rather, it blends the two; it allows each its own individuality and yet enables them at the same time to fuse into a greater whole.

The Torah was given, says Maimonides, to bring peace into the world.⁴⁵ Through the Torah, God allows His infinite wisdom to be distilled into a form accessible by finite creatures. He thus gave humanity the capacity to bring Godliness into the world, to continue to exist as finite human beings and still attain a level of Divine consciousness. The Torah does not superimpose one reality in place of the other, but rather melds the two into a Godly and meaningful existence in the context of this world.⁴⁶

On this day: Instead of mentioning the first day of Sivan explicitly, the Torah simply calls it “this day.” This is because the people recognized it as a special day. They had been counting the days from the Exodus in eager anticipation of the Giving of the Torah.

They knew that in order to receive the Torah, they had to internalize the quality of self-effacement, for only through self-effacement can we experience the Torah

as God’s wisdom (rather than as an exercise of our own intellect) and can we feel God speaking to us through the Torah. The total self-effacement required for this had to permeate all seven emotions and all their mutual interactions, which meant that the people had to devote seven days to work on each of the seven emotions, totaling forty-nine days.

Upon reaching the third day of the seventh week, the people had completely refined the first six emotions and had worked on the first three subdivisions of the seventh. Inasmuch as the first three emotions are the principal ones, the passage of the first three days of the seventh week meant that most of the work had already been done; they had reached a major milestone. This day was the 1st of Sivan.

The fact that this point in their progress occurred on the first day of the month was particularly propitious, for this is the day that the moon is its smallest, a clear expression of self-effacement. Once the moon reaches its nadir, it can again begin to absorb the light of the sun; similarly, on this day, the people began their final round of preparations to receive God’s infinite revelation.

On this day, “they came to the Sinai Desert.” The parched desert is a metaphor for the thirst for Godliness the people felt as the expected day drew closer. Thirst for Godliness is always accompanied by a corresponding healthy disdain for the material world’s impudence—when it tries to overstep its intended role in life and usurp the devotion we would prefer to invest in Divinity. Thus, on this day, the people “came to the Sinai Desert,” for the word *Sinai* is related to the word for “hatred” (*sinah*), alluding to their heightened disdain for the subterfuges of materialism.⁴⁷

They came to the Sinai Desert: According to the Midrash,⁴⁸ God gave the Torah in the desert because He wanted to teach us a fundamental truth about it. If

44. Rashi on Deuteronomy 33:2, 32:10. 45. *Mishneh Torah*, Chanukah 4:14. 46. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 21, p. 111. 47. *Torah Or* 66c-67c; *Ma’amarei Admor HaZaken* 5567, pp. 151-152; *Or HaTorah*, Yitro, p. 2975; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5633, vol. 1, pp. 293 ff; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5655, pp. 88 ff; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5732-5733, pp. 341ff; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5734-5735, pp. 87 ff; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5737, pp. 244-251; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5747-5751, pp. 393 ff. 48. *Bemidbar Rabbah* 19:26.

ONKELOS

2 ונטלו מרפידים ואתו למדברא
דסיני ושרו במדברא ושרא תמן
ישראל לקבל טורא:

2 ויסעו מרפידים ויבאו מדבר סיני ויחנו במדבר ויחן
שם ישראל נגד ההר:

RASHI

נסיעתן מרפידים בתשובה: ויחן שם ישראל. כאיש
אחד בלב אחד. אבל שאר כל-החניות — בתרעומות
ובמחלוקת: נגד ההר. למרחו, וכל-מקום שאתה מוצא
"נגד" — פנים למרח:

2 ויסעו מרפידים. למה הצרך לחזור ולפרש מהיכן
נסעו? והלא כבר כתב שבפידים היו חונים, בידוע
שמשם נסעו! אלא, להקיש נסיעתן מרפידים לביאתן
למדבר סיני — מה-ביאתן למדבר סיני בתשובה, אף

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

therefore God chose it as the site for the Giving of the Torah.⁶³ This teaches us that the gateway to Torah is humility.

On the other hand, God did *not* choose to give the Torah on level ground or in a valley. The fact that the Torah was given on a low mountain teaches us that our humility must be complemented by self-assurance. Without self-assurance, we could not presume to impose the Torah's dictates on a sometimes unwilling world. We should therefore cultivate pride and uplifting joy based on our awareness that we are God's partners in implementing His plan for creation.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, we must ensure that this self-assurance never degenerates into arrogance, so the Torah warns us to encamp "facing the mountain," the word for "facing" also meaning "opposite." Similarly, when the Torah was given, God told us to "make a boundary around the mountain,"⁶⁵ i.e., to limit the self-assurance so that it not degenerate into arrogance.⁶⁶

Israel encamped there as one united people...facing the mountain: This unity was a prerequisite for the Giving of the Torah. God's presence refuses to dwell amongst discord and disharmony. Only when the Jews were at peace with one another and concerned for one another could they achieve harmony with God, as well, and attain the degree of spirituality necessary to receive His Torah.

The lesson for us here is that we can become vessels for God's Torah only if we truly love each other. Anyone can study the Torah, of course, but the Divine inspiration that grants us additional insight and allows us to sense God's presence in the Torah is granted us only when we are actively concerned for our compatriots.

There is, however, an additional lesson here. The Jews united at Mount Sinai *because* they were "facing the mountain" — i.e., already under the influence of Torah. God created us as individuals with different intellects, emotions, characteristics, and opinions. Naturally, then, there *is* no way we can truly get along, no way we can maintain our individuality and differences and still be able to function as one unified body.

Any group of people can unite temporarily or partially in order to accomplish some common goal. But the parties to such confederacies inevitably maintain their personal agendas and lack the mutual concern that enables them to function as a truly unified body.

Only if we are "facing the mountain" — totally devoid of ego and focused in anticipation on receiving God's word — do our petty differences pale in significance. Our differences still exist; indeed, it is the blending of all these varied approaches that creates the synergy and energy demanded of our collective Divine mission. But our common devotion to God's will transforms these differences into stepping-stones to achievement rather than barriers to it.⁶⁷

INNER DIMENSIONS

[2] **As one united people:** The reason why such a profound unity is possible is because all Jews are, in essence, a "part" of God and therefore share the same inner identity.⁶⁸ It is only our external façades — our human/animal souls and our bodies and their false sense of ego — that separate us from one another. When we approached Mount Sinai,

our divergent egos melted away in the face of the imminent, mounting revelation. Similarly, by educating ourselves out of our materialistic perspectives, we become able to focus on our own inner essence and that of our fellows; this in turn renders us fit to receive greater and deeper understanding of God's Torah.⁶⁹

63. Midrash Tehilim 68:17. 64. Sichot Kodesh 5716, p. 238. 65. Below, v. 23. 66. Sefer HaMa'amarim 5703, p. 136. 67. Likutei Sichot, vol. 11, p. 250. 68. Tanya, chapter 32. 69. BeSha'ah SheHikdimu 5672, vol. 1, p. 18.

2 They departed from Refidim in a unanimous spirit of repentance for having doubted if God's presence was among them,⁵⁵ **and arrived in the Sinai Desert** still in this inspired spiritual state, **camping in the wilderness.** They began to prepare for the Giving of the Torah. Although each individual related to this event differently, they all realized that it would forge them into one nation under the same God. United in this religious-national consciousness, **Israel encamped there** as one united people. Unfortunately, this was the last time until their entry into the Land of Israel that they were so united in spirit; at all their subsequent stops, there were individuals or groups who dissented against the community or rebelled against God.⁵⁶ They camped **facing the mountain** at its east side (see Figure 1). The top of Mount Sinai was covered with cloud, and remained so continuously until the Giving of the Torah.⁵⁷

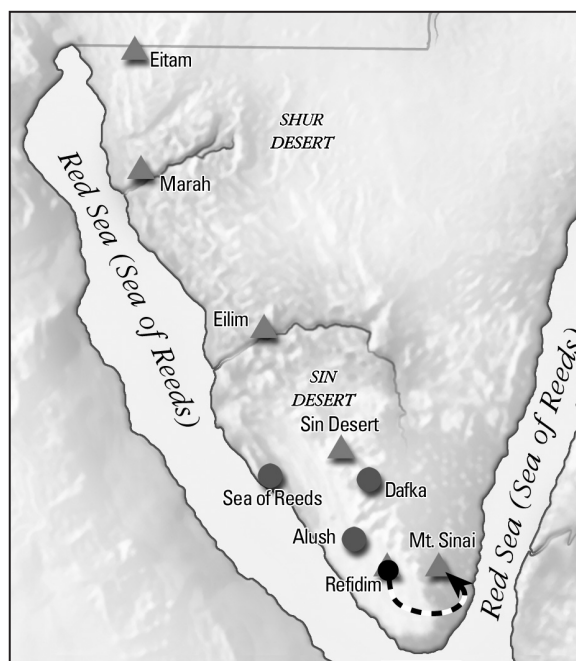


Figure 1: Encamping before Mount Sinai

1-2 On this day they came to the Sinai Desert. They departed from Refidim: Clearly, they departed from Refidim *before* they came to the Sinai Desert. This reversal of the order of events implies that in some way their leaving Refidim was contingent on their arrival at the Sinai Desert, as if to say that they hadn't truly or fully left Refidim until they arrived at Sinai.

As was mentioned above,⁵⁸ in Refidim the Jews lapsed into insensitivity to God's presence in the world and, as a result, "they loosened (*rafu*) their hands' grip on the Torah," meaning that they became apathetic toward the ideal of applying the Torah practically, in the context of physical reality.

The cure for this apathy is a sojourn in the "Sinai Desert." The parched desert, as was just mentioned,⁵⁹ is a metaphor for thirst for Godliness, which breeds in turn a healthy "hatred" (*sinah*) for gross materialism.

It is in this sense that the people did not really "leave Refidim" until they arrived in the Sinai Desert.⁶⁰

The opposite, complementary reading of these two verses is also true: It was only by "departing Refidim"—by reaffirming their commitment to practical observance of the Torah—that the Jews could "arrive at the Sinai Desert," i.e., be ready and prepared to receive the Torah.⁶¹ Thirsting for God and despising obstacles to quenching this thirst is the cure for apathy towards doing God's will; renewed commitment to doing God's will intensifies our thirst for God's self-revelation in the Torah.

2 Mount Sinai: God chose to give the Torah on a mountain because a mountain expresses the ideal of elevating the physical world. A mountain is made of the same earth as a plane, but it has been raised upward. It thus demonstrates that even lifeless dirt, the lowliest element of creation, can be elevated to the highest levels. The fact that we see this truth physically reminds us that it is true spiritually, as well.⁶²

Mount Sinai was a low, unimposing mountain, and

55. Above, 17:7. 56. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 21, pp. 100-105. 57. Rashi on 24:16. 58. On 17:8. 59. On v. 1. 60. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5762-5733, pp. 341-346; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5737, pp. 244-251; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5739, p. 173. 61. *Hitva'aduyot* 5744, vol. 3, pp. 1790-1791. 62. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5700, p. 114.

ONKELOS

3 ומשה עליה אל-האלהים ויקרא אליו יהוה מן-ההר
לאמר בזה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגיד לבני ישראל:
4 אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם
על-כנפי נשרים ואבא אתכם אלי:

3 ומשה עליה אל-האלהים ויקרא אליו יהוה מן-ההר
לאמר בזה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגיד לבני ישראל:
4 אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם
על-כנפי נשרים ואבא אתכם אלי:

RASHI

כלם לרעמסס. ואונקלוס תרגם: "ואשא" — כמו: "ואסיע
אתכם", "ואטלית יתכון", תקן את הדבור דרך כבוד
למעלה: על-כנפי נשרים. בנשר הנושא גוזליו על כנפיו,
שכל-שאר העופות נותנים את בניהם בין רגליהם, לפי
שמתיראין מעוף אחר שפורח על גביהם, אבל הנשר
הזה אינו מתירא אלא מן האדם שמא יורק בו חץ, לפי
שאין עוף פורח על גביו, לךך נותנו על כנפיו, אומר:
מוטב יכנס החץ בי ולא בבני. אף אני עשיתי כן: "ויסע
מלאך האלהים וגו' ויבא בין מחנה מצרים וגו'".⁷⁸ והיו
מצרים וזרקים חצים ואבני בליסטראות, והענן מקבלם:
ואבא אתכם אלי. כתר גומו:

3 ומשה עליה. ביום השני. וכל-עליותיו בהשכמה היו,
שנאמר: "וישכם משה בבקר"²⁵: בזה תאמר. בלשון
הזה וכסדר הזה: לבית יעקב. אלו הנשים, תאמר להן
בלשון רכה: ותגיד לבני ישראל. ענשין ודקדוקין, פרש
לזכרים דברים הקשין בגידיו: 4 אתם ראיתם. לא מסרת
היא בידיכם, ולא בדברים אני משגר לכם, לא בעדים
אני מעיד עליכם, אלא "אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי
למצרים". על כמה עברות היו חיבין לי קדם שנודגו
לכם, ולא נפרעתי מהם אלא על ידכם: ואשא אתכם.
זה יום שבאו ישראל לרעמסס, שהיו ישראל מפזרין
בכל-ארץ גשן, ולשעה קלה בשבאו לסע ולצאת נקבצו

25. שמות לד, ד. 26. שמות יד, יטכ.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

taught to both men and women; the difference is only in the manner and approach.

True, women's biological role in bearing children and their social role in rearing them and as homemakers exempts them from the obligation of constant study and the obligation to delve into the more theoretical aspects of the Torah. Nonetheless, this should in no way be construed as an exemption from mastering those aspects of Jewish law and theology that women must know in order to lead properly Jewish lives. Indeed, because of their central role in educating children and thereby assuring Jewish continuity, the necessity for women to study the Torah takes precedence over that of the men!

Even with regard to the more abstract, theoretical realms of Torah study, since we live nowadays in an age with more leisure time than there was formerly and many women are using their free time for more abstract intellectual pursuits, they *should* study those aspects of the Torah formerly deemed men's province. This will ensure that they develop their intellectual abilities in accord with the Torah's logic and purity, and conversely, encourage them to seek intellectual excitement and fulfillment in Torah study rather than in secular philosophy and culture.

This development in women's Torah study is both a foretaste and a preparation for the imminent messianic Redemption. At that time, knowledge of the Torah will be universal and the intrinsic qualities of women

will be revealed. They will participate in drawing Divine wisdom from the Torah on an equal footing with men.⁷⁸

Still, the Torah must indeed be taught differently to women than it is to men. Rather than stressing the negative consequences of abandoning the Torah, the stress must be on the benefits achieved by adhering to it. This difference in approach reflects the difference between men and women's innate spirituality, but there is also a practical reason for it.

The mother is the primary educator of the children during their formative years. A child's education begins inside the mother's womb, inasmuch as the mother's attitudes and behavior during pregnancy definitely influence her baby. The ambiance and attitudes children imbibe along with their mother's milk accompany them their whole lives, so it is crucial that mothers be learned in the Torah and themselves possess a love for God, His Torah, and its commandments, so they can convey this love to their children.

Love of God and love of the Torah are the foundations of Judaism. True, it is important to teach children to fear God as well, but in our times, when secular culture beckons so pervasively, unrelentingly, and enticingly, it is of paramount importance to raise our children to value Judaism deeply and not to view it, God forbid, as nothing more than a massive web of obligations or worse, a system of self-inflicted suffering.⁷⁹[continues...]

78. Sefer HaSichot 5750, vol. 2, pp. 455-459. 79. Reshimot 30, pp. 9-10.

3 The following morning, the 2nd of Sivan, **Moses went up** Mount Sinai to God. The angels protested the whole idea of giving the Torah to mortals, but Moses rebuffed their arguments, whereupon they showered him with gifts. The Angel of Death's gift was the knowledge that the incense used in the Tabernacle is effective against the plague.⁷⁰ Once the angels' objections were satisfactorily rebuffed, God proceeded to prepare Moses to receive the Torah. **God called to him from the mountain and said**, "In general, when you teach the people the Torah, **you shall first say** each lesson gently **to the House of Jacob**, i.e., the women, telling them the outlines of the commandments and the rewards for their observance.⁷¹ Since women are more naturally predisposed toward spirituality, this will be enough to ensure that they uphold the Torah's commandments. In contrast, after you teach the women, **you shall relate** the lesson bluntly **to the male Israelites**, specifying all the punishments and details of the commandments in order to ensure their compliance.⁷² But now, tell both the women and the men exactly as follows, no more and no less:⁷³

4 **'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians**: because of their depravity, they deserved to be punished even before they enslaved you, but I only punished them on your account. Furthermore, you have seen how **I carried you** swiftly, as if **on eagles' wings**, and **brought you to Me** on the night before the Exodus: you were dispersed over the whole land of Goshen, but I assembled you together instantaneously at Raamses when it was time to leave. Also, **I figuratively carried you on eagles' wings** when you were encamped at the Sea of Reeds: the eagle carries its young above its wings in order to protect them from the hunter's arrows; similarly, I placed My cloud between you and the Egyptians in order to intercept the arrows and rocks they hurled at you.⁷⁴ You have also seen how **I brought you to Me** by choosing you from among all nations to assist Me in fulfilling My plan for the world. You have seen all these things firsthand, and you know that I did all this in order to bring you here to give you the Torah.⁷⁵

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

3 **The angels protested**: The sages teach us that the angels said to God: "You want to give the Torah to flesh and blood? The Torah belongs in heaven!" God said to Moses, "Answer them!" Moses said to God: "Master of the universe! The Torah that You are giving me says, 'I am God, your God, who brought you out of the Land of Egypt.'" He then said to the angels, "Did you go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Why, then, should the Torah belong to you? Again, what is written in the Torah? 'You shall have no other gods.' Do you dwell among people that engage in idol worship? Again, what is written in the Torah? 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.' Do you perform work, that you are in need of rest? Again, what is written in the Torah? 'You shall not

take My name in vain.' Are there any business dealings among you? Again, what is written in the Torah? 'Honor your father and your mother.' Do you have fathers and mothers? Again, what is written in the Torah? 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal.' Is there jealousy among you? Is the evil inclination among you?" After this, the angels conceded to God that the Torah should be given to human beings.⁷⁶

It is clear from this debate that the Torah was given to us in order for us to use it to refine our animal natures.⁷⁷

You shall first say each lesson gently to the "House of Jacob," i.e., the women: The very same Torah is

70. Numbers 17:11-13; Rashi on v. 11 *ad loc.*; *Shabbat* 88b-89a. 71. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 31, p. 94, note 8. 72. *Derashot Maharal, Derush al HaTorah*, s.v. *Shuv Amar Ko Tomar* (ed. 1913, p. 75; ed. 1959, p. 38); *Shemot Rabbah* 28:2; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, p. 268. 73. Below, v. 6; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 36, pp. 86-89. 74. Above, 14:19. 75. Above, 3:12; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, p. 126. 76. *Shabbat* 89a. 77. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5706-5707, p. 36.

— ONKELOS —

5 ובען אם קבלא תקבלון למימרי ותשרון ית קדמי ותדון קדמי תביבין מכלי עממא ארי דילי כל ארעא:

5 ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקלי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגלה מכל העמים בי לי כל הארץ:

— RASHI —

5 ועתה. אם עתה תקבלו עליכם, יערב לכם מכאן ואילך, שכל התחלות קשות: ושמרתם את בריתי. שאכרת עמכם על שמירת התורה: סגלה. אוצר חביב, כמו: "וסגלת מלכים"²⁷ — כלי יקר ואבנים טובות,

5 ועתה. אם עתה תקבלו עליכם, יערב לכם מכאן ואילך, שכל התחלות קשות: ושמרתם את בריתי. שאכרת עמכם על שמירת התורה: סגלה. אוצר חביב, כמו: "וסגלת מלכים"²⁷ — כלי יקר ואבנים טובות,

27. קהלת ב, ח.

~ A CLOSER LOOK ~

[continued...] the legal status of a bondman, and the only commandments he must observe are the prohibitions of certain types of Sabbath work. If, after this interim period, he still demurs, the Jew must sell him back to the non-Jew.⁸²

- **Jewish women:** All adult Jewish women are required to abide by all the Torah's prohibitions and observe all active commandments that are not time-bound plus certain other active commandments.
- **Jewish men:** All adult Jewish men are required to abide by all the Torah's prohibitions and observe all the Torah's active commandments that apply to them.
- **Jewish men of specific office:** Kings, priests, Levites, judges, etc., in addition to observing all the commandments that devolve on adult Jew-

ish men, must also observe the commandments that apply specifically to their office.

There is no obligation for a non-Jew to become a Jew, nor is a Jew obligated to encourage a non-Jew to convert. Jews and non-Jews alike are required to encourage all non-Jews to observe the Noahide commandments and to encourage all Jews to observe all the Torah's commandments that apply to them.

Nonetheless, if a non-Jew feels unfulfilled or incomplete by only following the Noahide commandments, he or she may elect to become a Jew. The non-Jew does this by undergoing a specific conversion process, which includes (a) circumcision (for a male), (b) immersion, (c) offering a specific sacrifice (when the Temple is standing), and (d) acceptance of the full obligation to uphold all of the commandments required of a Jew.

~ INNER DIMENSIONS ~

This division of humanity into categories based on their varying degrees of obligation to fulfill the commandments parallels a corresponding distinction in the nature of their psyches. In other words, God equips each of His creatures with the tools necessary to fulfill its purpose. Since Jews and non-Jews are required to fulfill different sets of commandments, they are born with different spiritual psyches, correspondingly tailored to their obligations.

Specifically, non-Jews possess at birth only a human/animal soul, i.e., their *a priori* motivation in life is physical survival and attaining a satisfying and comfortable lifestyle. Inasmuch as this propensity can easily degenerate into destructively possessive drives for power, glory, sensuality, wealth, etc., this soul is *a priori* rooted in the spiritual realm of

impurity. If a non-Jew consciously accepts his obligation to observe the Noahide code, he *ipso facto* re-roots his soul in the spiritual realm of neutrality. This decision transforms him into a force for good in the world, rather than a force for selfish self-aggrandizement.⁸³

In contrast, Jews are initially born with both a human/animal soul, rooted in the spiritual realm of neutrality, as well as a Divine soul rooted in the spiritual realm of holiness, which inherently—even if unconsciously—motivates them toward Divinity.⁸⁴

If a non-Jew wishes to become a Jew, he or she can convert. By undergoing this process in accordance with Jewish law, the non-Jew again re-roots his psyche and acquires an additional, Divine soul.

82. See below, Exodus 23:12. 83. R. Hillel of Paritch, *Likutei Biurim* (to R. Dovber of Lubavitch's *Kuntres HaHitpa'alut*) 47d, quoting *Siddur im Dach, Sha'ar Chag HaMatzot*. 84. *Tanya*, chapters 1-2.

5 So now, you will enter into a permanent relationship with Me, **provided** you are willing to bind yourselves to Me in two ways: (a) **you vigilantly heed My voice**, performing My commandments, **and** (b) **you keep My covenant**, i.e., bond yourselves to Me supra-rationally and unconditionally. Although undertaking to perform My commandments is a serious commitment, you will find that if you make this decision *now*, it will become easier for you as time goes on, for taking the first step is always the hardest. In any case, if you enter into this relationship with Me, **you shall be for Me a treasure cherished above all nations**. I am able to *choose* you for this relationship from all the other nations **for the entire world is Mine**; I am in no way limited in My choice.

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

Important as the mother's influence on her children is in their formative years, her role does not end there. Throughout their lives, the entire family's spiritual and even physical well-being remain dependent upon the mother's ongoing ability to inculcate them with the love of God and His Torah. Even the husband's spirituality is greatly dependent upon his wife's. Every woman sets the tone in her home and is thus actively responsible for the physical and spiritual health of her entire family.

(The connection between spiritual and physical well-being may once have been hard to comprehend, but modern medicine has made us fully aware of the benefits of spiritual serenity upon a person's nerves, and,

by extension, upon his or her entire body.)⁸⁰

5-6 You shall be for Me a treasure cherished above all nations...a kingdom of nobles... and a holy nation: These three descriptions of how God will regard us in return for entering the covenant with Him constitute the three facets of our ongoing relationship with God:

The basis of this relationship is that God *chose* us, which means that He and we are bound together supra-rationally. True choice is possible only when circumstances do not dictate the choice, in other words, when the choice cannot be ascribed to any predilection of the chooser or any unique qualities of the

✧ A CLOSER LOOK ✧

[5] You will enter into a permanent relationship with Me: Although the Jewish people had been keeping the 613 commandments since the time of the patriarchs, they did so voluntarily. The commandments did not become legally binding on every Jew until the Torah was given at Mount Sinai.

In fact, the Giving of the Torah also obligated the rest of humanity to keep the commandments that devolve on them. Thus, this historic event divided humanity into several distinct categories, based on their respective legal obligations to perform the commandments:

- ♦ **Non-Jews:** Non-Jews are universally required to keep seven specific categories of commandments. These commandments are known as the "Noahide commandments," inasmuch as Noah was the common ancestor of all humanity. Non-Jews are required to observe these commandments with the intent to fulfill their obligation that God gave them at Mount Sinai. They do not fulfill their legal obligation if they observe them for other reasons, e.g., because God gave them to Adam or Noah, or because they consider them logical, worthwhile, or praiseworthy,

or because some other religion also happens to require them to do so.

- ♦ **Resident Aliens (*ger toshav*):** A non-Jew who has accepted his obligation to observe the Noahide commandments and wishes, in addition, to live in the Land of Israel, may do so provided that he also undertake not to perform certain types of Sabbath work for the benefit of a Jew. (He is allowed to perform them for himself.)⁸¹
- ♦ **Non-Jewish Bondmen (*eved*) and Bondwomen (*shifchah*):** A non-Jew purchased by a Jew as a bondman or bondwoman is obligated to abide by all the Torah's prohibitions and perform all active commandments that are not time-bound. When a Jew purchases a non-Jew as a bondman, the non-Jew must be asked if he wants to become a bondman and obligate himself to observe these commandments for the rest of his life. If he agrees, he is circumcised (in the case of a male) and immersed, for this is considered a partial conversion. If he demurs, the Jew must sell him back to a non-Jew. If he hesitates, we may wait up to a year for him to consent. During this interim period, he does not yet attain

80. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 2, pp. 573-576; *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 22, pp. 458-459. 81. See below, Exodus 23:12.

— ONKELOS —

וְאֵתָם תְּהִי־לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כְּהֻנִּים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים
וְאֵתָם תְּהִי־לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כְּהֻנִּים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים
תְּמַלִּיל עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

וְאֵתָם תְּהִי־לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כְּהֻנִּים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים
וְאֵתָם תְּהִי־לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כְּהֻנִּים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים
תְּמַלִּיל עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

— RASHI —

וְאֵתָם תְּהִי־לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כְּהֻנִּים. שְׂרִים. כְּמִה דְּאֵת אָמַר: "וּבְנֵי דֹר כְּהֻנִּים הָיוּ"²⁸: אֱלֹהִים הִדְבָּרִים. לֹא פְחוּת וְלֹא יוֹתֵר:

28. שמואלב ח, יח.

~ A CLOSER LOOK ~

[continued...] for transgressions for which the Torah stipulates these forms of punishment,

- **Death administered by the heavenly court** (i.e., premature death and/or death without survivors [in the latter case, this is called "excision"]) for transgressions for which the Torah stipulates these forms of punishment, and
- **Lashes administered by the court**, for certain other transgressions.

The earthly court can administer punishments only if (a) the wrongdoing was committed willfully and (b) it was legally witnessed. If the wrongdoer transgressed inadvertently, or the act was not legally witnessed, or if he transgressed a commandment for which the Torah does not specify any punishment, then the court is not required to administer punishment; but the wrongdoer must still repent and cleanse himself of the effect of his wrongdoing.

Repentance (*teshuvah*) comprises three separate acts: (a) confession, i.e., voicing admission of guilt, (b) contrition, i.e., regret for having done the act, and (c) resolution not to repeat the act.

The wrongdoer must cleanse (*kaparah*) himself of

the negative spiritual effect of his transgression as follows: If he failed to perform an active commandment, no cleansing is necessary. If he transgressed a commandment punishable by lashes, his observance of *Yom Kippur* cleanses him. If he committed a capital offense, his observance of *Yom Kippur* plus whatever suffering the heavenly court inflicts upon him cleanses him. If the wrongdoer does not fully cleanse himself during his lifetime, the cleansing process is completed in the afterlife.

Finally, atonement (another meaning of *kaparah*) is required in order to reinstate the wrongdoer to his former spiritual status and relationship with God, no matter what form of wrongdoing he committed. When the Tabernacle/Temple is functioning, certain specific sacrifices can effect atonement; otherwise, fasting or giving charity can accomplish the same effect.⁹⁴

God, of course, can choose to override any of these standard procedures, and it is therefore possible to pray to Him to rescind a decree of cleansing suffering. After the incident of the Golden Calf, God revealed to us that invoking His thirteen attributes of mercy is especially effective in this regard.⁹⁵

~ INNER DIMENSIONS ~

Capital Punishment: Although the earthly court can only inflict the four forms of capital punishment when the Temple is standing,⁹⁶ the spiritual correlates to these punishments apply at all times:

Death by stoning is administered mainly for sins of idolatry or sins akin to idolatry.⁹⁷ The essence of idolatry is regarding the natural forces through which God channels His beneficence as independent or even semi-independent entities, when in truth they are just God's tools. In modern terms, we are guilty of idolatry when we regard the efforts we must make to earn our livelihood as the true means by which we secure it. In fact, we *really* earn our livelihood through our devotion to God and

our faithful fulfillment of His will, while the effort we invest in our careers or jobs is just the vessel we prepare to receive God's beneficence. By submerging our minds and hearts in our work instead of in the Torah and its commandments, we are lowering our heads—bowing down—and prostrating ourselves before the idols of business and work.

The result of this is "stoning"—the heart turns to stone. When we finally take a break from business and try to open our hearts in prayer, nothing happens. Our spiritual senses have become deadened by our relentless service to the gods of material wealth and career success.

[continues...]

410; vol. 11, pp. 5-7. 94. *Igeret HaTeshuvah*, chapters 1-2. 95. Below, 34:6-10. 96. *Avodah Zarah* 8b. 97. *Sanhedrin* 7:4.

6 Furthermore, **you shall be unto Me a kingdom of nobles**, who will rule over the other nations; **and** finally, you shall be **a holy nation**, wholly dedicated to My purposes, rather than to simply maintaining and enhancing the orderly, physical functioning of the world.⁸⁵ **These are the words that you shall say now to the Israelites**—no more and no less.”

Based on this twofold bond between God and the people that was about to be forged at Mount Sinai, the Torah now splits the historical narrative in two. It will first recount the aspects of the historical narrative pertinent to the rational, *contractual* side of the relationship, beginning with the preparations for the Revelation at Mount Sinai,⁸⁶ through the Revelation itself,⁸⁷ and concluding with the laws given while Moses is still on the mountain.⁸⁸ It will then backtrack and recount the aspects of the narrative pertinent to the essential, *covenantal* side of the relationship, starting again with the preparations for the Revelation,⁸⁹ through the Revelation itself,⁹⁰ the writing of the Tablets of the Covenant,⁹¹ and concluding with the instructions for the Tabernacle (through which God promises to “dwell among” the people), which were also given while Moses was still on the mountain.⁹²

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

chosen. In this case, this means that our relationship with God is rooted in God’s essence, which transcends and exists “before” and apart from any value system whereby good is preferable to evil or obedience to disobedience.

However, because this bond is so essential, it is also hidden. It exists in our lives as an undercurrent, whose presence is rarely even sensed. It is therefore necessary to bring this intrinsic bond to the surface by relating to God *actively*. This is done in two ways:

- ♦ First, by being “a holy nation,” dedicating ourselves to God’s purposes for us by studying His Torah and observing its commandments. This *separates* us from the materiality of the world and all other human cultures, setting us apart as a holy nation.
- ♦ Second, by being a “kingdom of nobles” who rule over the materiality of the world and its cultures, co-opting their positive aspects into our Di-

vine mission. This *engages* us in the materiality of the world.

It is the second of these two ways of actualizing our bond with God that is the main accomplishment of the Giving of the Torah. The patriarchs were already shining examples of renouncing the corruption of one’s milieu and devoting oneself to God before the Torah was given. This is why they chose to be shepherds, who could maximize the time they spent by themselves, away from the distractions of civilization and free to meditate and commune with God. And if that is not enough, the angels are *totally* spiritual and consummately separate from materiality.

Since the principle innovation of the Giving of the Torah was the ability it granted us to consecrate the mundane world, the Torah mentions being a “kingdom of nobles” before being “a holy nation.”⁹³

✧ A CLOSER LOOK ✧

The Judicial System. The legal obligation to uphold the commandments makes a person liable to corrective measures for failing to do so. These punishments are not “retribution,” but rather a means to cleanse the individual of the negative effect of the transgression on his or her spiritual psyche. Whenever possible, these corrective measures are imposed (either by God, the court, or the individual himself, as the case may be) while the wrongdoer is still alive, allowing him to then continue with his

life’s mission. Failing this, the wrongdoer will be submitted to cleansing processes in the afterlife.

First and foremost, the wrongdoer must make whatever restitution is due to any injured or wronged party. In addition, certain transgressions incur the following punishments:

- ♦ **Death administered by the earthly court** (i.e., one of the four forms of capital punishment: stoning, burning, decapitation, or strangulation),

85. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 18, pp. 20-21. 86. Below, 19:7-15. 87. Below, 19:16-20:23. 88. Below, 21:1-23:33. 89. Below, 24:1-9. 90. Below, 24:10-11. 91. Below, 24:12-18. 92. Below, 25:1-31:17. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, pp. 153-159. 93. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 18, pp. 21-23, 409-

— ONKELOS —

7 וְאַתָּא מֹשֶׁה וְקָרָא לְסִבֵּי עֲמָא
וְסֹדֵר קְדָמִיהוֹן יֵת כָּל-פִּתְגָּמֵי
הָאֱלֹהִין דִּי פִקְדָה יֵי: 8 וְאַתִּיבּוּ כָל-
עֲמָא בְּחָדָא וְאָמְרוּ כָל-דִּי מְלִיל
יֵי נַעֲבִיד וְאַתִּיבּ מֹשֶׁה יֵת פִּתְגָּמֵי
עֲמָא קָדָם יֵי: 9 וְאָמַר יֵי לְמֹשֶׁה
הָא אָנָּא מִתְגַּלִּי לָךְ בְּעִיבָא דְעֻנְיָא
בְּדִיל דִּישְׁמַע עֲמָא בְּמִלְלוֹתֵי עֲמָךְ
וְאִף בָּךְ יְהִימְנוּן לְעֵלָם וְחוּי מֹשֶׁה
יֵת פִּתְגָּמֵי עֲמָא קָדָם יֵי: 10 וְאָמַר
יֵי לְמֹשֶׁה אֵיזֵל לֹות עֲמָא וְתוֹמְנוּן
יִמָּא דִין וּמְחָר וְיִחְדְּרוּן לְבוּשִׁיהוֹן:

◆ חמישי 7 וַיִּבֹּא מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְרָא לְזִקְנֵי הָעָם וַיֵּשֶׁב לִפְנֵיהֶם
אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ יְהוָה: 8 וַיַּעֲנוּ כָל-
הָעָם יַחְדָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע
מֹשֶׁה אֶת-דְּבָרֵי הָעָם אֶל-יְהוָה: 9 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-
מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי בָּא אֵלֶיךָ בְּעָב הָעֲנָן בְּעָבֹר וַיִּשְׁמַע
הָעָם בְּדַבְּרֵי עֲמֹךְ וְגַם-בְּךָ יֹאמִינוּ לְעוֹלָם וַיַּגֵּד מֹשֶׁה
אֶת-דְּבָרֵי הָעָם אֶל-יְהוָה: 10 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵךְ
אֶל-הָעָם וְקִדְּשֵׁתָם הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר וּכְבֹּסוּ שַׂמְלֹתָם:

— RASHI —

שהוא רביעי לחדש: אֶת-דְּבָרֵי הָעָם וּגו'. תשובה על
דָּבָר זֶה שְׁמַעְתִּי מֵהֶם, שֶׁרְצוּנָם לִשְׁמַע מִמֶּךָ, אֵינוֹ דוֹמָה
הַשּׁוֹמֵעַ מִפִּי שְׁלִיחַ לְשׁוֹמֵעַ מִפִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ, רְצוֹנָנוּ לְרֹאוֹת
אֶת מַלְכָּנוּ: 10 וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה. אִם כֵּן, שְׂמוֹנִיקִין
לְדַבֵּר עִמָּךְ, לָךְ אֶל-הָעָם: וְקִדְּשֵׁתָם. וְזִמְנָתָם שְׂיִכְיִנוּ
עִצְמָם הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר:

8 וַיִּשְׁבּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת-דְּבָרֵי הָעָם וּגו'. בְּיוֹם הַמַּחֲרָת שְׁהוּא
יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי, שֶׁהָיָה בְּהַשְׁכָּמָה עֲלֶיהָ. וְכִי צָרִיךְ הָיָה מֹשֶׁה
לְהַשִּׁיב? אֵלֶּה, בָּא הַכְּתוּב לְלַמֶּדֶךָ דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ מִמֹּשֶׁה,
שֶׁלֹּא אָמַר: הוֹאִיל וַיִּדְעַע מִי שֶׁשְׁלַחְנִי אֵינִי צָרִיךְ לְהַשִּׁיב:
9 בְּעָב הָעֲנָן. בְּמַעֲבֵה הָעֲנָן, וְזֶהוּ עֶרְפֶּל: וְגַם-בְּךָ. גַּם
בְּנִבְיָאִים הַבָּאִים אַחֲרָיִךְ: וַיַּגֵּד מֹשֶׁה וּגו'. בְּיוֹם הַמַּחֲרָת,

INNER DIMENSIONS

[continued...] even indulging in forbidden pleasures in order to satisfy our unending need for excitation. Burned by our lusts, we become in this way also deadened to all things Godly.

Death by decapitation is administered to a murderer.¹⁰³ The spiritual correlate of murder is when we stifle the higher (or "human") aspects of our personalities, killing them off and leaving ourselves with nothing more than our animal drives and emotions. By neglecting to cultivate our intellectual side, choosing instead to follow the lead of our raw emotions, these emotions grow unguided, unrefined, and uncultured. Our reactions to even permitted indulgences become exaggerated: we become gluttonous and greedy; we act cruelly and mercilessly to those who dare to get in our way or dare not to show us proper respect.

Having severed our head from our body—our intellect from our emotions—it should come as no surprise that it is virtually impossible for any intellectual realization or meditation to influence our emotions or behavior. Even when we understand

and get intellectually excited about some profound Divine insight, our heart does not react accordingly. It is too absorbed in its overblown involvement with our inner animal.

Death by strangulation is administered for transgressing most other prohibitions for which none of the above methods of execution is specified.¹⁰⁴ As such, it is the generic result of disobedience or a lack of commitment or discipline. In general, lawless behavior is an affront to our purpose in creation, i.e., to make the world into God's home. By not being true to our Divine mission, we deprive our true, Divine self of its ability to express itself. Our inner voice is silenced, and when we are confronted with some challenge to our Jewish right to exist or flourish we can articulate no self-defense; we have nothing to say. Our spiritual vocal cords have atrophied. We have choked.

The remedy for all these spiritual maladies is true, sincere repentance. Eliciting God's mercy repairs whatever damage we have done and gives us a new lease on life.¹⁰⁵

103. Sanhedrin 9:1. 104. Sanhedrin 11:1, 52b. 105. Sefer HaMa'amarim 5665, pp. 37-41; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5707, pp. 164-172.

- ◆ **Fifth Reading 7** Moses came down the mountain and summoned the elders of the people, and presented before them all these words that God had commanded him.

8 All the people responded together and said, "All that God has spoken, we shall do." With this, they expressed their willingness to enter into a covenantal relationship with God.⁹⁸ The following morning, that of the 3rd of Sivan, Moses ascended the mountain again and conveyed the people's words back to God. This was not technically necessary since God is omniscient, but Moses did not take advantage of this fact and fulfilled his mission with due propriety.

9 God said to Moses, "I am about to come to you in the thickness of the cloud,⁹⁹ so that all the people will hear when I speak to you, and then they will believe both in you and in the prophets that succeed you forever." Moses descended the mountain and relayed this message to the people. When they heard that God intended to speak to them via Moses, they objected, saying that they wanted God to speak to them directly. They said, "We want to see our King!" The following morning, that of the 4th of Sivan, Moses ascended the mountain and reported to God the people's response.

10 God then said to Moses, "If that is the case, go to the people and sanctify them as follows, today and tomorrow: In order for them to receive the revelation they are requesting, they must be ritually pure. First, they shall wash and ritually immerse their clothes."¹⁰⁰

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

10 Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow...they shall wash their clothes: Allegorically, our "clothing" is our thought, speech, and deed. These are the tools the soul uses to express and present itself to the outside world, just as we clothe our bodies in accord with the image we wish to convey to society.

God gave Moses the job of sanctifying the people, but it was the people's job to cleanse their clothing. The Moses of each generation can inspire us, direct us, and connect us to God, but this is dependent on our own preparation, the extent to which we cleanse our thought, speech, and actions from unseemly elements.¹⁰¹

✧ INNER DIMENSIONS ✧

[continued...] A subtler form of idolatry is anger. Anger is possible only when we become haughty and arrogant; when we idolize ourselves this way, we cannot bear it when others disagree with us or when things don't go our way. In contrast, a humble person, aware of his insignificance before God, does not get angry. The effect of unrecanting arrogance is also the stone heart, i.e., being deadened to Divinity.

Death by burning is administered for certain sins

of adultery and incest.¹⁰² These sins are the archetypes for all other forbidden and permitted sensual lusts. God's world is full of beautiful and pleasurable things; we are meant to enjoy these things in accordance with the Torah's guidelines in order to enhance our appreciation and wonder for their Creator. When instead we misuse our intellect and focus it exclusively on experiencing the beauty and pleasure inherent in God's creation, we become progressively consumed by the fire of lust, chasing after ever more titillating stimuli and eventually

98. See *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, p. 156, note 42. 99. See below, v. 16, 20:18. 100. There was a river descending from Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 9:21); alternatively, they could have constructed a *mikveh*. 101. *HaYom Yom*, 5 Sivan; *Sefer HaSichot* 5697, p. 243. 102. *Sanhedrin* 9:1.

ONKELOS

11 ויהוה נכניס ליום השלישי כי | ביום השלישי ירד יהוה לעיני כל העם על ההר סיני: 12 והגבלת את העם סביב לאמר השמרו לכם עלות בהר ונגע בקצהו כל הנגע בהר מות יומת: 13 לא תגע בו יד כי יסקול ויסקל אוירה יירה אם בהמה אם איש לא יתה במשן היכל המה יעלו בהר: 14 וירד משה מן ההר אל העם ויקדש את העם וכבסו שמלתם: 15 ויאמר אל העם יהוה נכניס לשלשת ימים אל תגשו אל אשה:

RASHI

לעלות: היכל. הוא שופר של איל, שכן בערבא קורין ל"דכרא" "יובלא". ושופר של אילו של יצחק היה: 14 מן ההר אל העם. מלמד שלא היה משה פונה לעסקיו, אלא מן ההר אל העם: 15 היו נכניס לשלשת ימים. לסוף שלשת ימים, הוא יום רביעי, שהוסיף משה יום אחד מדעתו. בדברי רבי יוסי. ולדברי האומר: בששה בחדש נתנו עשרת הדברות, לא הוסיף משה כלום. ו"לשלשת ימים" — כמו: "ליום השלישי": אל תגשו אל אשה. כל שלשת ימים הללו, כרי שהיו הנשים טובלות ליום השלישי, ותהינה טהורות לקבל תורה. שאם ישמשו תוך שלשה ימים, שמא תפלט האשה שכבת זרע לאחר טבילתה, ותחזור ותטמא. אבל מששהתה שלשה ימים, כבר הורע מריח ואינו ראוי להוריע, וטהור מלטמא את הפולטת:

11 והיו נכניס. מבדלים מאשה: ליום השלישי. שהוא ששה בחדש. ובחמישי בנה משה את המזבח תחת ההר, ושנים עשרה מצבה, כל הענין האמור בפרשת "ואלה המשפטים". ואין מקדם ומאוחר בתורה: לעיני כל העם. מלמד שלא היה בהם סומא, שנתרפאו כלם: 12 והגבלת. קבע להם תחומין לסימן, שלא יקרבו מן הגבול והלאה: לאמר. הגבול אומר להם: השמרו מעלות מכאן והלאה. ואתה תזהירם על כך: ונגע בקצהו. אפלו בקצהו: 13 יירה יירה. מכאן לנסקלין שהם נדחין למטה מבית הסקילה, שהיה גבוה שתי קומות: יירה. ישלף למטה לארץ, כמו: "יירה בים": במשן היכל. כשימשך היובל קול ארץ, הוא סימן סלוק שכניה והפסקת הקול. ובין שאסתלק, הם ראין

29. שמות טו, ד.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

But once the Divine inspiration dissipated, the resulting void left room again for doubt, even rebellion.¹¹⁷ Thus, the same blast that signaled the withdrawal of God's presence signaled the return of free choice and independence of action.

But precisely because of this independence, our accomplishments count as our own. If there were no alternative to devotion to God, it would have little significance. The possibility of rejecting God therefore endows meaning to our devotion to Him and enables us to express our freedom of choice. When there is no motivation from heaven, we must muster our own initiative, rendering our accomplishments the result of our own choice, fueled by our own energy.

God therefore withdrew after giving the Torah to enable us to serve Him with self-motivation and transform the world from within. Whereas the sanctity

God infused into the physical world at the Giving of the Torah was superimposed and therefore fleeting, the sanctity we infuse into the world is generated from within, and therefore permanent.¹¹⁸

14 And Moses came down from the mountain to the people: Our sages note that "Moses did not attend to his own affairs, but [rather proceeded straight] from the mountain to the people."¹¹⁹ This statement implies that Moses did not even attend to his *spiritual* affairs. Moses' spiritual concerns were certainly so sublime that only he was capable of performing them. Yet he ignored these matters in order to attend to the people's rudimentary need to cleanse their behavior.¹²⁰

The lesson for us is that, however sublime our personal agenda, we must give precedence to attending to the needs of other Jews.¹²¹

115. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 14, p. 160. 116. See below, on v. 17. 117. As apparent from the episode of the Golden Calf soon to follow.

118. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5745, p. 108; *Sichot Kodesh* 5724, pp. 195-196. 119. *Mechilta*, cited in Rashi. 120. See above, on v. 10.

121. *Sichot Kodesh* 5726, pp. 310-311; *Sichot Kodesh* 5737, vol. 1, p. 114.

11 Second, when a couple engages in marital relations, they become ritually defiled until the evening after they next immerse themselves in a *mikveh* or natural body of water.¹⁰⁶ In addition, if a woman discharges seminal fluid within three days after having marital relations, she is thereby rendered ritually defiled until she immerses herself in a *mikveh* or natural body of water. Therefore, all couples should refrain from marital relations for the next three days.¹⁰⁷ In this way, **they will all be prepared for ritual immersion, at the latest, on the third day from today, the 6th of Sivan, for on the third day from today I, God, will descend on Mount Sinai and give the people the Torah.**

In order for them all to experience this revelation fully, I will heal them of their infirmities. I will restore sight to the blind among them, speech to the dumb among them, and hearing to the deaf among them.¹⁰⁸ Thus, I will descend on Mount Sinai **in the sight of all the people.**

12 Since My descent on the mountain will temporarily sanctify it, **you shall make a boundary for the people all around that will proclaim, 'Beware of ascending the mountain or even touching its edge.'** You shall also tell them explicitly, **'Whoever touches the mountain will surely be put to death.'**

13 But **no hand shall touch him** to execute him, **for he will be stoned.** Prior to being stoned, the transgressor is to be **cast down** from a place twice his height; if he dies from this fall, there is no further need to stone him. **Whether animal or man,** if he crosses the boundary around the mountain **he will not live.'** Only **when the ram's horn sounds a long blast** from heaven, signifying the departure of the Divine presence from the mountain, will the mountain revert to its mundane state,¹⁰⁹ and **they may ascend the mountain.** The horn I will sound will be the horn of the ram that Abraham sacrificed instead of Isaac on Mount Moriah."¹¹⁰

14 **Moses came down from the mountain** and went straight to the people, conveying God's message before attending to his personal affairs. **He sanctified the people and they washed and immersed their clothes.**

15 **Moses said to the people, "Keep yourselves in readiness for a three-day period; do not 'approach' a woman, i.e., engage in marital relations."** He then built the fence surrounding the mountain. The remaining events of this day as well as those of the following day will be recounted further on.¹¹¹

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

11 **I will heal them of their infirmities:** Along with healing them of their physical infirmities, God also healed the people of their spiritual infirmities: He erased the effects of any past wrongdoings and restored the entire people to the innocence of Adam and Eve before they ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.¹¹² Were it not for the incident of the Golden Calf, the people would have retained this pristine status and lived forever.¹¹³ The sublime quality of the original tablets affected the people by enabling them to remember perfectly the Torah they would learn.¹¹⁴

They were thus transformed into a nation of wholly righteous people.¹¹⁵

13 **When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may ascend the mountain:** The extended blast indicated the withdrawal of God's presence and the termination of its sanctifying effect on the mountain. The awesome mountain that had been strictly off-limits suddenly became approachable.

The open revelation of God's presence on the mountain temporarily suspended the people's free choice; they could not deny God's existence or His concern.¹¹⁶

106. Leviticus 15:18. 107. Below, v. 15. 108. Rashi here and on 20:15, below. 109. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, p. 266. 110. Genesis 22:13. 111. Below, chapter 24. 112. *Shabbat* 146a; *Zohar* 1:52b, 2:193b. 113. *Avodah Zarah* 5a; *Tikunei Zohar* 56 (91a). 114. *Eiruvin* 54a.

— ONKELOS —

16 וְהָיָה בְיוֹמָא תְּלִיתָאָה בְּמַדְבָּרָא
צִפְרָא וְהָיוּ קָלִין וּבְרָקִין וְעִנְנָא
תְּקִיף עַל טוּרָא וְקַל שׁוֹפְרָא תְּקִיף
לְחֵדָא וְזַע כָּל-עַמָּא דִּי בְּמִשְׁרִיתָא:
17 וְאַפִּיק מִשָּׁה יֵת עַמָּא לְקַדְמוֹת
מִיִּמְרָא דִּי מִן מִשְׁרִיתָא וְאַתְעֵתְדוּ
בְּשׁוֹפְרֵי טוּרָא: 18 וְטוּרָא דְסִינִי
תֵּנּוּ כְּלָה מִן קֳדָם דִּי אֲתַגְלִי עֲלוּהִי
יְיָ בְּאַשְׁתָּא וְסִלִּיק תִּנְנָה כְּתִנְנָא
דְּאַתְנָא וְזַע כָּל-טוּרָא לְחֵדָא:

16 וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בַּהֲיִית הַבְּקָר וַיְהִי קֶלֶת וּבְרָקִים
וַעֲנָן כָּבֵד עַל-הָהָר וְקַל שׁוֹפָר חֲזָק מְאֹד וַיִּתְּחַד כָּל-
הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּמַחֲנֶה: 17 וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הָעָם לְקִרְיַת
הָאֱלֹהִים מִן-הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְּצֻבוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר: 18 וְהָרָ
סִינִי עָשָׂן כִּלּוֹ מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל
עֲשָׂנוּ בְּעֵשֶׂן הַכֶּבֶשֶׂן וַיִּתְּחַד כָּל-הָהָר מְאֹד:

— RASHI —

תרגום "תננא" וכל-עשן שבמקרא נקודים קמץ, מפני שהם שם דבר: הכבשן. של סיד. יכול ככבשן זה ולא יותר? תלמוד לומר: "בער באש עד-לב השמים"³³. ומזה-תלמוד לומר "כבשן" — לשביר את האזן מזה שהיא יכולה לשמע, נותן לבריות סימן הנביר להם. כיוצא בו: "כאריה ישאג"³⁴, וכי מי נתן כח בארי, אלא הוא? והכתוב מושלו באריה? אלא, אנו מכניין ומדמין אותו לבריותיו, כדי לשביר את האזן מזה-שיכולה לשמע. כיוצא בו: "וקולו כקול מים רבים"³⁵, וכי מי נתן קול למים, והלא הוא? ואתה מכנה אותו לדמותו לבריותיו, כדי לשביר את האזן:

16 בהית הבקר. מלמד שהקדים על ידם, מה-שאין דרך בשר ודם לעשות כן, שיהא הרב ממתין לתלמיד. וכן מצינו ביחזקאל: "קום צא אל-הבקעה וגו', ואקום ואצא אל-הבקעה והנה-שם כבוד-ה' עמד"³⁶. 17 לקראת האלהים. מגיד שהשכינה יצאה לקראתם, כחתן היוצאת לקראת כלה. וזה שנאמר: "ה' מסיני בא"³⁷, ולא נאמר "לסיני בא": בתחתית ההר. לפי פשוטו: ברגלי ההר. ומדרשו³⁸ שנתלש ההר ממקומו, ונכפה עליהם בגיגית: 18 עשן כלו. אין "עשן" זה שם דבר, שהרי נקוד השי"ן פתח, אלא לשון "פעל", כמו: "אמר" "שמר" "שמע". לכך תרגומו "תננא כוליה", ולא

ג. כביכ. 31. דברים ל, ב. 32. מכליתא פרק ג; שבת פח, א. 33. דברים ד, יא. 34. הושע יא, י. 35. יחזקאל מג, ב.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

stray from the path of the Torah and its commandments. As with any transaction involving a risk of default, God required some form of guarantee that the Torah would be upheld.

The Jews first suggested their parents as guarantors. "Although we may be busy," they said, "we have older parents. They are already retired and carry no financial responsibilities. We will be happy to support them so that they can comfortably study the Torah, and they will be our guarantors."

God did not accept this, so the Jews suggested their prophets as guarantors. The word for "prophet" (*navi*) actually means "orator." The Jews said: "Our rabbis will keep Judaism alive! We ourselves don't have time for Torah study, so we will hire rabbis, and it will be their job to study on our behalf."

God wasn't satisfied with this solution either. His intent was for every Jew to follow the path of Torah, not only the rabbis or the elders.

The Jews then tried one more approach. "Accept our children as guarantors. Throughout their childhood, when they are too young to earn a livelihood, we are prepared to send them to Jewish schools where they will study the Torah. When they grow older,

however, we will have to bring them into the family business, and they will no longer have time for full-time study."

God found these guarantors satisfactory, and on this merit He agreed to give the Jews the Torah. When children receive the proper education, their dedication to the Torah lasts throughout their lives. Moreover, besides eventually passing their dedication on to their own children, they influence their parents to renew their dedication to the Torah as well.

We see here how educating our children in schools that provide them with a solid grounding in the Torah is the only way of ensuring Jewish continuity.¹³⁴

Another lesson from the above Midrash:

Parents love all their children, but they usually express their love most openly to their youngest children. A young child's lack of understanding limits the ways in which parents can express their love, but the intensity of their love exists despite this—or perhaps because of it.

The same is true in the relationship between God and His children, the Jewish people. The greatest display of His love for us took place in our national infancy, at the revelation at Mount Sinai. True, He limited the

134. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 2, pp. 572-573.

The Giving of the Torah

16 On the third day after this, the 6th of Sivan, **as morning dawned**, God began the process of revelation on Mount Sinai, before the people had assembled there. God was even more “excited,” so to speak, about giving the Torah than the people were about receiving it. **There was thunder and lightning, and a heavy cloud on the mountain.** There were three degrees of thickness to the cloud: darkness, cloud, and thick cloud.¹²² **There was an extremely loud blast of a ram’s horn, and all the people in the camp trembled.**

17 God’s presence was palpably coming from Mount Sinai towards the people,¹²³ accompanied by a retinue of some of His angels.¹²⁴ In response, **Moses led the people out of the camp toward the Divine Presence, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain.** God uprooted the mountain, threatening to crush the people under it if they would not accept the Torah, but the people accepted this compulsion willingly by lovingly crowding under the mountain.¹²⁵ Seeing this, God had the people retreat and lowered the mountain back to the ground.

18 The whole of Mount Sinai was in smoke because God had descended upon it in fire. The fire was slightly above the mountain¹²⁶ but it was close enough to burn the vegetation on the mountain.¹²⁷ **Its smoke rose up like the prodigious smoke of a limekiln** but in fact much higher, for the fire reached up to the midst of the sky,¹²⁸ **and the entire mountain quaked violently.**

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

17 At the foot of the mountain: Literally, this phrase reads “underneath the mountain.” Allegorically, this refers to the Jewish people’s utter submission to the Torah. This shared submission, united “under” the Torah, is what enabled them to stand “as one people” despite their innate diversity, as we have noted.¹²⁹

Just as this holds true for the Jewish people as a whole, so does it hold true for every Jewish family unit. Differences of role and function and of nuance in individual personality can naturally set family members at odds. Yet, if they share a common submission to the Torah, all else becomes secondary and they become united in profound underlying harmony.¹³⁰

God uprooted the mountain and suspended it over the people: A mountain is a protrusion above the plain, while a valley is a sunken area below the level of the plain. A mountain is a metaphor for love, how a person extends himself outward to make contact with another person, whereas a valley is a metaphor for fear, how a person withdraws within himself to avoid contact with another person. A plain, in this context, is a metaphor for indifference.

Allegorically, then, by suspending the mountain on top of the people, God enveloped them in His love. We are taught in the Book of Proverbs¹³¹ that “as [in]

water, face reflects face, so is a person’s heart [reflected] by another.” By overwhelming them with His love, God forced the people to feel overwhelming love for Him. Although they were ready to accept the Torah in any case, God coerced them in this manner into accepting it unconditionally.

This enveloping love was a preparation for the union that was to occur at the actual Giving of the Torah.

In Kabbalistic terms, this was the revelation of enveloping (*makif*) light that preceded the revelation of inner (*penimi*) light.¹³²

The Children as Guarantors: According to the Midrash, when God wanted to give the Torah to the Israelites, He asked them, “Do you accept My Torah?” “Yes,” they answered. “Provide Me with a guarantor that will ensure that you uphold it,” demanded God. They said to Him, “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be our guarantors.” God did not accept this. They said to Him, “Our prophets will be our guarantors.” God did not accept this, either. They said to Him, “Our children will be our guarantors.” God accepted them immediately as guarantors and gave the Torah to Israel.¹³³

A homiletical interpretation:

Although the Jews had the best of intentions, God knew that the exigencies of life could cause them to

122. Deuteronomy 4:11. 123. Rashi here and on Deuteronomy 33:2. 124. Deuteronomy 33:2, Rashi *ad loc.* 125. Rashi on Deuteronomy 33:3 and *Shabbat* 88a. 126. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 223. 127. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 224, note 9. 128. Deuteronomy 4:11. 129. Above, on 19:2. 130. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 8, pp. 242-243. 131. 27:19. 132. *Torah Or* 98d; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5671, pp. 96, 104-105; *Sefer HaSichot* 5750, vol. 1, p. 342, 336. 133. *Tanchuma*, *Vayigash* 2, according to the version of *Anaf Yosef*.

— ONKELOS —

19 וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וַחֲזָק מְאֹד מִשֵּׁה יִדְבָּר
וְהַאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֵנוּ בְּקוֹל:
שִׁישִׁי 20 וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה עַל־הָר סִינַי אֶל־רֹאשׁ הָהָר
וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה לְמֹשֶׁה אֶל־רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה:
21 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה רֵד הָעַד בָּעָם פֶּן־יִהְיֶה־סִּינַי
יְהוָה לְרֹאוֹת וַנִּפְּל מִמֶּנּוּ רַב:
וַיַּפֵּל מִנְהוֹן סָגִי:

— RASHI —

תלמוד לומר: "כי מן השמים דברתי עמכם".³⁷ מלמד,
שהרכין שמים העליונים והתחתונים והציען על גבי
ההר, כמצע על המטה, וירד כסא הכבוד עליהם:
21 הַעֲדָה בָּעָם. התירה בהם שלא לעלות בהר: פֶּן־
יִהְיֶה־סִּינַי וְגו'. שלא יהרסו את מצבם, על ידי שתאזתם
"אלה לראות", ויקרבו לצד ההר: וַנִּפְּל מִמֶּנּוּ רַב. כל־
מהשיפול מהם ואפלו הוא יחידי, חשוב לפני רב: פֶּן
יִהְיֶה־סִּינַי. כל־הריסה מפרדת אספת הבנין, אף הנפרדין
ממצב אנשים הורסים את המצב:

9 הַחֲזָק וְחֲזָק מְאֹד. מנהג הדיוט — כל־זמן שהוא מאריך
לתקוע קולו מחליש וכוהה, אבל כאן הולך וחזק מאד.
ולמה כך מתחלה? לשבר אוניהם מהשיכולין לשמע:
מֹשֶׁה יִדְבָּר. כשהיה משה מדבר ומשמיע הדברות
לישראל, שהרי לא שמעו מפי הגבורה אלא "אנכי"
ו"לא יהיה־לך", והקדוש־ברוך־הוא מסיעו לתת־בו
כח להיות קולו מגביר ונשמע: יַעֲנֵנוּ בְּקוֹל. יעננו על
דבר הקול, כמו: "אשר־יענה באש"³⁶ — על דבר האש
להורידו: 20 וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל־הָר סִינַי. יכול, ירד עליו ממש?

36. מלכיסא יח, כד. 37. שמות כ, יח.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

pects of reality: what we would call today the three
dimensions of space, the dimension of time, and the
dimension of life or consciousness.¹⁴³

The key to accomplishing this is making sure that all
aspects of our religious life are imbued with "fire,"
i.e., Divine warmth and enthusiasm.¹⁴⁴

Until the Giving of the Torah, spirituality and physi-
cality were separate domains and the gulf between
them could not be bridged. Physical deeds could

not influence the spiritual realm, and spiritual deeds
could not affect the physical world. With the Giving
of the Torah, this discontinuity was annulled, and
spirituality and physicality became opposite ends of
a continuum.

God Himself initiated this new reality by descending
upon Mount Sinai. At that point, the revelation of the
Name *Havayah* that began in Egypt¹⁴⁵ was complet-
ed.¹⁴⁶

A CLOSER LOOK

[20] God descended upon Mount Sinai, onto the
peak of the mountain. Although God's presence
also descended into Egypt to slay the firstborn,¹⁴⁷
this descent was not accompanied by smoke, fire,
a shofar blast, or an earthquake, as it was in this
instance. This is because here, God's presence "set-
tled" on the mountain—if only temporarily—in
order to reveal His wisdom, the Torah. (The Rab-

binic idiom for this is that God's "throne" descend-
ed onto the mountain.) This intense revelation was
appropriately accompanied by a majestic display
of phenomena that expressed how nature was be-
ing overruled.

In Egypt, in contrast, God's presence merely
"passed" through the land to accomplish its
ends.¹⁴⁸

143. This is alluded to in the word for "smoke" (עשן), which is seen as an acronym for the words used in *Sefer Yetzirah* (6:1) for "space" (עולם), "time" (שנה), and "soul" (נפש) (Rabbi Avraham ben David, *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*, introduction [2b in standard editions]; *Torat Shmuel* 5628, p. 144). 144. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5701, p. 129; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 13, p. 151. 145. See above, on 6:2 ff. 146. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5742, p. 82. 147. Above, 12:12. 148. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 228.

19 In contrast to the sound of a mortal person blowing a ram's horn, which dies out as he runs out of breath, **the sound of a ram's horn** was here at first heard softly, so the people could get used to the volume, but it **grew increasingly loud** without any break. When God later articulated the first two commandments, He spoke over this sound. When **Moses spoke** the remaining eight commandments, **God responded** to the weakness of his mortal voice **by making Moses' voice** loud enough to be heard.

- ◆ **Sixth Reading** 20 God lowered all seven heavens so they were suspended just above the top of the mountain; the heavens thus appeared as a blanket covering the mountain. God's Throne of Glory descended into this depression. God used the imagery of a "throne" in order to convey the idea that through giving the Torah, His presence was "settling" into the world permanently, much as a chair offers a person a fixed place of repose.¹³⁵ In this sense, **God descended** figuratively **upon Mount Sinai, onto the peak of the mountain**. It was only the heavens, and not God's presence, that actually "touched" the mountain. Nonetheless, since the heavens were spread over the mountain as a blanket covers a bed, they did not interpose between the Divine presence and the mountain itself, just as the fact that a bed is covered with a blanket does not stop us from referring to a person resting on the blanketed bed as resting on the bed itself.¹³⁶ This proximity of God's presence to the mountain sanctified it for the duration of the Divine revelation.¹³⁷ God then opened all seven heavens so the people could perceive that He is the only God that exists.¹³⁸ Never again would He reveal Himself publicly to this degree.¹³⁹ **God then summoned Moses to the mountain peak, and Moses ascended.**

21 **God said to Moses, "Go down; warn the people not to break ranks and move towards God to gaze better upon Me, lest they touch the mountain and many of them perish."**¹⁴⁰ Even if only one of them were to be lost this way, I would be as pained as if many of them had died.

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

revelation to what we were capable of absorbing. "God descended upon Mount Sinai"—He descended to a level that we could appreciate. The Ten Commandments are for the most part practical and straightforward decrees, because that was all we could absorb at that time.

Yet, just as a parent's love for his child is not diminished in any way by the latter's limited capacity to appreciate it, so too, God's love was not limited in any way by our limited spiritual sophistication. The entire Torah is hidden within the Ten Commandments. Moreover, God imparted His very essence in the Torah that He gave us, as we will note.¹⁴¹

This concept remains true at all times. When we contemplate our spiritual shortcomings, we may feel over-

whelmed by the challenges facing us, and wonder: "How can I possibly overcome all these obstacles and hope to connect to God through His Torah and commandments?" The truth is, however, that God's love is revealed in its entirety specifically to His youngest children; i.e., to those who, despite their challenges and obstacles, choose to unconditionally follow His word with boundless devotion.¹⁴²

18 The whole of Mount Sinai was in smoke because God had descended upon it in fire: The smoke indicated that the heavenly fire that had descended upon the mountain was consuming it. This alluded to how the Giving of the Torah enabled the physical world to be transformed into a vehicle for spirituality.

This transformation can and should encompass all as-

135. *Sichot Kodesh* 5737, vol. 1, pp. 480-482d. 136. *Sichot Kodesh* 5737, vol. 1, pp. 480-482d. 137. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 223-228.

138. Rashi on Deuteronomy 4:35. 139. Deuteronomy 5:19; Rashi *ad loc.* 140. Above, v. 12. 141. Below, on 20:2. 142. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 4, pp. 1307-1308.

— ONKELOS —
 22 ואף כהניא דקריבין לשמשא
 קדם יי תקדשון דלמא יקטל בהון
 יי: 23 ואמר משה קדם יי לא יבול
 עמא למסק לטורא דסיני ארי את
 אסהידתא בנא למימר תחיים ית
 טורא וקדישהי: 24 ואמר לה
 יי איזיל חות ותסק את ואהרן
 עמר וכהניא ועמא לא יפגרון
 למסק קדם יי דלמא יקטל בהון:
 25 ונחת משה לעמא ואמר להון:
 201 ומליל יי ית כל-פתגמניא
 האלין למימר:

22 וגם הכהנים הנגשים אליהוה יתקדשו פן יפריץ
 בהם יהוה: 23 ויאמר משה אליהוה לא יוכל העם
 לעלות אל-הר סיני כי אתה העדתה בנו לאמר הגבל
 את-ההר וקדשתו: 24 ויאמר אליו יהוה לד-רד ועלית
 אתה ואהרן עמך והכהנים והעם אליהרסו לעלות
 אליהוה פן יפריץ-בם: 25 וירד משה אל-העם ויאמר
 אליהם: ׀

In the public reading of the Ten Commandments, the cantillation indicated on p. 340 is used.

20:1 וידבר אלהים את כל-הדברים האלה לאמר: ׀

RASHI

לעלות אל ה': פן יפריץ-בם. אף-על-פי שהוא נקוד
 חטף קמץ, אינו זו מגזרתו. כף דרך כל-תכה שנקדחה
 מלאפוסים¹⁶¹, כשהיא סמוכה במקף משתנה הנקוד לחטף
 קמץ: 25 ויאמר אליהם. התראה זו: 1 וידבר אלהים.
 אין אלהים אלא דין. וכן הוא אומר: "אלהים לא
 תקלל"¹⁶², ותרגומו: "דינא". לפי שיש פרשיות בתורה,
 שאם עשאן אדם — מקבל שבר, ואם לאו — אינו
 מקבל עליהם פרענות, יכול אף עשרת הדברות בן?
 תלמוד לומר: "וידבר אלהים" — דין להפרע: את
 כל-הדברים האלה. מלמד שאמר הקדוש-ברוך-הוא
 עשרת הדברות בדבור אחד, מה שאי אפשר לאדם
 לומר בן. אם בן, מה-תלמוד לומר עוד "אנכי" ו"לא
 יהיה-לך"? שחור ופרש על כל-דבור ודבור בפני עצמו:
 לאמר. מלמד שהיו עונין על הן הן ועל לאו לאו:

22 וגם הכהנים. אף הבכורות שהעבודה בהם:
 הנגשים אליה. להקריב קרבנות. אף הם אל יסמכו
 על חשיבותם לעלות: יתקדשו. יהיו מונמנים להתניצב
 על עמדתן: פן יפריץ. לשון פרצה, יהרג בהם ויעשה
 בהם פרצה: 23 לא יוכל העם. איני צריך להעיד בהם,
 שהרי מתרין ועומדין הם היום שלשת ימים, ולא יוכלו
 לעלות, שאין להם רשות: 24 לד-רד. והעד בהם שנית,
 שמורוין את האדם קדם מעשה, וחורוין ומורוין אותו
 בשעת מעשה: ועלית אתה ואהרן עמך והכהנים. יכול
 אף הם עמך? תלמוד לומר: "ועלית אתה". אמר מעתה,
 אתה מחיצה לעצמך, ואהרן מחיצה לעצמו, והכהנים
 מחיצה לעצמם. משה נגש יותר מאהרן, ואהרן יותר
 מן הכהנים, והעם כל-עקר אליהרסו את מצבם

38. חולס. 39. שמות כב, כז.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

however, and left their subsequent actualization up to us. By studying the Torah and observing its commandments, we increase Divine consciousness in the world, and thereby remove the veils that hide these

Divine revelations.¹⁶¹

God then spoke all these words, saying: In all other instances where the Torah uses this idiom ("God spoke...saying"), it means that the message is to be

INNER DIMENSIONS

[1] **God then spoke all these words, saying:** The Torah contains 613 specific commandments: All 248 active commandments are included within the first commandment and all 365 passive commandments are included within the second commandment. In this sense, the people indeed heard *all* the commandments directly from God.¹⁶²

But this was only in a general sense; God did not explicitly communicate all the 613 commandments at this time. For example, He waited to articulate some of those that would be applicable only when

the people would enter the Land of Israel until just before they entered it. With yet other commandments, God waited until a situation arose that "occasioned" the commandment, etc.¹⁶³ This was in order to convey the message that we are meant to consider *all* the commandments relevant and immediately practicable.

In any case, God communicated the entire Torah prior to Moses' death, enabling him to transmit the text to the people in its entirety.

161. *Sefer HaMa'amarim Kuntresim*, vol. 2, p. 840. 162. *Tanya*, chapter 20 ff. 163. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 13, p. 95

22 I will allow **the** firstborn, who officiate as **priests who come near God** to offer sacrifices, to ascend the mountain somewhat.¹⁴⁹ But they should not abuse this distinction;¹⁵⁰ rather, **they shall also sanctify** and control **themselves, lest God cause a breach among them** by killing those who break ranks and venture too close.”

23 **Moses replied to God**, “I do not need to warn anyone. **The people cannot ascend Mount Sinai, for You have already warned us, saying, ‘Make a boundary around the mountain and sanctify it.’**”

24 Yet **God said to him**, “Go, descend, and warn them again. It is prudent to instruct a person about how he is to behave both in advance of the moment of action and again when the actual moment arrives. **Then you shall come up** again to the mountain peak. **Aaron** will ascend part way **with you** to his station, lower down on the mountain, **and the priests**—the firstborn—will ascend to their station, lower still. **But the people shall not break** their ranks at all **to ascend to God, lest He cause a breach among them.**”

25 **Moses went down to the people and conveyed this instruction to them** again.

At the giving of the Torah, all the Israelites “converted” to Judaism, i.e., became legally responsible for fulfilling whatever the Torah obligates them to. The mixed multitude, however, were “converted” conditionally. They did not receive the status of full Israelites until later, after the incident of the Golden Calf.¹⁵¹

The Ten Commandments

20:1 **God then spoke all these words**—the Ten Commandments—from out of the darkness,¹⁵² the fire,¹⁵³ and the cloud that covered the mountaintop.¹⁵⁴ The people heard the sound of God’s voice issuing from heaven, but they were able to hear distinct words only from the Divine fire on top of the mountain.¹⁵⁵ All the commandments of the Torah are alluded to in the Ten Commandments.¹⁵⁶ In giving these commandments, God obligated the people to keep them and made them liable to corrective punishment for transgressing them. He first miraculously said all ten commandments at once. He then repeated the first two separately and had Moses repeat the remaining eight,¹⁵⁷ as will be described presently. The people responded to each commandment by **saying**, “Yes! We will!” to the preceptive ones and “No! We will not!” to the prohibitory ones.¹⁵⁸ God spoke to the people from all four directions,¹⁵⁹ in order not to overwhelm them with the intensity of a direct revelation from only one direction.¹⁶⁰

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

1 **God then spoke all these words:** Inasmuch as the Giving of the Torah was the greatest revelation of God in history, we would expect it to be introduced by the Name *Havayah*, which signifies God’s mercy, rather than the Name *Elokim*, which signifies God’s concealment and strict justice.

Indeed, had God revealed at the Giving of the Torah only the Divine revelations that the Jews actually witnessed, the Torah would have used the Name *Havayah*. However, the Giving of the Torah also included all the Divine revelations that would occur until the end of time. God gave these revelations *in potentia*,

149. Rashi on v. 24. 150. See *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6, p. 173, note 23. 151. Below, 33:1. 152. Deuteronomy 5:20. 153. Deuteronomy 4:33, 36, 5:4, 19, 21, 23. 154. Deuteronomy 5:19; Rashi on 24:16. 155. Deuteronomy 4:36; Rashi on 20:19, below; Rashi on Deuteronomy 33:2. 156. Below, 24:12. 157. Rashi on 19:19, above, and on Numbers 15:21. 158. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, p. 160. 159. Below, v. 15. 160. Rashi on Deuteronomy 32:11.

— ONKELOS —
2 אָנא יי אַלֶּהָךְ דִּי אַפִּיקְתָּךְ
מֵאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדֵיהּ:

2 אָנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאַרְץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:

— RASHI —

רוחות ומן השמים ומן הארץ, אל תאמרו רשיות הרבה
הן. ולמה אמר לשון יחיד — "אלהיך"? לתן פתחון פה
למשה ללמד סגוריא במעשה העגל, וזה הוא שאמר:
"למה ה' יחרה אפך בעמך?"⁴², לא להם צוית לא יהיה
לכם אלהים אחרים, אלא לי לבדי: **מבית עבדים**.
מבית פרעה שהייתם עבדים לו. או אינו אומר אלא
"מבית עבדים" שהיו עבדים לעבדים? תלמוד לומר:
"ויפדך מבית עבדים מיד פרעה מלך-מצרים"⁴³. אומר
מעלה: עבדים למלך היו ולא עבדים לעבדים:

2 **אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים**. כדאי היא ההוצאה
שתהיו משעבדים לי. דבר אחר: לפי שנגלה בים
כגבור מלחמה, ונגלה כאן כזקן מלא רחמים, שנאמר:
"ויראו את אלהי ישראל, ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת
הספיר"⁴⁰ — זו היתה לפניו בשעת השעבוד, "ובעצם
השמים" — משנגאלו. הואיל ואני משתנה במראות,
אל תאמרו שתי רשויות הן, אנכי הוא אשר הוצאתיך
ממצרים, ועל הים. דבר אחר: לפי שהיו שומעין קולות
הרבה, שנאמר: "את-הקולת"⁴¹ — קולות באין מארבע

40. שמות כד, י. 41. להלן פסוק טו. 42. שמות לב, יא. 43. דברים ז, ח.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

er we go, we must carry with us the Divine consciousness we attain when we pray and study the Torah.¹⁶⁹

Another explanation: "God spoke all these words" then, at the Giving of the Torah, such that we actually "say" them again, whenever we study the Torah. When we open ourselves properly, we re-experience the revelation of the Torah from God whenever we learn it. Thus, God speaks of the Torah as "My word, which I have put in your mouth,"¹⁷⁰ and our sages encourage us to feel the same "awe, fear, trembling, and perspiring"¹⁷¹ when we learn today that we felt at the Giving of the Torah.¹⁷²

Another explanation: There is value in reciting of the Torah's words itself, apart from learning and understanding them. (The verse can thus be read: "God spoke all these words [for us] to recite.") Thus we find that Chasidic leaders often instructed the more simple of their followers—who did not necessarily have the

talents or time for in-depth study—to memorize certain parts of the Torah and recite them often. In this way, these simple folk achieved levels of purity and holiness far beyond what their ability to study or pray could have granted them.¹⁷³

The Ten Commandments are all addressed in the singular. Our sages offer two seemingly contradictory explanations for this fact:

1. The Ten Commandments had to be addressed to the Jewish people as a collective whole, for if even one Jew was missing, the Torah could not have been given. This implies that each individual received the Torah in the same way.¹⁷⁴
2. The Ten Commandments were addressed to each and every Jew as individuals. This implies that each individual received the Torah in a unique, personal way, tailored to his or her spiritual and psychological makeup.¹⁷⁵

[continues...]

INNER DIMENSIONS

[2] I am God, your God: Allegorically, this means that with the Giving of the Torah, the Name *Ha-vayah* became operative with every Jew. We all intrinsically possess the ability to align our entire array of psychological powers with the Divine powers alluded to in the four letters of this Name: The *yud* indicates *chochmah*, the power to access the supra-conscious level of the Divine soul, which binds us to God intrinsically. This is expressed as the power to overcome all obstacles to fulfilling our

Divine purpose, even if this calls for self-sacrifice. The *hei* indicates *binah*, the power to understand Divinity and know God.

The *vav* indicates the power to orient our six emotions toward God, making Him the object of our love, awe, compassion, trust, devotion, and loyalty.

The final *hei* indicates the powers of expression—thought, speech, and action—which we can also dedicate to fulfilling our Divine mission in life.¹⁷⁶

169. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, pp. 148-149. 170. Isaiah 59:21. 171. *Berachot* 22a. 172. *Torah Or*, *Yitro* 67b. 173. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5704, p. 145. 174. *Zohar* 3:84:2; *Pesikta Zotarta* on this verse; *Devarim Rabbah* 7:8. 175. *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 12; *Pesikta Rabati* 21; *Tanchuma* (ed. Buber) *Yitro* 17; Ramban on this verse. 176. *Likutei Torah* 4:18ab.

2 The first commandment: **"I am God, your God.** This means that you are now officially obligated to fulfill all My commandments. However, your relationship with Me is not merely contractual; you do not consummate it simply by discharging your legal obligations to Me. For I am the one **who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of Pharaoh**, where you were **slaves**. By freeing you from Egyptian slavery, I have made you, in effect, into *My* slaves; your lives are from now on to be totally oriented toward My purposes and you no longer have any 'private lives' at all.¹⁶⁴ Also: even though I appeared to you at the Sea of Reeds as a warring God and I appear to you here as a merciful God,¹⁶⁵ do not think that there are two deities! **I am both God** the God of mercy, and **your God**, the God of judgment, **who brought you out of the land of Egypt**, one and the same. And even though you hear My voice coming from all four directions, do not let this lead you to think that there are multiple deities, either."

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

conveyed to a third party. (In most cases, it means that Moses is to relate to the Jewish people what God is telling him.) In this case, however, there was no third party to hear these words later on: every single Jew alive at the time was present at Mount Sinai and personally heard God say these words. It cannot even be understood as the obligation to transmit the Torah to later generations, for the sages teach us that the souls of every Jew that would exist throughout all of history were present at the giving of the Torah.¹⁶⁶

Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael explain that the word "saying" in this verse indicates that the Jews responded to each of the Ten Commandments. According to Rabbi Yishmael, they responded, "Yes [we will do it]" to the active commandments and "No [we will not commit that sin]" to the passive commandments. According to Rabbi Akiva, they responded to both the active and the passive commandments with "Yes!" meaning "We will do whatever You say."¹⁶⁷

Their conflicting opinions may be resolved as follows: Every commandment is an expression of God's will. In this regard, all commandments are equal, since they are all equally the will of God. On the other hand, each commandment has its particular, unique effect on the person performing it and upon the world. The question of which aspect of the commandment should be paramount in the mind of the person performing it underlies the disagreement between the two sages. Rabbi Yishmael maintained that the emphasis must be on the particular aspects of each commandment ("yes" to positive commandments; "no" to passive ones), since the purpose of the commandments is to bring holiness to all the various and different facets of the individual's life. Rabbi Akiva, in contrast, maintained that the emphasis must be on the transcendent nature

of the commandments, i.e., how they express our surrender to the will of God ("yes" to everything).

On a deeper level, Rabbi Akiva focused on the positive result of resisting evil rather than on the inherent negativity of evil itself. Thus, he considered the proper response to passive commandments to be "yes—we will resist." In contrast, Rabbi Yishmael focused on the evil to be resisted in passive commandments, and thus considered the proper response to them to be "no—we will not succumb."¹⁶⁸

The Maggid of Mezeritch offered an alternative explanation:

Two verbs for speaking are used in this verse: "God then *spoke* all these words, *saying*." These two verbs allude to the ten decrees with which God created the world (which begin "And God *said*, let there be...") and the Ten Commandments (which are introduced with "God then *spoke*..."). Thus, this verse can be read as follows: "God *spoke* all these words"—God gave the Jewish people the following commandments—in order that they be implemented within and have an affect upon His "*saying*"—the physical world created through the ten decrees.

Although there was no one else to whom to transmit the Torah, further transmission is still required. It is not enough for us to study the Torah; we must ensure that it permeates every aspect of our lives, such that everything we do, say, or think is a direct result of our connection with the Torah. This is the point of the word "*saying*"—that the Torah not remain as it was when God told it to the Jewish people, but rather that it be implemented and actualized within the physical world.

We are not allowed to relegate God and His Torah to synagogues and *yeshivot*. Whatever we do and wherev-

164. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, pp. 124-128. 165. See also below, 24:10. 166. *Shemot Rabbah* 28:6; *Zohar* 1:91a. 167. *Mechilta*. 168. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6, pp. 124-125.

ONKELOS

3 לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני: 4 לא תעשה לך פסל וכל תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ: 5 לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם כי אני יהוה אלהיך אל קנא פקד עון אבות על בנים על רשעים ועל רשעים לשנאי: 6 ועשה חסד לאלפים לאהבי ולשמרי מצותי: 7 לא תשא את שם יהוה אלהיך לשוא כי לא ינקוה יהוה את אשר ישא את שמו לשוא: פ

3 לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני: 4 לא תעשה לך פסל וכל תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ: 5 לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם כי אני יהוה אלהיך אל קנא פקד עון אבות על בנים על רשעים ועל רשעים לשנאי: 6 ועשה חסד לאלפים לאהבי ולשמרי מצותי: 7 לא תשא את שם יהוה אלהיך לשוא כי לא ינקוה יהוה את אשר ישא את שמו לשוא: פ

RASHI

4 פסל. על שם שנקסל: וכל תמונה. תמונת כל דבר אשר בשמים: 5 אל קנא. מקנא להפרע, ואינו עובר על מדתו למחל על עון עבודה זרה. כל לשון "קנא" אינפרימיניט בלעז, נותן לב להפרע: לשנאי. בתרגומו, כשאוחזין מעשה אבותיהם בידיהם; ונוצר חסד שאדם עושה, לשלם שכר עד לאלפים דור. נמצאת מדה טובה יתרה על מדת פרעניות אחת על חמש מאות, שזו לארבעה דורות וזו לאלפים: 7 לשוא. חנם להקל ואיזהו שבועת שוא? נשבע לשנות את הדין — על עמוד של אכן שהוא של זקב:

3 לא יהיה לך. למה נאמר? לפי שנאמר: "לא תעשה לך", אין לי אלא שלא יעשה, העשוי כבר — מנין שלא יקום? תלמוד לומר: "לא יהיה לך": אלהים אחרים. שאינן אלהות אלא אחרים עשאוים אלהים עליהם. ולא יתכן לפרש: אלהים אחרים וולתי, שגנאי הוא כלפי מעלה לקרואם אלהות אצלם. דבר אחר: "אלהים אחרים" — שהם אחרים לעובדיהם, צועקים אליהם ואינן עונים אותם, ודומה כאלו הוא אחר שאינו מפירו מעולם: על פני. כל זמן שאני קים, שלא תאמר: לא נצטוו על עבודה זרה אלא אותו הדור:

44. חוריאף

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

pler one (*ani*).¹⁸³ One would not expect the first word of the Ten Commandments, the basis of the entire Jewish religion, to evoke memories the language of the enemy from whom the Jews had just escaped and whose culture is the antithesis of Judaism. But that is just the point of the revelation of God's essence revealed in the Torah — that even the extreme materiality of Egypt can be made holy.

Furthermore, it is specifically by elevating the materiality of this world and using it for holy purposes that we reveal our connection to God's essence. In refining ourselves (as opposed to the world at large), we only tap our connection to God's Names *Havayah* (through relating to God supra-rationally) and *Elokim* (through relating to God using our intellect).¹⁸⁴

I am God, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt: As opposed to the Name *Havayah*, the Name *Elokim* undergoes declension: it accepts suffixes that make it mean "our God," "your God," etc. This is because in order for God to "belong" to us, He must first constrict His self-revelation, and this process of

constriction (*tzimtzum*) is indicated by the Name *Elokim*. The Name *Havayah*, in contrast, refers to God's essence, which can never be constricted.¹⁸⁵ This verse thus means that the normally transcendent Name *Havayah* will now become the immanent, operative power within every Jew.

Under other circumstances, infusing transcendent Divinity into a created being's normative consciousness would cause it to cease to exist. The intensity of the revelation would simply overload its capacities and it would be instantly absorbed into the Divine energy flowing through it. The only reason this did not happen here is because the Jewish people accepted the Torah; studying the Torah and fulfilling its commandments enable us to withstand this transcendent Divine consciousness.¹⁸⁶

The fact that "God is our God," i.e., that His transcendent self becomes our "nature," enables us to overcome whatever obstacles the natural world poses to fulfilling our Divine tasks. In other words, because "God is our God," we can "go out of the land of Egypt."¹⁸⁷

183. *Tanchuma* (Buber), Yitro 16; *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana*, BeChodesh HaShelishi (109b in Buber edition). 184. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, pp. 887 ff. 185. *Or HaTorah*, Shemot, vol. 1, p. 213. 186. *Torah Or* 56d; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5627, p. 103. 187. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5706-5707, p. 213.

— ONKELOS —

8 הָיָה דְּכִיר יֵת יוֹמָא דְּשַׁבְּתָא
לְקַדְשׁוּתָהּ: 9 שְׁתָּא יוֹמִין תַּפְּלַח
וְתַעֲבִיד כְּלִי-עֲבִידָתָהּ: 10 וְיוֹמָא
שְׁבִיעָאָה שְׁבַתָּא קָדָם יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיהָ
לֹא תַעֲבִיד כְּלִי-עֲבִידָתָא אֶתְּ וּבִרְךְ
וּבִרְתָּךְ עֲבָדְךָ וְאִמְתָּךְ וּבְעִירְךָ
וּגְיִרְךָ דִּי בְּקִרְךָ:

8 זָכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְשׁוֹ: 9 שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד
וְעִשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלָאכָתְךָ: 10 יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלָאכָה אַתָּה | וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ
עֲבָדְךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וּבְהֶמְתְּךָ וּגְרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

— RASHI —

מְזַמֵּינוּ לְשַׁבָּת: 9 וְעִשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלָאכָתְךָ. כְּשֶׁתְּבֹא שַׁבָּת,
יְהִי בְּעִינְיֶיךָ כְּאִלּוּ מְלָאכָתְךָ עֲשׂוּיָה, שֶׁלֹּא תַהַרְהֵר
אַחֵר מְלָאכָה: 10 אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ. אִלּוּ קִטְנִים. אִם
אֵינוּ אֵלָּא גְדוּלִים? אֲמַרְתָּ, הֲרִי כָּר מְזַהְרִין הֵם. אֵלָּא,
לֹא בָּא אֵלָּא לְהַזְהִיר גְדוּלִים עַל שְׁבִיתַת הַקִּטְנִים. וְזֶהוּ
נִשְׁנִינֵנוּ: 53. קָטָן שֶׁבָּא לְכַבּוֹת — אֵין שׁוֹמְעִים לוֹ, מִפְּנֵי
שֶׁשְׁבִיתָתוֹ עָלֶיךָ:

8 זָכוֹר. "זָכוֹר" וְ"שָׁמֹר", בְּדִבּוּר אֶחָד נֶאֱמְרוּ. וְכֵן
"מִחֻלְלִיהָ מוֹת יוֹמָת"⁴⁵ — "וּבְיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת שְׁנִי-
כְּבָשִׁים"⁴⁶. וְכֵן "לֹא תִלְבַּשׁ שַׁעֲטָנָה" — "גְּדָלִים
תַּעֲשֶׂה-לָּךְ"⁴⁷. וְכֵן "עֲרוֹת אֲשֶׁת-אֲחִיךָ"⁴⁸ — "וְיִבְמָה יִבָּא
עָלֶיהָ"⁴⁹. הוּא שְׁנֵאָמְרוּ: "אַחַת דְּבָר אֱלֹהִים, שֶׁתִּימָסֵּז
שְׁמַעְתִּי"⁵⁰. "זָכוֹר" — לְשׁוֹן פְּעוּל הוּא, כְּמוֹ: "אֲכֹל
וְשָׁתוּ"⁵¹, "הָלוֹךְ וּבָכָה"⁵². וְכֵן פִּתְרוּנוֹ: תָּנוּ לָב לְזָכוֹר
תָּמִיד אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת, שֶׁאֵם נִדְמָן לָךְ חֶפֶץ יָפֶה, תִּהְיֶה

45. שְׁמוֹת לֹא, יד. 46. בַּמִּדְבָּר כח, ט. 47. דְּבָרִים כב, יאיב. 48. ויקרא יח, טו. 49. דְּבָרִים כה, ה. 50. תהלים סב, יב. 51. ישעיה כב, יג. 52. שְׁמוּאֵל ב, ג.
טו. 53. שַׁבַּת קָדָם, א.

⌘ A CLOSER LOOK ⌘

[continued...] When assembling the boards, it would be necessary to (34) **write** (כָּתַב) on the board in order to identify it so it could then be properly positioned with the rest of the boards. If a mistake was made in the labeling, it would be necessary to (35) **erase** (מָחַק) the marking in order to write the correct one. The boards would then be (36) **assembled** (בִּנְיָה) and (37) **disassembled** (סוּתַר). After everything was positioned, they would (38) **hammer** (מָכָה בַּפִּטִּישׁ) everything into final place.

Gathering all the materials used involved (39) **carrying** (הוֹצֵאָה) from one domain to another.¹⁹⁰

[10] **A Sabbath unto God:** Biblically, the Sabbath is a day on which we must desist from *performing* certain acts. The prophets and the sages, however, instituted that on the Sabbath we must also refrain from *speaking* of these acts. Citing this verse, the sages state:¹⁹¹ "Just as God's Sabbath was a respite from speech [since God created the world with speech], so should we refrain from mundane speech on the Sabbath." They then relate the story of an exceptionally pious man who, one Sabbath, saw a breach in his fence and decided to fix it after the Sabbath. When he later realized that he

had been thinking about work on the Sabbath, he vowed never to fix the breach. So, as a measure of piety, we should not even *think* of non-Sabbath acts on the Sabbath.

The reason why we are not biblically obligated to imitate God in speech and thought is because God's thought and speech create, while ours do not. Hence, from a biblical perspective, we are only prohibited from desecrating the Sabbath through our deeds, which *can* be compared to God's creation of the world.

Speech, which can affect the physical world indirectly (by influencing or directing how others act, for example), is *similar* to creation and is therefore forbidden rabbinically. Rabbinic enactments take us beyond the strict letter of the law, reflecting the deep, innate Jewish desire to cleave to God's ways.

Thought, in contrast to both action and speech, is an entirely self-oriented faculty. It bears no resemblance to the outwardly oriented act of creation, and is therefore permitted. A pious person, however, who seeks to merge his own identity with God, will cease from even mundane thought on the Sabbath, in imitation of his Creator.¹⁹²

190. *Shabbat* 7:2. 191. *Y. Shabbat* 15:3. 192. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, pp. 80 ff.

8 The fourth commandment: **“Remember and observe¹⁸⁸ the Sabbath day** continuously, **to keep it holy.** ‘Remember’ it by anticipating it during the preceding week; for example, if you come across some special food item, set it aside for the Sabbath. ‘Observe’ the Sabbath by refraining on it from all categories of prohibited work.

9 **Six days shall you labor and do all your work.** But even if you have not finished all your work during the six workdays,

10 **the seventh day is the Sabbath unto God, your God;** you should behave on the Sabbath as if all your work is done. **You shall not do any work—neither you nor your son or your daughter.** Even though your children are not technically obligated to observe the commandments until they attain majority, you must nevertheless not permit them to do any forms of forbidden work. **Your bondman and your bondwoman** are forbidden to work, since they are obligated to observe all the prohibitions that you are. You may also not make **your animal** work. **The resident alien,** who is allowed to live **within your gates,** is also forbidden to work, although not to the extent that you are.¹⁸⁹

🔗 A CLOSER LOOK 🔗

[9] **You shall not do any work:** This law prohibits doing 39 specific categories of work, those that would be performed in constructing the Tabernacle, the portable Temple that was to serve as the locus of the sacrificial rites and the site where God’s presence was openly manifest. The Torah will give the details of the construction of the Tabernacle later. The 39 categories of work involved in its construction are as follows:

In order to prepare the vegetable dyes used in dyeing the tapestries, the ground had to be (1) **plowed** (חורש), and the seed (2) **sown** (זורע). Then, after the plant ripened, it was (3) **harvested** (קוצר), each plant being left where it was cut in the field. Then, all the plants were (4) **gathered together into piles** and **bound into sheaves** (מעמר). Afterwards, the grain was (5) **threshed** (דש) in order to separate the kernels from the chaff, although they remained mixed together. The mixture was then (6) thrown into the wind (**winnowed**, זורה), the wind blowing away the chaff as the kernels fell to the ground. The stones and debris were then (7) **separated** (בורר) away from the kernels, which were then (8) **ground** (טוחן) into flour, which was then (9) **sifted** (מרוקד) and (10) **kneaded** (לש) into dough, which was subsequently (11) **baked** (which is a type of **cooking**,

מבשל). Cooking involved (12) **kindling** (מבעיר) and (13) **extinguishing** (מכבה) fires.

To obtain the wool for the coverings, they would first (14) **shear** (גוזז) it off the animals, then (15) **wash** (מלבן) it, (16) **comb** (מנפץ) it so it would be ready to be woven, (17) **dye** (צורב) it, and (18) **spin** (טווה) it into threads. The threads would then be (19 & 20) **prepared to be woven** (מיסך & עושה שני) (בחי נירין), and finally (21) **woven** (אורג) into fabric. During the weaving process, it was often necessary to (22) **unravel** (פוצע) threads. Once the fabric was woven it was (23) **sewn** (תופר) into the coverings. In the process of sewing, it was often necessary to (24) **rip** (קורע) pieces of fabric.

To make the nets used for trapping the shellfish from which the dye was extracted, they would have to (25) **tie** (קושר) and (26) **untie** (מתיר) knots.

To obtain the hides used for the coverings, they had to first (27) **trap** (צד) the animals (this type of work was done also in trapping the shellfish), (28) **slaughter** (שוחט) them, and (29) **skin** (מפשט) them. The hide was then (30) **cured** (מעבד) (which included **salting** (מולח) and (31) **smoothed** (ממחק). Before cutting it, they would (32) **mark** (משרטט) it and then (33) **cut** (מחתק) it into shape. [continues...]

188. Deuteronomy 5:12. 189. See below, 23:12.

— ONKELOS —

11 אָרִי שְׂתֵּא יוֹמִין עֶבֶד יִי יֵת
שְׂמִיָּא וְיֵת אֲרַעָא יֵת יִמָּא וְיֵת
כְּלִי־יֵד בְּהוֹן וְנַח בְּיוֹמָא שְׂבִיעָא
עַל כֵּן בְּרִיךְ יִי יֵת יוֹמָא דְּשַׁבְּתָא
וְקִדְשָׁהּ: 12 יִקְרֵי יֵת אֲבוּךָ וְיֵת אִמְךָ
בְּדִיל דִּיּוֹרְכוֹן יוֹמִיךָ עַל אֲרַעָא דִּי
יִי אֱלֹהֶךָ יִהְיֶה לָּךְ: 13 לֹא תִקְטֹל
נַפְשׁ, לֹא תִגּוֹף, לֹא תִגְנוֹב, לֹא
תִסְהִיד בְּחִבְרָךְ סְהִידוּתָא דְּשִׁקְרָא:
14 לֹא תִחַמֵּיד בֵּית חִבְרָךְ לֹא
תִחַמֵּיד אֶתֶּת חִבְרָךְ וְעַבְדָּהּ
וְאַמְתָּה וְתוֹרָה וְחֻמְרָה וְכָל־דִּי
לְחִבְרָךְ:

11 כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ
וְאֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל־כֵּן
בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ: ׀
12 כִּבְדֹּךָ אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוֹן יָמֶיךָ עַל
הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ: ׀
13 לֹא תִרְצַח ׀ לֹא תִנְאָף ׀ לֹא תִגְנוֹב ׀ לֹא־
תַעֲנֶנָּה בִרְעֶךָ עַד שִׁקְרָךְ: ׀
14 לֹא תִחַמֵּד בֵּית רֵעֶךָ ׀ לֹא־תִחַמֵּד אִשְׁתִּי רֵעֶךָ
וְעַבְדּוֹ וְאַמְתּוֹ וְשׁוֹרׇךְ וְחֻמְרוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ: פ

— RASHI —

וְהִנָּאֲפֹת⁵⁴. וְאוֹמֵר: "הָאִשָּׁה הַמִּנְאָפֶת, תַּחַת אִישָׁה
תִּקַּח אֶת־זָרִים"⁵⁵: לֹא תִגְנוֹב. בְּגוֹנוֹב נִפְשׁוֹת הַקְּתוּב
מִדְּבָר. "לֹא תִגְנוֹבוּ"⁵⁶ — בְּגוֹנוֹב מִמּוֹן. אוֹ אֵינוֹ אֶלָּא זֶה
בְּגוֹנוֹב מִמּוֹן וּלְהֵלֶן בְּגוֹנוֹב נִפְשׁוֹת? אֲמַרְתָּ, דְּבָר הַלֵּמֵד
מִעֲנִינוֹ — מֵה "לֹא תִרְצַח" "לֹא תִנְאָף" מִדְּבָר בְּדָבָר
שְׂחִיבִין עֲלֵיהֶם מֵיִתֶּת בֵּית דִּין, אִף "לֹא תִגְנוֹב" דְּבָר
שְׂחִיב עֲלָיו מֵיִתֶּת בֵּית דִּין:

11 וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי. כִּבְיָכוֹל הַכְּתִיב בְּעֶצְמוֹ מְנוּחָה,
לְלַמֵּד הֵימָנוּ קֵל וְחֹמֶר לְאָדָם שְׂמִלְאֲכָתוֹ בְּעָמַל
וּבִיגִיעָה, שִׁיְהֵא נָח בְּשַׁבָּת: בֵּרַךְ...וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ. בֵּרַכּוֹ בְּמֶן,
לְכַפְּלוֹ בְּשִׁשִּׁי לֶחֶם מְשֻׁנָּה. וְקִדְּשׁוֹ בְּמֶן, שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה יוֹרֵד
בוֹ: 12 לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכוֹן יָמֶיךָ. אִם תִּכְבֹּד — יֵאָרְכוֹן, וְאִם
לֹא — יִקְצְרוֹן. שְׂדֵבְרֵי תוֹרָה נוֹטְרִיקוֹן הֵם נִדְרָשִׁים
— מִכָּלֶּל הֵן לֹא, וּמִכָּלֶּל לֹא הֵן: 13 לֹא תִנְאָף. אֵין
נֶאֱוָף אֶלָּא בְּאִשְׁתִּי אִישׁ, שְׂנֵאָמֵר: "מֹות־יוֹמֶת הִנָּאֲפֹת

54. ויקרא כ, י. 55. יחזקאל טו, לב. 56. ויקרא יט, יא.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

ability to procreate an infinite chain of generations derives from God's infinity. From this perspective, by honoring our parents we are in fact honoring God, recognizing the Divine infinity they reflect.¹⁹⁷

13 Do not murder: The five commandments inscribed on the first of the two tablets deal with our relationship with God, whereas the five inscribed on the second tablet deal with our relationship with our fellow human beings. This juxtaposition teaches us two things: On the one hand, we must learn to treat God as we do human beings. We instinctively sense that we must repay the kindnesses shown us by other people, but we often neglect our responsibilities towards God; He is easy to forget. On the other hand, our relationship towards our fellows must be predicated upon our belief in God: we are responsible to behave properly toward them because God says so. If the source of our commitment to decency is anything other than God's mandate, there is no guarantee that our actions will not be swayed by self-love or worse. When God is removed from the picture, even the most "cultured"

society can commit mass murder. But when the first half of the Ten Commandments, the awareness that "I am God, your God," governs our lives, we are sure to overcome any obstacle that stands in the way of goodness and truth.¹⁹⁸

14 You shall not be envious: God 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 God in the world. Any resources God has *not* provided us with at any given moment are thus extraneous to our mission and sidetrack us from the development of our fullest potential. Genuine recognition of this truth precludes any envy.¹⁹⁹

14 That belongs to your fellowman: As mentioned above,²⁰⁰ all the commandments of the Torah are alluded to in the Ten Commandments. In addition to the 613 biblical commandments, the sages instituted seven additional commandments: washing the hands

197. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 36, pp. 90 ff. 198. *Reshimot* 147, p. 11. 199. *Hitva'aduyot* 5742, vol. 3, pp. 1661-1662. 200. Verse 1.

11 For in six days God made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that is within them, and He rested on the seventh day, even though He did not need to rest since He did not become tired, of course, by creating the world. Rather, He rested in order to set an example for you. **God therefore blessed the Sabbath day** by ordaining that, in the future, a double portion of manna would fall on Friday, allowing us to rest on the Sabbath—and this indeed happened, as you have seen—and **He sanctified it** by ordaining that, in the future, no manna would fall on the Sabbath, thereby *preventing* us from pursuing our material needs even if we wanted to. This too happened, as you have seen.”

12 The fifth commandment: “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be lengthened on the land that God, your God, is giving you. The opposite is also true: if you do not honor your parents, your days will be shortened.”

13 The sixth commandment: “You shall not murder.”

The seventh commandment: **“You shall not commit adultery**, i.e., conduct extra-marital relations with a married woman.”

The eighth commandment: **“You shall not steal people**, i.e., kidnap.”¹⁹³

The ninth commandment: **“You shall not bear false witness against your fellow-man.”**

14 The tenth commandment: “You shall not be envious¹⁹⁴ of your fellowman’s house. You shall not be envious of your fellowman’s wife, his bondman, his bondwoman, his ox, his donkey, or anything else that belongs to your fellowman.”

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

12 Honor your father and mother: The Ten Commandments begin with the sublime fundamentals of Jewish theology: belief in God and negation of idolatry. The third commandment enjoins us to respect God, and the fourth enjoins us to devote one day a week to spiritual rejuvenation. But the subsequent commandments are rather prosaic, even obvious. Any normal society bans murder, kidnapping, bearing false witness, and so on. Was all the fanfare and awesome display of Divine power really necessary in order to convince us not to murder each other?

The answer is: yes. By including these self-evident pillars of civilized life in the Ten Commandments, God is telling us that we must uphold all the Torah’s laws—even the apparently “rational” ones—*not* because they make sense to us but because they are Divine commandments. Of course, we must understand and appreciate how God’s commandments make sense, but we must not predicate our observance of them on our understanding. Rational thinking can sometimes

be led astray by convincing counterarguments or mitigating circumstances, but absolute devotion to God’s word ensures that our observance will remain uncompromised.¹⁹⁵

The first five of the Ten Commandments focus on our relationship with God, the second five on our relationship with our fellow human beings. Honoring parents, the fifth commandment, is placed in the first category, since honoring parents, who are partners with God in creating life, is synonymous with honoring God.¹⁹⁶

In truth, however, this commandment is part of both our relationship with God as well as our relationship with humanity. On the one hand, we honor parents because we recognize and appreciate the fact that they brought us into the world and took care of us as children. This gratitude defines the commandment’s focus as interpersonal. On the other hand, we honor our parents because we recognize that a finite creature’s

¹⁹³. The command not to steal money or property is given in Leviticus 19:11. ¹⁹⁴. See *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 17, p. 217, note 18.

¹⁹⁵. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, p. 889. ¹⁹⁶. Nachmanides on this verse.

ONKELOS

15 וְכָל־עַמָּא חָזָן יְת קָלִיא וְיִת
בְּעוּרֵיָא וְיִת קָל שׁוּפְרָא וְיִת טוּרָא
תַּנּוּ וְחִזָּא עַמָּא וְזַעוּ וְקִמּוּ מִרְחִיק;

שביעי 15 וְכָל־הָעָם רֹאִים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת־הַלְפִידִם

וְאֵת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת־הַהָר עֵשָׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיִּזְעוּ וַיַּעֲמָדוּ
מִרְחָק;

RASHI

הַיּוֹצֵאִין מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה: וַיִּזְעוּ. אֵין נֹעַ, אֶלָּא זֵיע: וַיַּעֲמָדוּ
מִרְחָק. הָיוּ נִרְתָּעִין לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר מִיל, כְּאַרְבֵּי
מַחְנֵיהֶם, וּמִלֶּאכֶי הַשֶּׁרֶת בָּאִין וּמִסִּיעִין אוֹתָן לְהַחֲזִירָם,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "מִלְכֵי צְבָאוֹת יִדְּוִן יִדְּוִן"⁵⁹:

15 וְכָל־הָעָם רֹאִים. מִלְמִיד שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה בָהֶם אֶחָד טוֹמֵא.
וּמִנֵּין שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה בָהֶם אֶלֶם? תִּלְמוּד לֹמֵר: "וַיִּזְעוּ כָל־
הָעָם"⁵⁷. וּמִנֵּין שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה בָהֶם חֶרֶשׁ? תִּלְמוּד לֹמֵר:
"נִעְשָׂה וְנִשְׁמַע"⁵⁸: רֹאִים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת. רוֹאִין אֶת
הַנִּשְׁמָע, שְׂאִי אֶפְשָׁר לִרְאוֹת בְּמָקוֹם אֲחֵר: אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת.

57. שמות יט, ח. 58. שמות כד, ז. 59. תהלים סח, יג.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

fundamental level of understanding the Torah, this is all that God requires of us. He wants us to consider our spiritual lives as givens: that our primary occupation be learning the Torah and upholding its commandments.

In contrast, both Rabbi Yishmael's and Rabbi Akiva's approaches apply to more advanced levels of spiritual maturity. Rabbi Akiva's view includes "hearing what is normally seen": relating to our physical needs (eating, drinking, etc.) as something we'd rather do without and only partake of to the minimal extent absolutely necessary to sustain ourselves. This is a level of religious maturity that the Torah does not demand of us at the outset. Rabbi Yishmael's view, that the ultimate is "to see what is normally seen and hear what is normally heard" — that is, to imbue the world even as we normally see it with Divinity — is a level of spiritual maturity even more advanced than Rabbi Akiva's.

This is also why Rashi adopts Rabbi Yishmael's position with regard to how the people responded to God's commands: that they answered "Yes! We will!" to the preceptive ones and "No! We will not!" to the prohibitory ones. At the basic level of Divine consciousness, where Godliness is a given but so is the reality of the world, we must indeed affirm that which is positive and reject that which is negative.

Later, we may mature and attain Rabbi Akiva's perspective: that the world is only a logical necessity and the only true reality is God, and that therefore rejecting a prohibited activity is itself positive, an act of submission to God's will. Later still, we may attain Rabbi Yishmael's perspective: that we should imbue not only the morally neutral aspects of the world (where "the world, which is normally seen, is seen") with Divinity, but also reveal Divinity in the realms of evil (where "Divinity, which is normally only heard about,

is indeed only heard about"). To be sure, neophytes must be careful not to undertake such challenges before they are ready to, but as we mature spiritually, we should not shy away from elevating the lower aspects of material life nor from imbuing them with transcendent Divinity.²⁰⁸

The experience of "seeing" something, i.e., knowing it fully and intimately, characterizes our study of the exoteric dimension of the Torah. The laws of the Torah and their derivations apply to the things of this world, things we know and are familiar with. In contrast, the experience of "hearing," i.e., being indirectly aware of something, characterizes our study of the esoteric dimension of the Torah. None of us has seen a spiritual world, an angel, or a *sefirah*; these are abstract concepts we can only imagine.

According to the view of Rabbi Akiva, this situation was reversed at the Giving of the Torah. The exoteric dimension of the Torah was hidden—the laws and dialectic of the Torah were only alluded to in the Ten Commandments, while the esoteric dimension of the Torah was revealed, inasmuch as the heavens were opened and the spiritual worlds became visible.²⁰⁹

And they shuddered: This spontaneous reaction to the Giving of the Torah reflects its effect on the world at large. In the sages' words: "When God gave the Torah, the birds did not chirp nor take wing, the oxen did not low, the *ofanim* did not fly, the *seraphim*²¹⁰ did not say 'Holy! Holy!'"²¹¹ the sea did not tremble, and creatures did not converse with each other. Rather, the world was silently waiting. Thereupon [God's] voice proclaimed, 'I am God, your God...'"²¹²

Self-nullification, the spontaneous loss or deliberate abnegation of self-awareness and ego in the face of a greater, overwhelming reality, can come about in two

208. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6, pp. 121-129. 209. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, pp. 149-150. 210. *Ofanim* and *seraphim*: types of angels. 211. Isaiah 6:3. 212. *Shemot Rabbah* 29:9.

The Giving of the Torah, continued

- ◆ **Seventh Reading 15** When God began to speak, **all the people witnessed God's voices and the flames, the blast of the ram's horn, and the mountain smoking.** They miraculously *saw* God's voices and the blast of the ram's horn even though these were *sounds*. When **the people saw** God's voices **they shuddered**, retreated from the mountain twelve *mil* (= 24,000 cubits, approximately 11.5 kilometers or 7.2 miles), beyond the outer limit of their camp,²⁰¹ **and stood at a distance.** The ministering angels descended, calmed them, and transported them back to the mountain. The same thing happened after they heard each subsequent commandment.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

before eating bread, delineating boundaries around certain areas before carrying within them on the Sabbath (*eiruv*), lighting Shabbat candles, celebrating the holidays of Purim and Chanukah, and reciting Psalms 113-118 (collectively known as *Hallel*) on certain holidays.

The total number of commandments, biblical and rabbinic, is thus 620. Remarkably, the Ten Commandments contain 620 letters, alluding to these 620 commandments.²⁰² Accordingly, the seven rabbinic commandments are alluded to in the final seven letters of the Ten Commandments, which form the words for "that belongs to your fellowman."

This, in turn, alludes to the fact that the seven rabbinic commandments were added by the Jewish people, God's "fellow" or "friend."²⁰³ On the other hand, God is also called "a friend" in Scripture,²⁰⁴ implying that the seven rabbinic commandments "belong to" and are authored by God. Indeed, these commandments "belong to" both God and man: They were authored by God, but revealed and articulated by the Jewish people.²⁰⁵

15 All the people witnessed God's voices and the flames: According to Rabbi Yishmael, the people *saw* what is normally *seen* (the flames) and *heard* what is normally *heard* (the thunder). According to Rabbi Akiva, they *saw* what is normally *heard* (God's voices) and *heard* what is normally *seen* (the flames).²⁰⁶

The difference between sight and hearing is this: once we have seen something, we are sure of its reality—after all, we *saw* it. 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. Thus, for all practical purposes, our reality—that which we know to be real—is what we see.

God's presence in this world is normally something we hear about or understand, but it is not a part of our

empirical reality. At Mount Sinai, however, God's presence became obvious. The Jews saw it and perceived it as they normally perceived the physical world. When this happens, the *world* becomes the thing we merely "hear about." The Jews at Mount Sinai understood that a physical reality must exist, but it was not their reality; they didn't *see* it. This perception is the real truth, the consciousness that will prevail in the messianic future. This is the view of Rabbi Akiva.

According to Rabbi Yishmael, the people *saw* what is usually *seen* and *heard* what is usually *heard*. For Rabbi Yishmael, the purpose of creation is to bring holiness into *our* reality. Hence the experience at Sinai, in his view, was an intense revelation of God's presence that affected the people even within *their* perspective.

This difference of opinion between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael reflects the same philosophical difference underlying their debate over how the Jews responded to each commandment.²⁰⁷ Since Rabbi Yishmael considered the essence of the Torah and its commandments to be their ability to imbue the material world with Divinity, he saw the commandments in terms of how each one accomplishes this in its own way. In contrast, since Rabbi Akiva considered the essence of the Torah and its commandments to be their ability to raise us above our own perspective and allow us to see things from God's perspective, he saw the commandments as the collective means by which we lose our own selfhood and perspective in submission to God's will.

Rashi, in his explanation of the basic, contextual meaning of the Torah, states that the people saw what is normally heard, but not that they heard what is normally seen. In other words, they rose to the level of awareness where Godliness is a given, but they continued to accept the reality of the world as a given, too. They did not concomitantly sense the world as nothing more than a logical necessity, because, at the

201. See Numbers 33:49. 202. See *Torah Shleimah*, vol. 16, appendix. 203. Cf. *Zohar* 2:55b. 204. Rashi on Proverbs 27:10. 205. *Sefer HaSichot* 5749, vol. 1, p. 130. 206. *Mechilta*. 207. See above, on 20:1.

— ONKELOS —

16 ואמרו למשה מליל את עמנא ונקבל ולא יתמליל עמנא מן קדם יי דלמא נמות: 17 ואמר משה לעמא לא תדחלון ארי בדיל לנסאָה יתכון אתגלי לכון יקרא דיין ובדיל דתהי דחלתה על אפיון בדיל דלא תחובון: 18 וקם עמא מרחיק ומשה קריב לצית אמיטתא די תמן יקרא דיין: 19 ואמר יי למשה כדון תימר לבני ישראל אתון חזיתון ארי מן שמאי מלילית עמכון: 20 לא תעבדון קדמי דחלון דכסא ודחלון דדהב לא תעבדון לכון:

16 ויאמרו אל־משה דבר־אתה עמנו ונשמעה ואל־ידבר עמנו אלהים פון־נמות: 17 ויאמר משה אל־העם אל־תיראו כי לבעבור נסות אתכם בא האלהים ובעבור תהיה יראתו על־פניכם לבלתי תחטאו: 18 ויעמד העם מרחק ומשה נגש אל־הערפל אשר־שם האלהים: ס

◆ מפטיר 19 ויאמר יהוה אל־משה כה תאמר אל־בני ישראל אתם ראיתם כי מן־השמים דברתי עמכם: 20 לא תעשון אתי אלהי כסף ואלהי זהב לא תעשו לכם:

— RASHI —

ביניהם: "מן־השמים השמיעך את־קלו לִי־סֶרֶךְ, ועל־הארץ הראך את־אשו הגדולה" — כבודו בשמים ואשו וגבורתו על הארץ. דבר אחר: הרפין שמים ושמי השמים, והציען על החר, וכן הוא אומר: "ויט שמים וירד" 67: 20 לא תעשון אתי. לא תעשון דמות שמשי המושמים לפני במוס: אלהי כסף. בא להזהיר על הכרובים שאתה עושה לעמוד אתי, שלא יהיו של כסף, שאם שניתם לעשותם של כסף — הרי הן לפני באלהות: ואלהי זהב. בא להזהיר שלא יוסיף על שנים, שאם עשית ארבעה — הרי הן לפני באלהי זהב: לא תעשו לכם. לא תאמר: הריני עושה כרובים בכתי כנסיות ובכתי מדרשות, כדרך שאני עושה בבית עולמים. לכה נאמר: "לא תעשו לכם".

17 לבעבור נסות אתכם. לגדל אתכם בעולם, שיצא לכם שם באמות, שהוא בכבודו נגלה עליכם: נסות. לשון הרמה וגדלה, כמו: "הרימו נס" 68, "ארים נס" 69, "וכנס על־הגבעה" 70, שהוא זקוף: ובעבור תהיה יראתו. על ידי שראיתם אותו יראוי ומאיים, תדעו כי אין זולתו, ותיראו מפניו: 18 נגש אל־הערפל. לפנים משלש מחיצות: חשך ענן וערפל, שנאמר: "וזהר בער באש עד־לב השמים, חשך ענן וערפל" 71. "ערפל" — הוא עב הענן, שנאמר לו: "הנה אנכי בא אליך כעב הענן" 72: 19 כה תאמר. בלשון הזה: אתם ראיתם. יש הפרש בין מה שאדם רואה למה שאחרים משיחין לו, שמה שאחרים משיחין לו — פעמים שלבו חלוק מלהאמין: כי מן־השמים דברתי. וכתוב אחד אומר: "וירד ה' על־הר סיני" 73. בא הכתוב השלישי והקריע

60. ישעיה סב, י. 61. ישעיה מט, כב. 62. ישעיה ל, יז. 63. דברים ד, יא. 64. שמות יט, ט. 65. שם, כ. 66. דברים ד, לו. 67. תהלים יח, י.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

was the type of selflessness that the revelation at Sinai produced: the world became silent and the people spontaneously shuddered and stood at a distance.

This dynamic is relevant today, as well, in the different types of selflessness we experience when we perform God's commandments and study the Torah. When we perform God's commandments, we retain a certain degree of self-awareness: we are performing the commandment. When we learn Torah, however, we lose ourselves in Divine consciousness and feel God's words speaking through us.²²³

18 God agreed with the people: God agreed because only if the people would receive the Torah on

their normal level, not artificially and temporarily bolstered to a higher plane of consciousness, would the Torah they learn fully permeate their minds and hearts. Were they to continue to hear God's word at the intensity of Moses' level of awareness, they would indeed be more fully awed with its transcendence, but they would be unable to relate to it as something relevant and applicable to their daily lives.²²⁴

20-21 You shall not make with Me idols... You shall make an Altar for Me upon the earth: The first commandment following the giving of the Torah is a passive one ("you shall not make with Me idols of silver or idols of gold"), implying that the first step toward

223. Likutei Sichot, vol. 36, pp. 96-101. 224. Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, p. 205.

16 After the people heard all ten commandments, the leaders and elders of the people **said to Moses**,²¹³ “True, we have seen that it is possible—with outside help—for us to hear God’s words directly and survive. But we want to receive the Torah in the framework of our own, natural existence.²¹⁴ Therefore, from now on, **you speak to us, and we shall hear** God’s words from you, **but let God not speak with us** directly, lest we die.”

17 **Moses said to the people**, “Be not afraid, for **God has come in order to raise you up** in the esteem of all other nations, and He has appeared before you in this awesome way **in order that you be imbued with the awe of Him** and the awareness that there is no god beside Him, **so that you will not sin.**”²¹⁵

18 Yet, God agreed with the people, so when it came time for the next communication from God, **the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near** through all three degrees of cloud:²¹⁶ the darkness, the cloud, and **the thick cloud where God was present.**

After the Giving of the Torah

- ◆ **Maftir 19** After God gave the Ten Commandments, Moses ascended Mount Sinai for a period of 40 days, as will be described later.²¹⁷ While he was on the mountain,²¹⁸ **God said to Moses**, “**This is what you shall tell the Israelites: ‘You have seen that I spoke with you from heaven:** although you heard My voice issuing from within the fire atop the mountain, you also sensed that it originated in heaven. Since you have seen this yourself, no one will ever be able to convince you otherwise. Furthermore, although I caused all the heavens—including the highest—to *descend* atop Mount Sinai,²¹⁹ this did not render the spiritual realms any less transcendent.²²⁰ Therefore, do not attempt to depict the sublime spiritual revelations you have experienced in material form:

20 You shall not make a physical representation of any of the angels that you saw **with Me** in heaven. Nor may you make any replicas of the two gold cherubs that I will instruct you to make and place in the Tabernacle that I will instruct you to construct for Me.²²¹ You must make these cherubs out of gold; if you make them out of silver, I will consider them **idols of silver**. And even of gold, do not make more than two, for if you do, I will consider the additional ones **idols of gold**. **You shall not make for yourselves** cherub-figurines for your houses of prayer or study, erroneously considering them some kind of ‘medium’ or ‘channel’ for My presence.²²² They are only for use in the Tabernacle, and they will serve as a conduit for My presence only when I wish them to do so.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

ways. The inferior way is self-induced: we consciously nullify ourselves in deference to the superiority of another entity. This is certainly praiseworthy, for we are being honest enough to acknowledge that there is something greater than ourselves. Nonetheless, we are still in control; we *choose* to relinquish our ego.

The superior form of self-nullification occurs when we are in the presence of something so obviously awesome that we are instinctively and spontaneously humbled. In such a case, we do not need to consciously nullify ourselves; we are nullified automatically and lose even the awareness of our selflessness. This

213. Deuteronomy 5:20-28, 18:16. 214. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 204-205. 215. Cf. Deuteronomy 4:10. 216. Above, 19:16. 217. Below, 24:12-18. 218. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, p. 144-145. 219. Above, 19:20. 220. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 225-229. 221. Below, 25:17-22. 222. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, p. 144.

ONKELOS

21 מִזִּבְחַ אֲדָמָה תַעֲשֶׂה לִּי וְזִבְחָתָ עָלָיו אֶת־עֲלֹתֶיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלֵמֶיךָ אֶת־צֹאנְךָ וְאֶת־בְּקָרְךָ בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֶזְכִּיר אֶת־שְׁמִי אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ וּבְרַכְתִּיךָ: 22 וְאִם־מִזִּבְחַ אֲבָנִים תַעֲשֶׂה לִּי לֹא־תִבְנֶנָּה אֶתְּהֶן גִּזִּיתָ כִּי חֲרַבְךָ הִנֵּפֶת עָלֶיךָ וְתַחֲלִלָּה: 23 וְלֹא־תַעֲלֶה בְּמַעֲלֹת עַל־מִזְבְּחִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגָּלָה עֲרוֹתְךָ עָלָיו: תַּתְּגִּיל עֲרֹתְךָ עֲלֹהֶי:

על־מִזְבְּחִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגָּלָה עֲרוֹתְךָ עָלָיו:

ע"ב פסוקים, יונד"ב סימן.

RASHI

21 מִזִּבְחַ אֲדָמָה. מִחֲבַר בְּאֲדָמָה, שְׁלֹא יִבְנֶנּוּ עַל גְּבִי עֲמוּדִים אוֹ עַל גְּבִי כְּפִין. דָּבָר אַחֵר: שֶׁהִיָּה מִמֶּלֶא אֶת הַלֵּל מִזִּבְחַ הַנִּחֲשֶׁת אֲדָמָה, בְּשַׁעַת הַנִּיחָתָ: תַעֲשֶׂה לִּי. שֶׁתִּהְיֶה תַחֲלֹת עֲשִׂיתוֹ לְשָׁמִי: וְזִבְחָתָ עָלָיו. אֲצִלּוֹ, כְּמוֹ: "וְעָלָיו מִטָּה מְנֻשָּׁה"⁶⁸. אוֹ אֵינוֹ אֶלָּא עָלָיו מִמֶּשֶׁךְ תִּלְמוּד לומר: "הַבֶּשֶׂר וְהָדָם עַל־מִזְבְּחַ ד' אֱלֹהֶיךָ"⁶⁹, וְאֵין שְׁחִיטָה בְּרֹאשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: אֶת־עֲלֹתֶיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלֵמֶיךָ. אֲשֶׁר מִצֹּאנְךָ וּמִבְּקָרְךָ: אֶת־צֹאנְךָ וְאֶת־בְּקָרְךָ. פְּרוֹשׁ ל"אֶת־עֲלֹתֶיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלֵמֶיךָ": בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֶזְכִּיר אֶת־שְׁמִי. אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּן לָךְ רִשּׁוֹת לְהִזְכִּיר שֵׁם הַמִּפְרָשׁ שְׁלִי, שֵׁם "אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ וּבְרַכְתִּיךָ" — אֲשֶׁרָה שְׁכִינָתִי עָלֶיךָ. מִכָּאן אֵתָּה לֵמַד, שְׁלֹא נָתַן רִשּׁוֹת לְהִזְכִּיר שֵׁם הַמִּפְרָשׁ, אֶלָּא בְּמָקוֹם שֶׁהַשְׁכִּינָה בָּאָה שָׁם, וְזֶהוּ בֵּית הַבְּחִירָה, שֵׁם נָתַן רִשּׁוֹת לְכַהֲנִים לְהִזְכִּיר שֵׁם הַמִּפְרָשׁ בְּנִשְׁאֵת כְּפִים לְבָרֵךְ אֶת הָעָם: 22 וְאִם־מִזִּבְחַ אֲבָנִים. רַבִּי יִשְׁמַעֵאל אומר: כָּל "אִם" וְ"אִם" שֶׁבַתּוֹרָה — רִשּׁוֹת, חוּץ מִשְׁלֵשָׁה: "וְאִם־מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים תַעֲשֶׂה לִּי"⁷⁰ — הֵרִי "אִם" זֶה מְשִׁמֵּשׁ בְּלִשׁוֹן "כֹּאֲשֶׁר" — וְכֹאֲשֶׁר תַעֲשֶׂה לִּי מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים, לֹא־תִבְנֶנָּה אֶתְּהֶן גִּזִּיתָ, שֶׁהִרִי חוּבָה עָלֶיךָ לְבָנוֹת מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אֲבָנִים שְׁלֵמוֹת תִּבְנֶנָּה"⁷¹. וְכֵן "אִם־כֶּסֶף תִּלְוֶה"⁷² — חוּבָה הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְהִעֲבִיט תַעֲבִיטֶנּוּ"⁷³, וְאֵף זֶה מְשִׁמֵּשׁ בְּלִשׁוֹן "כֹּאֲשֶׁר". וְכֵן "וְאִם־תִּקְרִיב מִנְחָת כֹּהֲנִים"⁷⁴ — זֶה מִנְחַת הָעֹמֶר שֶׁהִיא חוּבָה. וְעַל כִּרְחֹק אֵין "אִם" הִלְלוּ תְלוּיִין אֶלָּא וְדֹאֵין, וּבְלִשׁוֹן

21 מִזִּבְחַ אֲדָמָה. מִחֲבַר בְּאֲדָמָה, שְׁלֹא יִבְנֶנּוּ עַל גְּבִי עֲמוּדִים אוֹ עַל גְּבִי כְּפִין. דָּבָר אַחֵר: שֶׁהִיָּה מִמֶּלֶא אֶת הַלֵּל מִזִּבְחַ הַנִּחֲשֶׁת אֲדָמָה, בְּשַׁעַת הַנִּיחָתָ: תַעֲשֶׂה לִּי. שֶׁתִּהְיֶה תַחֲלֹת עֲשִׂיתוֹ לְשָׁמִי: וְזִבְחָתָ עָלָיו. אֲצִלּוֹ, כְּמוֹ: "וְעָלָיו מִטָּה מְנֻשָּׁה"⁶⁸. אוֹ אֵינוֹ אֶלָּא עָלָיו מִמֶּשֶׁךְ תִּלְמוּד לומר: "הַבֶּשֶׂר וְהָדָם עַל־מִזְבְּחַ ד' אֱלֹהֶיךָ"⁶⁹, וְאֵין שְׁחִיטָה בְּרֹאשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: אֶת־עֲלֹתֶיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלֵמֶיךָ. אֲשֶׁר מִצֹּאנְךָ וּמִבְּקָרְךָ: אֶת־צֹאנְךָ וְאֶת־בְּקָרְךָ. פְּרוֹשׁ ל"אֶת־עֲלֹתֶיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלֵמֶיךָ": בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֶזְכִּיר אֶת־שְׁמִי. אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּן לָךְ רִשּׁוֹת לְהִזְכִּיר שֵׁם הַמִּפְרָשׁ שְׁלִי, שֵׁם "אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ וּבְרַכְתִּיךָ" — אֲשֶׁרָה שְׁכִינָתִי עָלֶיךָ. מִכָּאן אֵתָּה לֵמַד, שֶׁלֹּא נָתַן רִשּׁוֹת לְהִזְכִּיר שֵׁם הַמִּפְרָשׁ, אֶלָּא בְּמָקוֹם שֶׁהַשְׁכִּינָה בָּאָה שָׁם, וְזֶהוּ בֵּית הַבְּחִירָה, שֵׁם נָתַן רִשּׁוֹת לְכַהֲנִים לְהִזְכִּיר שֵׁם הַמִּפְרָשׁ בְּנִשְׁאֵת כְּפִים לְבָרֵךְ אֶת הָעָם: 22 וְאִם־מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים. רַבִּי יִשְׁמַעֵאל אומר: כָּל "אִם" וְ"אִם" שֶׁבַתּוֹרָה — רִשּׁוֹת, חוּץ מִשְׁלֵשָׁה: "וְאִם־מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים תַעֲשֶׂה לִּי"⁷⁰ — הֵרִי "אִם" זֶה מְשִׁמֵּשׁ בְּלִשׁוֹן "כֹּאֲשֶׁר" — וְכֹאֲשֶׁר תַעֲשֶׂה לִּי מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים, לֹא־תִבְנֶנָּה אֶתְּהֶן גִּזִּיתָ, שֶׁהִרִי חוּבָה עָלֶיךָ לְבָנוֹת מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אֲבָנִים שְׁלֵמוֹת תִּבְנֶנָּה"⁷¹. וְכֵן "אִם־כֶּסֶף תִּלְוֶה"⁷² — חוּבָה הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְהִעֲבִיט תַעֲבִיטֶנּוּ"⁷³, וְאֵף זֶה מְשִׁמֵּשׁ בְּלִשׁוֹן "כֹּאֲשֶׁר". וְכֵן "וְאִם־תִּקְרִיב מִנְחָת כֹּהֲנִים"⁷⁴ — זֶה מִנְחַת הָעֹמֶר שֶׁהִיא חוּבָה. וְעַל כִּרְחֹק אֵין "אִם" הִלְלוּ תְלוּיִין אֶלָּא וְדֹאֵין, וּבְלִשׁוֹן

68. במדבר ב, כ. 69. דברים יב, כז. 70. שמות כ, כא. 71. דברים כז, ו.

72. שמות כב, כד. 73. דברים טו, ח. 74. ויקרא ב, יד. 75. דברים כז, ח. 76. מקדמות. 77. שמות כח, מב.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

23 All the more should you show respect to your fellow human being: This exercise in showing respect for stones emphasizes the extent to which we must protect the honor of our fellow: even when the other person is not aware that he is being disrespected; even when the offender does not mean to offend; and even when the offense is not a full-fledged one.

Thus, the last verse of the *parashat Yitro* sums up the message of Mount Sinai: God is to be found in the simple things, in how we treat our fellow. Issues between man and man are indeed issues between man and God: a slight to one's fellow is a slight to his Creator. And in a positive sense, loving one's fellow is in truth loving his Creator.²³³

21 You shall make an altar for Me and place it directly **upon the earth**—not upon columns or on a base. This altar is to be a copper-coated wooden box that you will fill **with earth** whenever you set it up.²²⁵ When you make it, you must have in mind that you are making it for My sake. **Near it you shall sacrifice your ascent-offerings and your peace-offerings from your flocks and your cattle. Whenever I allow My Name to be mentioned**—i.e., in the Tabernacle (and later, in the Temple), when the priests bless you at the end of the daily morning sacrificial service²²⁶—**I will come to you and bless you** by resting My presence on you.

22 I will later on²²⁷ command you to erect an altar when you first enter the Land of Israel, for the purpose of rearticulating My covenant with you. I will instruct you to build *this* altar out of stones, rather than as a copper-coated wooden box filled with earth. **When you make Me this altar of stones, you shall not build it with hewn stones, for if you lift your sword over a stone intended for the altar to cut it, you will profane it.** The altar prolongs life, whereas the sword shortens life; and the altar reconciles Me with My people, whereas the sword cuts and destroys. It is therefore not fitting that the sword should be lifted above the altar stones. And if, as you see, I do not allow a sword to be lifted against lifeless stones simply because they promote peace, you can be assured that I will protect any human being who promotes peace from all harm.

23 You shall not ascend My altar on steps, so that your nakedness not be exposed over it. Rather, build and use a ramp for this purpose. True, the priests will be wearing trousers under their tunics,²²⁸ so their reproductive organs would not be exposed to the altar even on a staircase, but taking large steps gives the *impression* of exposing these organs, and is therefore less modest than ascending a ramp. If, as you see, I am concerned for the respect due to inanimate stones just because they serve some purpose, all the more should you show respect to your fellow human being, who is created in My image and is sensitive about being shown proper respect.' "

God also told Moses that He approved of the people's fear of Him²²⁹ and their wish that He communicate with them further only through Moses. God therefore told Moses to tell the people that married couples may now resume conducting marital relations,²³⁰ but that he should remain separated from his wife in order to always be ready to receive Divine communication.²³¹

The *Haftarah* for *parashat Yitro* may be found on p. 315.



CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

internalizing the Torah is not active involvement, but passivity. Nothingness must precede new existence; the seed's protective coating must disintegrate in the ground before it can germinate. The more we wipe away the previous state of being, the previous way of thinking, the greater the new one can be.

The next commandment is an active one ("you *shall* make Me an Altar upon the earth"), yet it, too, contains the message of self-nullification. Earth, the ground

upon which we all tread, symbolizes selflessness.

As we saw above, the Torah's effect on us is one of absolute self-abnegation. When we study it, we become totally absorbed in God's mind, so to speak. This being the case, whatever spiritual accomplishments we go on to achieve—the "Altar" we build—do not heighten our sense of self; they are an "Altar of earth." We identify totally with God and ascribe all our deeds to Him, working through us.²³²

225. Below, 27:1-8. 226. Numbers 6:22-27. 227. Deuteronomy 27:1-8. 228. Below, 28:42. 229. Above, v. 16. Deuteronomy 5:25-26, 18:17. 230. See above, 19:11. 231. Deuteronomy 5:27-28; Rashi on Numbers 12:8. 232. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 36, pp. 96-101; *Likutei*

