

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The Ten Commandments are the most famous religious-and-moral code in history. Until recently they adorned American courtrooms. They still adorn most synagogue arks. Rembrandt gave them their classic artistic expression in his portrait of Moses, about to break the tablets on seeing the golden calf. John Rogers Herbert's massive painting of Moses bringing down the tablets of law dominates the main committee room of the House of Lords. The twin tablets with their ten commands are the enduring symbol of eternal law under the sovereignty of G-d.

It is worth remembering, of course, that the "ten commandments" are not Ten Commandments. The torah calls them aseret hadevarim (Ex. 34:28), and tradition terms them aseret hadibrot, meaning the "ten words" or "ten utterances". We can understand this better in the light of documentary discoveries in the twentieth century, especially Hittite covenants or "suzerainty treaties" dating back to 1400-1200 BCE, that is, around the time of Moses and the exodus. These treaties often contained a twofold statement of the laws laid down in the treaty, first in general outline, then in specific detail. That is precisely the relationship between the "ten utterances" and the detailed commands of parshat Mishpatim (Ex. 22-23). The former are the general outline, the basic principles of the law.

Usually they are portrayed, graphically and substantively, as two sets of five, the first dealing with relationships between us and G-d (including honouring our parents since they like G-d brought us into being), the second with the relations between us and our fellow humans.

However, it also makes sense to see them as three groups of three. The first three (one G-d, no other G-d, do not take G-d's name in vain) are about G-d, the Author and Authority of the laws. The second set (keep Shabbat, honour parents, do not murder) are about

createdness. Shabbat reminds us of the birth of the universe. Our parents brought us into being. Murder is forbidden because we are all created in G-d's image (Gen. 9:6). The third three (don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness) are about the basic institutions of society: the sanctity of marriage, the integrity of private property, and the administration of justice. Lose any of these and freedom begins to crumble.

This structure serves to emphasise what a strange command the tenth is: "Do not be envious of your neighbour's house. Do not be envious of your neighbour's wife, his slave, his maid, his ox, his donkey, or anything else that is your neighbour's." At least on the surface this is different from all the other rules, which involve speech or action.¹ Envy, covetousness, desiring what someone else has, is an emotion, not a thought, a word or a deed. And surely we can't help our emotions. They used to be called the "passions", precisely because we are passive in relation to them. So how can envy be forbidden at all? Surely it only makes sense to command or forbid matters that are within our control. In any case, why should the occasional spasm of envy matter if it does not lead to anything harmful to other people?

Here, it seems to me, the Torah is conveying a series of fundamental truths we forget at our peril. First, as we have been reminded by cognitive behavioural therapy, what we believe affects what we feel.² Narcissists, for instance, are quick to take offence because they think other people are talking about or "dissing" (disrespecting) them, whereas often other people aren't interested in us at all. Their belief is false, but that does not stop them feeling angry and resentful.

Second, envy is one of the prime drivers of violence in society. It is what led Iago to mislead Othello with tragic consequences. Closer to home it is

¹ To be sure, Maimonides held that the first command is to believe in G-d. Nachmanides, however, disagreed and maintained that the verse, "I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt" is not a command but a prelude to the commands.

² This has long been part of Jewish thought. It is at the heart of Chabad philosophy as set out in R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi's masterpiece, Tanya. Likewise Ibn Ezra in his commentary to this verse says that we only covet what we feel to be within our reach. We do not envy those we know we could never become.



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what led Cain to murder Abel. It is what led Abraham and then Isaac to fear for their lives when famine forced them temporarily to leave home. They believe that, married as they are to attractive women, the local ruler will kill them so that they can take their wives into their harem.

Most poignantly, envy lay at the heart of the hatred of the brothers for Joseph. They resented his special treatment at the hands of their father, the richly embroidered cloak he wore, and his dreams of becoming the ruler of them all. That is what led them to contemplate killing him and eventually to sell him as a slave.

Rene Girard, in his classic *Violence and the Sacred*, says that the most basic cause of violence is mimetic desire, that is, the desire to have what someone else has, which is ultimately the desire to be what someone else is. Envy can lead to breaking many of the other commands: it can move people to adultery, theft, false testimony and even murder.³

Jews have especial reason to fear envy. It surely played a part in the existence of anti-semitism throughout the centuries. Non-Jews envied Jews their ability to prosper in adversity – the strange phenomenon we noted in parshat Shemot that “the more they afflicted them the more they grew and the more they spread.” They also and especially envied them their sense of chosenness (despite the fact that virtually every other nation in history has seen itself as chosen⁴). It is absolutely essential that we, as Jews, should conduct ourselves with an extra measure of humility and modesty.

So the prohibition of envy is not odd at all. It is the most basic force undermining the social harmony and order that are the aim of the Ten Commandments as a whole. Not only though do they forbid it; they also help us rise above it. It is precisely the first three commands, reminding us of G-d’s presence in history

³ The classic work is Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: a Theory of Social Behaviour*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969. See also Joseph Epstein, *Envy*, New York: New York Public Library, 2003.

⁴ See on this Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

and our lives, and the second three, reminding us of our createdness, that help us rise above envy.

We are here because G-d wanted us to be. We have what G-d wanted us to have. Why then should we seek what others have? If what matters most in our lives is how we appear in the eyes of G-d, why should we want anything else merely because someone else has it? It is when we stop defining ourselves in relation to G-d and start defining ourselves in relation to other people that competition, strife, covetousness and envy enter our minds, and they lead only to unhappiness.

If your new car makes me envious, I may be motivated to buy a more expensive model that I never needed in the first place, which will give me satisfaction for a few days until I discover another neighbour who has an even more costly vehicle, and so it goes. Should I succeed in satisfying my own envy, I will do so only at the cost of provoking yours, in a cycle of conspicuous consumption that has no natural end. Hence the bumper sticker: “He who has the most toys when he dies, wins.” The operative word here is “toys”, for this is the ethic of the kindergarten, and it should have no place in a mature life.

The antidote to envy is gratitude. “Who is rich?” asked Ben Zoma, and replied, “One who rejoices in what he has.” There is a beautiful Jewish practice that, done daily, is life-transforming. The first words we say on waking are *Modeh ani lefanekha*, “I thank you, living and eternal King.” We thank before we think.

Judaism is gratitude with attitude. Cured of letting other people’s happiness diminish our own, we release a wave of positive energy allowing us to celebrate what we have instead of thinking about what other people have, and to be what we are instead of wanting to be what we are not. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall you work and do all acts of physical creativity; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord your G-d, on which you shall not do any act of physical creativity’ (Ex. 20:8-10) Undoubtedly the greatest gift of the Jews to the world is our Bible, the 24 books from Genesis to Chronicles, the quintessential centerpiece of which is the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments.

If enlightened Western culture emerged from the twin influences of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian literatures, the “mother of human and humane morality” is the “Ten Utterances” (*Aseret Hadibrot* in Hebrew) expressed by an invisible and ineffable G-d from atop a desert mountain before a newly freed slave people, who adopted these ethical norms as the Declaration of Independence of their newly forming nation.

Indeed, in the past 3,500 years, no philosopher or theologian has come up with a more inclusive or trenchant moral code which says it better than the Divine Words uttered at Sinai: "Honor your father and your mother..." (basic gratitude to those who gave you life and nurture).

"You shall not murder."

"You shall not commit adultery."

"You shall not steal."

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

"You shall not covet" (that which belongs to another).

Here, in very few words, is set down the basic inviolability of every human being; if society would only adhere to these principles, the world would become a Garden of Eden.

But I must ask two important questions. I have listed the last six commandments; the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," the prohibition of "working" on the Sabbath, with which I opened this commentary, doesn't seem to belong with the rest. What transgression against the integrity of another human being do I commit by opening up my business on Saturday morning? Moreover, if the essence of what was commanded at Sinai was principles of morality, why must the first three commands deal with G-d, the G-d who took us out of Egypt, the G-d who demands exclusivity of fealty, and the G-d whose name dare not be taken in vain? Is it not possible to be ethical or moral without necessarily believing in G-d?

Let us begin with the first of the "Ten Utterances," not so much a commandment as it seems to be almost a definition of G-d's "essence": "I am the Lord who took you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage," I am the Lord who insists that every human being be free! We must remember that the Book of Exodus emerges from the Book of Genesis, where G-d describes the creation of the world and creation of the human being. And what is remarkable and unique about the creation of the human is that he/she-unlike all other creatures of the universe-is created in G-d's image, is inspirited with the soul of Divine life, is endowed with a portion of essence from G-d on High (Gen. 1:27, 2:7).

This means further that the human being was created to have freedom of choices, to be empowered to do even that which G-d would not have wanted him to do (Seforno ad loc, and the story of the eating of the forbidden fruit). Yes, G-d charges the human to develop and take responsibility for the world, to perfect the imperfect world which G-d created (Gen. 2:15; Isa. 45:7) and G-d believes that the human, created after all in His image, will eventually succeed in doing that (Isa. 2; Mic. 4). But let no one dare enslave the human, whom G-d made to be free, and let no one dare to

violate the human created in the Divine image (Gen. 9:7). Herein lies the force of these three "commands."

This Divine basis for human freedom and inviolability-for our biblical morality, if you will-is not at all self-evident. It was not only the Greek pagans who modeled the gods of Mount Olympus after humans, but it was also the Greek philosophers who accepted the right of the conqueror to acquire slaves, the right of the victor to take the spoils, the justice of the powerful controlling the weak. But it was Moses and the later prophets who articulated the responsibility of the rich and powerful to care for the poor and the weak, it was Abraham who articulated "G-d's path of compassionate righteousness and moral justice," and it was the author of the Book of Job who reminded the Jewish master to remove the injustice of owning a gentile slave; after all, "did not the one who made the Jewish master in His belly also make the gentile slave, did not the womb of the same One prepare them both?" (Job31:15 and Maimonides, Laws of Slaves, last law).

Now we can understand the majestic significance of the prohibition of working on the Sabbath; the Sabbath reminds us that G-d created the world, that G-d created the human being in His Divine Image, and that the human being is inviolate and free. Herein lies the ultimate value and equality of every human being, in both a moral as well as a political sense.

G-d demands that no totalitarian ruler may enslave his subject, may reduce him to slave labor seven days a week, may control his thoughts and beliefs.

G-d is our Ultimate Employer, who guarantees our ultimate freedom, who doesn't allow us to work on the seventh Sabbath day! This is why, when Moses repeats the Decalogue in the Book of Deuteronomy, he links the Sabbath rest not to the creation of the world but rather to our exodus from Egypt: "Observe the Sabbath day... in order that your male gentile servant and your female gentile servant may rest like you, so that you remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your G-d freed you from there..." (Deut. 5:12-15).

It is the necessity of Sabbath rest which precludes slavery and thereby ensures universal freedom! ©2016 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The mores present in today's Western world seem to suggest that the Ten Commandments are, at best, recommendations but certainly not legal or moral mandatory obligations. The commandments that relate to money and to sexual probity are publicly violated, almost with impunity, on a seemingly daily basis. This is true with regard to all religious groups, including ours as well.

One would have thought that after more than thirty-three hundred years of human experience regarding these matters, the message of Sinai would have finally taken root in the Jewish and human soul. But apparently we are still standing before that desert mountain awaiting Divine instruction as to how to conduct our behavior and our lives.

We said that we would do and we would listen but in reality our commitment was not absolute and our moral compass is still not properly adjusted. Hence, we are aware of everything that is still happening all around us. The obsessive nature of shopping and the ever-futile pursuit of entertainment and escapism have sapped the vitality and holiness of the Shabbat in the Jewish world, and of any day of rest in human society generally.

Murder is an everyday acceptable occurrence and the warped amongst us even justify its commitment by hiding behind the name of G-d. And honoring parents and elders is passé, a relic of ancient ideas and bygone societies. So, one can easily see that there is not much left of the Ten Commandments in the modern world.

But, we should not be overly discouraged by all of the above. After all, G-d has not given up on us so why should we do so. The prophet Malachi has taught us: 'I the Lord G-d have not changed.' There are no other sets of commandments from G-d to the human race and to the Jewish people – and the proof of that statement lies in the fact that '...you, the children of Yaakov have not been destroyed.' The Jewish people remain eternal.

As far as G-d is concerned, so to speak, the Ten Commandments remain obligatory and enforceable through G-d's will. King Solomon warned us in Kohelet never to say that previous times were better than our days are now. All generations rose against the Ten Commandments, violated them and disregarded their practical and moral import. But the Ten Commandments have survived all attempts to ignore, modify or even forget them.

Instinctively, we are aware that they are in force and set the bar by which we are to measure ourselves and assess our actions. Thus the revelation at Sinai was not a one-off event. In the words of Avot, the echo of Sinai reverberates daily in the universe that we inhabit. The Ten Commandments are not past advice. They are current instructions and mandatory obligations, a loving Torah that speaks to our generation and its challenges and problems. We would certainly be wiser and happier if we heeded its words and absorbed its eternal moral messages. ©2016 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The last sentence of this week's portion states that ramps should lead to the altar. (Exodus 20:23) Why are ramps used and not steps?

The issue may be one of modesty. In the ancient Near East nudity was associated with ritual activity. This link is rejected by Torah. If there were steps, the robe of the priest would be upset while he climbed them, revealing the nakedness of his limbs. As Rashi points out, with ramps, this would not occur.

Another idea comes to mind. The altar symbolizes a central place of spirituality. The ramps connecting the ground with the altar teach that in order to reach the higher world of the spirit one must be in constant motion. Ramps imply perpetual movement, whereas steps can offer rest. Similar to the ladders of Jacob's dream, in the world of the spirit-one can either ascend or descend-never can one stand still.

Another important contemporary lesson can be learned. The presence of ramps can be viewed as a symbol of accessibility. Once there is accessibility in the place of the spirit, either in the altar or in today's synagogue, it sends a message that all places should be open to the handicapped. Not only do ramps send a message of welcome to the physically challenged, but they also send to one and all, even to those not in wheelchairs, that everyone, regardless of affiliation, health or station in life is welcome.

For me, the ramps to the altar powerfully remind us what makes a synagogue beautiful. I have heard Jews with a passion for architecture, debate this question at length. Some may advocate an ultra-modern structure with a skylight over the ark, while others may prefer a more traditional structure. Personally, the first items I look for in a shul are ramps. If the synagogue is accessible, it is beautiful.

To those who feel themselves far removed from the issue and believe it has nothing to do with them, let it be said that none of us are immune from the misfortunes that befall others. There is no such thing as the sick and the well. There are only the sick and the not yet sick.

A photograph in my office says it all. It is of a man sitting in his wheelchair at the bottom of a flight of steps, leading up to the entrance of the synagogue. Over its door, is emblazoned the sentence, "Open the gates of righteousness for me, I will enter through them." (Psalm 118:19)

The man sits with his back to the doors, unable to enter. As a Jewish community we have failed him. Our task is to learn from the ramps that led to the altar in the tabernacle. They teach that we must make sure that this man can face the door and be welcomed as he makes his way in. ©2016 Hebrew Institute of

Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

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

Rabbi Leibowitz, in Majesty of Man, explains that Yitro was so moved by G-d, the Torah and the Jews that he felt that he had to go back to his home to try to convert his family and friends. Yitro was willing to give up being surrounded by what he obviously believed in and wanted to be around, just for the sake of others. If this was the determination of someone that had no responsibilities toward the people he was trying to help (in terms of converting them), how much more determination should we demonstrate when we actually have a responsibility to help one another!? The Parsha is named after Yitro because he was willing to change his life for Judaism. He was so proud of it that he didn't hide his Judaism, but went out and told others how beautiful it is. If we expressed the Yitro that we undoubtedly have within us, those around us are bound to be moved. ©2016 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And he (Yisro) said to Moshe, 'I, your father-in-law Yisro, have come to you, along with your wife and her two sons with her' (Sh'mos 18:6).

A few years ago, my father, amu'sh, asked me why Yisro referred to them as "her sons" rather than as "his sons." Although they were already referred to twice, once as "her sons" (18:3) and once as "his sons" (18:5), and the switching off between the way they are described certainly needs an explanation, it is more puzzling the third time, when it is Yisro himself talking to Moshe (as opposed to the Torah's narrative). Shouldn't he refer to them as Moshe's sons when talking to their father?

Rabbeinu Bachye (18:6) says that the reason Yisro referred to them as "her sons" is because this is the normal way for the Torah to describe children, with the sons attributed to the mother and the daughters to the father, as we can see from "the sons of Leah" and "Dinah his daughter" (B'reishis 46:15). However, since Yaakov had sons from all four wives, which sons were born to Leah had to be specified. And since Yaakov's

daughter is listed amongst Leah's sons, we know who her mother was.

There are several other issues with Rabbeinu Bachye's approach. First of all, why did he wait until the third mention to tell us that sons are attributed to the mother, rather than the first one? From his wording, it seems that he specifically said it on this verse because referring to them as "her sons," as opposed to "your sons," is more blatant in the same sentence as "your father-in-law" and "your wife." Even though there is no other way to describe Yisro and Tziporah, whereas he could have referred to their sons as either "yours" or "hers," the change from "your" to "her" is more noticeable when placed next to two other expressions with the word "your" in it. It is therefore possible that a reason that also applies to 18:3 is first given on 18:6 in order to emphasize how strong the preference to attribute sons to the mother is.

Another issue with Rabbeinu Bachye's approach is that if sons are usually attributed to the mother, why are they described as "his sons" in 18:5? The M'chilta says they were called "his sons" there because we might otherwise think that she had sons from a different marriage, and these were the sons that were referred to; by clarifying that they were also "his sons" we are being told that the sons described as being "hers" were also "his." Nevertheless, Rabbeinu Bachye doesn't quote the M'chilta; if the "norm" is to attribute sons to the mother, why doesn't he address why they are called "his sons" the second time?

The M'chilta itself needs an explanation, as immediately after telling us (in 18:3) that they were "her sons" we are told their names, and why they were given these names, which were directly related to Moshe's experiences, not Tziporah's. Why would we think that these sons might be from a different father if we are told explicitly why Moshe gave them these names? Zeis Ra'anah suggests we might have thought that Tziporah was unfaithful to Moshe, and even though he thought they were his sons, and therefore named them after what had happened to him, they really weren't, so the Torah had to tell us that they were in fact Moshe's sons. Despite backing up this possibility by mentioning the wicked M'nashe, who descended from Moshe, which may have led us to believe that these weren't really Moshe's sons, such a suspicion seems a bit far-fetched.

Another issue with the M'chilta is that the Zohar (quoted incorrectly in HaK'sav v'haKabala as being in M'chilta d'Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai) says that the "him" referred to in "his sons" is Yisro, as Yisro brought his own sons, born after Moshe moved in, with him to Moshe. [If the verse is to be read this way, "his wife" would refer to Yisro's wife, not Moshe's. We would then need to find a reason why the Torah tells us that Yisro's wife came too, perhaps to teach us that Yisro originally planned on staying with the nation, in which case we

would need to figure out why he changed his mind and went back to Midyan.] Putting aside whether or not "his sons" really refers to Moshe's sons or Yisro's, if it can be understood either way, calling them "his sons" cannot prove that they were not only Tziporah's. [If Rabbeinu Bachye thought it was Yisro's sons being referred to, he should have pointed this out.]

The third "issue" may be more of a "note" than a question; the verse Rabbeinu Bachye is commenting on is a quote of Yisro's words, so even if the Torah normally attributes sons to the mother, the question here is not why the Torah did, but why Yisro did. Was Yisro already well-versed enough in the Torah's style to have emulated it? Is it Rabbeinu Bachye's understanding that the Torah's "quotes" aren't exact quotes, so even if Yisro said "your sons" his words could appear in the Torah as "her sons" because that is that way the Torah writes things?

Midrash Seichel Tov (on 18:3) says that the Torah refers to them as "her sons" because Moshe, following Aharon's advice (see Rashi on 18:2), had sent them, with Tziporah, back to Midyan, so she was the one who raised them. However, it had only been a year since Moshe had sent them back, and even though one year makes a profound difference in how children are raised, it is a bit curious that the one year Tziporah raised them by herself qualified to make them "her sons" rather than "his sons" or "their sons." Additionally, this wouldn't explain why they are also referred to as "his sons" (in 18:5).

Rashi (on 18:6) tells us that the purpose of Yisro's message to Moshe was to convince him to come out to him; "and if you won't come out on my behalf, come out on behalf of your wife, and if you won't come out on behalf of your wife, come out on behalf of her two sons." As I explained several years ago (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/yisro.pdf), Yisro wasn't able to get in to see Moshe because the protective clouds that surrounded the nation wouldn't let him enter (see Targum Yonasan on 18:7), and he was trying to convince Moshe to come out from within the clouds to where he was. Yisro added that "your wife" is here too, in case him being there wasn't enough, and then added that his children were also there, so even if he wouldn't come out because of him or because of his wife, he should come out for his children.

Since the purpose of Yisro's message to Moshe was to convince him to come out to see him, Yisro may have referred to them as "her sons," not "his," in order to hint to him that if he doesn't come out them, and bring them back within the clouds, Moshe wouldn't be able to help raise them, and they would only be considered "her sons," not his.

When my father asked me the question, this was the answer I suggested to him. After researching it a bit, I saw that Midrash Seichel Tov (on 18:6), while backing up what I wrote in 5765, has a different

explanation for why Yisro called them "her sons" in 18:6; "you are busy teaching Torah and Mitzvos to Israel, and your sons you have left for her [to raise], and have distanced them from you." In other words, Yisro called them "her sons" because she would be the one to raise them even if he let them in. This approach is very different than mine, albeit coming from the same starting point. Instead of calling them "her sons" to motivate Moshe to come out and make them "his sons" too, according to Midrash Seichel Tov, Yisro called them "her sons" so that Moshe wouldn't refrain from letting them in out of fear that doing so would mean having to spend time and energy raising them instead of focusing only on his role as the nation's leader and teacher.

I'm not sure how this fits with "and if not for your wife, come out on behalf of her sons," which sounds like a reason for Moshe to come out to Yisro and let them in, not a reason why he shouldn't be afraid to. Either way, it explains why Yisro called them "her sons" when describing them to Moshe. They were "her sons" before Yisro brought them back to Moshe (18:3), but he was bringing "his sons" back to him (18:5). What would they be considered from this point on? Would they be considered "her sons" if Moshe didn't let them in and they would only be raised by Tziporah, or "her sons" even if he did because she would continue to raise them without any substantial help from Moshe?

Panim Yafos references the Midrash (M'chilta, Yisro) which says that before allowing Moshe to marry his daughter (Tziporah), Yisro made him swear that their first son would worship idols, adding that Yisro made this a condition for Tziporah's conversion. When this son was circumcised (see Targum Yonasan on 4:24), Yisro thought that Moshe hadn't fulfilled the condition, so Tziporah's conversion was nullified retroactively, and neither of their sons were considered Israelites. For this reason, Yisro called them "her sons" even when addressing Moshe. In reality, though, Tziporah had converted unconditionally (anyway, Moshe knew that the condition was invalid, since it went against the Torah, and he was confident that G-d would not curse him for not following through on what he swore to Yisro). Therefore, even though when Yisro came to convert he brought "her sons" with him to be converted too, they didn't need to be.

Yisro took "her sons" with him from Midyan (18:3), thinking they were only "hers," but in reality they were also "his sons" (18:5). Whereas I suggested that Yisro called them "her sons" (18:6) in order to motivate Moshe to let them in so that he could also raise them, according to Panim Yafos he called them "her sons" because he mistakenly thought they were only her sons, and also needed to be converted. Moshe, knowing that his wife's conversion was valid so his sons didn't need to be converted, only "went out to Yisro" (18:7), the only one (mentioned) who needed

conversion. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI ELIAKIM KOENIGSBERG

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At the beginning of Parshas Yisro the Torah describes how after Yisro decided to convert to Judaism, he brought various korbanos. "Vayikach Yisro olah u'zevachim l'Elokim -- Yisro brought both a korban olah and korbanos shelamim" (Shemos 18:12). Why did he bring both types of korbanos?

Perhaps the answer is that this double korban symbolized Yisro's transition from non-Jew to full-fledged ben Yisrael. The halacha is that a non-Jew cannot bring a korban shelamim, only a korban olah (Menachos 73b). Some explain that this is because according to the non-Jewish world's perspective, kedusha requires a total separation from physicality; to live a life of holiness, a person must deny himself physical pleasure. For a non-Jew, the korban olah is the only way to serve Hashem because a non-Jew feels that a spiritual life requires total sacrifice.

However, the Torah has a different perspective. While there certainly is room for a korban olah which is completely burnt on the mizbeach, there is also a place for a korban shelamim, in which part of the korban is burnt on the mizbeach, part is given to the kohein, and part is also eaten by the owner. The korban shelamim shows that the Torah believes that man can partake of the physical world, he can enjoy physical pleasures like eating and drinking, and still be serving Hashem. Kedusha does not require a person to abstain from the physical world. It requires that he elevate and sanctify the physical world. By bringing both an olah and a shelamim, Yisro demonstrated that he understood this message.

This idea can also help explain a puzzling Gemara (Pesachim 68b.) which says, "All agree that to fulfill the mitzvah of simchas yom tov on Shavuos, one must have some physical pleasure because on Shavuos the Torah was given to the Jewish people." On all other yomim tovim, the Rabbis argue as to whether a person can choose between total immersion in spiritual pursuits (kulo l'Hashem) and complete involvement in physical activities (kulo lachem), or rather he should split the day chatzi l'Hashem v'chatzi lachem -- he should engage both in spiritual endeavors like davening and learning Torah, as well as physical activities like eating and drinking. But on Shavuos, everyone agrees that some physical enjoyment is necessary.

At first glance, the opposite seems more logical. After all, Shavuos is the day that the Jewish people received the Torah, a day on which we celebrate the value of ruchniyus in our lives. Why must there be some portion of lachem on that day? If anything, everyone should agree that on Shavuos one can choose the option of kulo l'Hashem to fulfill the

mitzvah of simchas yom tov!

The answer is that precisely because Shavuos is the day of kabbolas haTorah we have to eat and drink to celebrate the yom tov because Shavuos is a day that we declare our commitment not only to learning Torah, but to living a Torah lifestyle as well. And there is no better way to demonstrate the Torah's perspective on life than by elevating ourselves through eating and drinking (see Beis Halevi).

As Jews, the ultimate level we can aspire to is not to separate ourselves from the world, but to engage in physical activities -- even the most mundane -- and imbue them with a sense of kedusha. When we eat and drink l'shem shomayim, in a refined way, when we dedicate some of our resources to tzedaka and hiddur mitzvah, we demonstrate that we have internalized the message of the korban shelamim. We do not have to abstain from physical pleasures in order to reach the ultimate level in avodas Hashem. All we have to do is live for a higher purpose. ©2016 Rabbi E. Keonigsberg & TorahWeb.org

HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

Rav Wolbe (Da'as Shlomo) cites a fascinating statement made by Rav Sadya Goan. He asserts that all the mitzvos in the Torah are alluded to in the aseres ha'dibros (Ten Commandments). Moreover, the aseres ha'dibros are all encapsulated in the first commandment, and not only that, all the words in the first commandment are encapsulated within the first word of that commandment -- "Anochi." In other words, all the mitzvos can be condensed into a single mitzvah. In Parshas Mishpatim (24:12) the Torah relates that Hashem said to Moshe, "Ascend the mountain to Me and remain there and I will give you the stone luchos and the Torah and the mitzvah." The Torah refers to all the mitzvos in the singular because all of them together really boil down to a single commandment.

Regarding this idea, Rav Yeruchom Levovitz would cite the Gemara in Sukka (46a) which brings an opinion that one who is about to fulfill several mitzvos in succession should only recite a single bracha, "Asher kideshanu b'mitzvosav v'tzivanu al ha'mitzvos." Although at face value it looks like he is performing many unrelated mitzvos -- tefillin, lulav, tzitzis and sukkah -- nevertheless, the bottom line of all the mitzvos is the same and a single bracha suffices for them all. In a similar vein, the Gemara at the end of Makkos tells us that Chavakuk encapsulated the entire Torah in a single commandment.

How are we to understand this? What does it mean that the entire Torah can be found in the word "Anochi?" Rav Wolbe explains as follows. There are many aspects that make up a society, such as its country, government, elections, army, police force and so on. In addition, there are many facets that are

included in its culture, such as science, music and the arts. Religion can be thrown in there too.

Let us take for example, a cultured gentleman in such a society, who enjoys a concert once in a while, attends services on Sunday, reads the paper each day and takes an interest in sports and finances. Imagine, that this fine gentleman was present at Har Sinai when Hashem revealed Himself and declared "I [am Hashem your G-d]!"

From that moment on, his life would change drastically. His entire value system would crumble with the knowledge that there is a Creator of the world. Religion is no longer a facet of culture; it is life itself. All Hashem had to do was declare, "Anochi" -- I exist! The awareness that a Creator exists, in and of itself, is enough to compel a person to do everything in his ability to fulfill the will of the One Who created him.

It is quite possible for a person to fulfill all the commandments -- he keeps Shabbos and kashrus, wears tefillin and tzitzis, davens, bentches and even washes mayim achronim -- and nevertheless is missing the boat of Yiddishkeit. For him, sports are a more significant part of his life than religion. Although they are both things that he wants to fit into his daily schedule, sports are a more central part of that schedule than his religious obligations. Judaism is not comprised of religious ceremonies that have to be attended similar to the opera and the Super Bowl. Yiddishkeit is life. Chazal assert, "What is a small portion of the Torah upon which all aspects of the Torah are dependant? -- 'Know Him in all your ways' -- all your actions should be performed for the sake of Heaven" (Brachos 63a).

With the first word of the aseres ha'dibros Hashem revealed Himself and gave us His business card, so to speak. We now know He exists and our life is to be lived accordingly. In addition to the overtly spiritual activities such as davening and learning, we also have to eat, sleep, engage in conversation, work and relax. However, all these activities should be performed with the knowledge that ultimately everything we do is with the purpose of bringing us closer to Hashem. If you think about it for a minute, you might be surprised to discover that most of your daily schedule is subconsciously executed for that very reason. All that is left are just a few actions that have to be fine tuned to sing in harmony with Hashem's solo "Anochi!" ©2016 Rabbi S. Wolbe zt"l & AishDas Society

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your G-d in vain" (Ex. 20:7). The commandment forbids swearing falsely. The Talmud says that when G-d spoke this commandment, the entire world trembled (Shavuos 39a). What is so outstanding about this particular commandment that

makes it so formidable?

The author of Chezyonos Avraham says that this commandment was a prerequisite for all the commandments that follow.

Our capacity to rationalize is remarkable. The human mind is ingenious in producing logical reasons for something one wishes to do. Rationalizations, of course, are nothing but good reasons to cover up the true reason. The danger of rationalization is that we may delude ourselves to actually believe the conjured up reasons.

People wish to satisfy their desires, so they rationalize in order to eliminate any obstacles. However, if they had to answer to the reason for a particular act, the severity of the transgression, "G-d will not absolve anyone who takes His Name in vain," might break through their self-deception. If the rationalization was eliminated, they would be discouraged from doing the forbidden act. This commandment made the Israelites cognizant of the importance of adhering to the truth. *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. © 2016 Rabbi K. Packouz & TorahWeb.org*

SHLOMO KATZZ

Hama'ayan

"I am Hashem, your Elokim..." (20:2) R' Yaakov ben Asher z"l (1269-1343; the "Ba'al Ha'turim") writes: This is a mitzvat aseh / affirmative commandment that requires us to know and believe that there is a G-d, that He exists and always existed, that everything that exists comes from Him, that He is our Elokim, and that we are obligated to serve Him. The verse continues, "Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt," because that fact is evidence of His existence and His will, for He took us from there with yedi'ah / knowledge of what is happening in our world and with hashgachah / providence. The Exodus also is proof of Creation, because, if the world had existed forever, it necessarily would be unchanging. And, it is proof of His ability to do whatever He pleases, which, in turn, is proof of His Uniqueness. (Peirush Ha'Tur Ha'Aroch) ©2016 S. Katz & torah.org

