

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In the course of any life there are moments of awe and amazement when, with a full heart, you thank God shehecheyanu vekiyemanu vehigiyanu lazeman hazeh, "who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this day."

Two that particularly stand out in my own memory were separated by almost ten years. The first was the Lambeth Conference at Canterbury in 2008. The conference is the gathering, every ten years, of the bishops of the Anglican Communion -- that is, not just the Church of England but the entire worldwide structure, much of it based in America and Africa. It is the key event that brings this global network of churches together to deliberate on directions for the future. That year I became, I believe, the first rabbi to address a plenary session of the conference. The second, much more recent, took place in October 2017 in Washington when I addressed the friends and supporters of the American Enterprise Institute, one of the world's great economic think tanks.

The two gatherings could not have been less alike. One was religious, Christian, and concerned with theology. The other was secular, American, and concerned with economics and politics. Both of them, though, were experiencing some kind of crisis. In the case of the Anglican Church it had to do with gay bishops. (One, Gene Robinson, had already been appointed and was serving in New Hampshire.) Could the Church accommodate such people? The question was tearing the Church apart, with many of the American bishops in favour and most of the African ones against. There was a real sense, before the conference, that the communion was in danger of being irreparably split.

In Washington in 2017 the issue at the forefront of people's minds was quite different. A year earlier there had been a sharply divisive American Presidential election. New phrases had been coined to describe some of the factors involved -- post-truth, fake news, flyover states, alt-right, identity politics, competitive victimhood, whatever -- as well as the resurfacing of an old one: populism. It all added up to what I termed the politics of anger. Was there a way of knitting together the unravelling strands of American society?

The reason these two events are connected in

my mind is that on both occasions I spoke about the same concept -- the one that is central to this week's parsha, and to biblical Judaism as a whole, namely brit, covenant. This was, in the seventeenth century especially, a key concept in the emerging free societies of the West, especially in Calvinist or Puritanical circles.

To grossly simplify a complex process, the Reformation developed in different directions in different countries, depending on whether Luther or Calvin was the primary influence. For Luther the key text was the New Testament, especially the letters of Paul. For Calvin and his followers, however, the Hebrew Bible was the primary text, especially in relation to political and social structures. That is why covenant played a large part in the (Calvinist) post-Reformation politics of Geneva, Holland, Scotland, England under Cromwell, and especially the Pilgrim Fathers, the first European settlers in North America. It lay at the heart of the Mayflower Compact (1620) and John Winthrop's famous "City upon a Hill" speech aboard the Arbella in 1630.

Over time however, and under the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the word "covenant" was gradually supplanted by the phrase "social contract." Clearly there is something similar between the two, but they are not the same thing at all. In fact, they operate on different logics and they create different relationships and institutions.

(I have set out the philosophy of this in *The Politics of Hope*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1997. Most recently I have summarised this argument in a whiteboard animation video released last month. You can watch the video or read a transcript using this link: <http://rabbisacks.org/the-politics-of-hope>)

In a contract, two or more people come together, each pursuing their self-interest, to make a mutually advantageous exchange. In a covenant, two or more people, each respecting the dignity and integrity of the other, come together in a bond of loyalty and trust to do together what neither can achieve alone.

(One might ask: what is there that God cannot



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do alone? The answer -- given the theology of the Hebrew Bible -- is: to live within the human heart. That requires our free assent.)

It isn't an exchange; it's a moral commitment. It is more like a marriage than a commercial transaction. Contracts are about interests; covenants are about identity. Contracts benefit; covenants transform. Contracts are about "Me" and "You"; covenants are about "Us."

What makes the Hebrew Bible revolutionary in political terms is that it contains not one founding moment but two. One is set out in 1 Samuel 8, when the people come to the prophet Samuel and ask for a king. God tells Samuel to warn the people what will be the consequences. The king will take the people's sons to ride with his chariots and their daughters to work in his kitchens. He will take their property as taxation, and so on. Nonetheless, the people insist that they still want a king, so Samuel appoints Saul.

Commentators have long been puzzled by this chapter. Does it represent approval or disapproval of monarchy? The best answer ever given was provided by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes, who explained that what Samuel was doing at God's behest was proposing a social contract precisely on the lines set out by Thomas Hobbes in *The Leviathan*. People are willing to give up certain of their rights, transferring them to a central power -- a king or a government -- who undertakes in return to ensure the defence of the realm externally and the rule of law within. (*Kol Kitvei Maharatz Chajes*, vol. 1, 43-49) The book of Samuel thus contains the first recorded instance of a social contract.

However, this was the second founding moment of Israel as a nation, not the first. The first took place in our parsha, on Mount Sinai, several centuries earlier, when the people made with God, not a contract but a covenant. What happened in the days of Samuel was the birth of Israel as a kingdom. What happened in the days of Moses -- long before they had even entered the land -- was the birth of Israel as a nation under the sovereignty of God.

The two central institutions of modern Western liberal democracies are both contractual. There are commercial contracts that create the market; and there is the social contract that creates the state. The market

is about the creation and distribution of wealth. The state is about the creation and distribution of power. But a covenant is about neither wealth nor power, but rather about the bonds of belonging and collective responsibility. As I put it in *The Politics of Hope*, a social contract creates a state. A social covenant creates a society. A society is the totality of relationships that do not depend on exchanges of wealth and power, namely marriages, families, congregations, communities, charities and voluntary associations. The market and the state are arenas of competition. Society is an arena of co -- operation. And we need both.

The reason that the concept of covenant proved helpful to the Anglican bishops on the one hand, and the American Enterprise Institute on the other, is that it is the supreme example of a bond that brings together, in a single co-operative enterprise, individuals and groups that are profoundly different. They could not be more different than the parties at Mount Sinai: God and the children of Israel, the one Infinite and eternal, the other, finite and mortal.

In fact the very first human relationship, between the first man and the first woman, contains a two-word definition of covenant: *ezer ke-negdo*, meaning on the one hand "a helper" but on the other, someone "over-and-against." (Gen. 2:18 and Rashi ad loc., based on *Yevamot* 63a) In a marriage, neither husband nor wife sacrifice their distinctive identities. At Sinai, God remained God and the Israelites remained human. A symbol of covenant is the *havdalah* candle: multiple wicks that stay separate but produce a single flame.

So covenant allowed the Anglican Communion to stay together despite the deep differences between the American and African churches. The American covenant held the nation together despite, in Lincoln's day, a civil war, and at other times, civil and economic strife, and its renewal will do likewise in the future. In Moses' day it allowed the Israelites to become "one nation under God" despite their division into twelve tribes. Covenants create unity without uniformity. They value diversity but, rather than allowing a group to split into competing factions, they ask each to contribute something uniquely theirs to the common good. Out of multiple Me's they create an overarching Us.

What made these two experiences in Canterbury and Washington so moving to me was that they showed how prophetic Moses' words were when he told the Israelites that the Torah and its commands "will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deut. 4:6). Torah continues to inspire not only Jews but all who seek guidance in hard times.

So, if you find yourself in a situation of conflict that threatens to break something apart, whether a

marriage, a family, a business, a community, a political party or an organisation, framing a covenant will help keep people together, without any side claiming victory or defeat. All it needs is recognition that there are certain things we can do together that none of us can do alone.

Covenant lifts our horizon from self-interest to the common good. There is nothing wrong with self-interest. It drives economics and politics, the market and the state. But there are certain things that cannot be achieved on the basis of self-interest alone, among them trust, friendship, loyalty and love. Covenant really is a life -- and world-changing idea. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd the entire nation responded together and said, "Everything the Lord has spoken we shall do" (Ex. 19:8). Religious coercion has long threatened Israeli society, bringing to the surface all the tensions inherent in our unprecedented experiment of maintaining a state that is both "Jewish and democratic." Is such an experiment viable?

Our global village knows two extremes: on the one hand, fanatic Islamist states whose citizens are held captive by the latest Fatwah decreed by their Sheikhs-Ayatollahs. And on the other hand, the democratic model of the United States of America, which grants every citizen his/her inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, to freedom of worship, speech and ideology, insisting upon a clear and absolute separation between Synagogue/Church and State. Is there room for a hybrid situation of a Jewish state without religious coercion?

Religious coercion is certainly not a desirable goal. My revered teacher and mentor, Rav J.B. Soloveitchik, z"l, frequently noted, "Religious coercion is an oxymoron." This is because when a ritual act is coerced by an external political force, it ceases to have any religious or spiritual significance. Quite the opposite, in fact: it only enhances anti-religious antagonisms, pushing the unwilling participant much further away from true Divine service and commitment. What does our tradition have to say about religious coercion versus religious conviction?

A dramatic interpretation of a verse from our weekly reading, Yitro, takes up our issue head on. The Torah states, "And Moses bought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain" (ibid.). The Talmudic Sage Rav Avdimi bar Hama comments that this verse comes to teach that God picked up the mountain and "held it over their heads like a barrel, threatening, 'If you will accept the

Torah, good; if not there shall remain your gravesites" (B.T. Shabbat 88a).

Beyond the traumatic imagery, this is a difficult reading on a textual level. We have already seen how the Israelites accepted the Torah of their own free will (Ex. 19:8). In fact, God enters into a covenant with the Jewish People only after they declare of their own free will, "We shall do and we shall obey ("na'aseh v'nishma")" (ibid., 24:7). God wants a freely accepted Torah, not a coerced Torah!

Rav Soloveitchik explains the apparent contradiction between the verse and the Talmudic midrash by noting that indeed religious commitment and religious coercion are mutually exclusive terms. In "The Lonely Man of Faith," the Rav explains that the Biblical description of freely accepted obligation refers to the "in general" acquiescence of the Israelites to live by the Divine Will, which they truly accepted of their own volition.

In contrast, the Talmudic addition of coercion relates to the details of the religio-legal structure, concerning which different individuals at different times may be forced to comply. A comparison can be made to traffic laws: every intelligent individual accepts the necessity of speeding limits, but when he is caught overstepping the line, he may balk as he is forced to pay his ticket.

Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, a 19th century commentator on the Torah ("Meshech Chochma") and of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah ("Ohr Sameach") goes even a step further. He insists that only a person who has announced that he is observant of religious law and that he wants to observe all the commandments may be compelled to uphold ritual law.

In an open secular society, it goes without saying that in the realm of laws governing interpersonal relationships, a court of law can and must use coercion in order to establish a just society. People understand that such laws exist to help them adhere to the regulations that they know are for everyone's good -- including their own. However, with regard to laws between a person and God, enforced adherence will have the exact opposite effect and will only lead to resentment and anti-religious feelings.

I suggest a very different approach. It is not the promulgation of laws that secular Israelis neither understand nor accept which will increase respect for and observance of the Sabbath. Rather, it is through their understanding that the religious community loves and respects them, and that the religious will make every attempt not to enforce, but to inspire.

I believe that most Israeli citizens would understand and even agree to the closing of commercial businesses on the Sabbath, a day of rest that the Torah bequeathed to the world, while advocating that cultural programs remain open. With Halakhic ingenuity, this would be possible in a way in

which Sabbath sanctity could be maintained, and the beauty of our tradition – with songs, music and food – could be brought to a large secular audience (as suggested by Prof. Ruth Gavison and Rav Yaakov Medan).

As far as public transportation is concerned, there must be a way of running non-Jewish-controlled bus lines for non-religious areas, so that secular Jews without cars would not experience undeserved hardship because of the Sabbath.

In the final analysis, it is not through enforced laws, but rather by inspiring love, that we must attempt to express the glories of the Sabbath. And love means accepting with love even those who decide to reject the laws of the Sabbath. ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The high point of Jewish spiritual history is achieved in the narrative that is this week's Torah reading.

The revelation at Sinai and the subsequent granting of the Torah to Israel defined the character and mission of the Jewish people throughout its long and eventful history. The basic ideas encompassed in the Ten Commandments have become the foundation of Western civilization. And, even though they have often been challenged, they have never been refuted or ignored.

The universality of the message of the Torah is emphasized to us by the fact that the description of the Revelation at Sinai is preceded by the story of Yitro and his journey, both the physical and spiritual one, to join the Jewish people and share their fate and mission.

Jewish tradition tells us that Yitro had previously experimented with every form and device of paganism – the dominant religion of his time in the world – in order to find a sense of purpose and serenity for his soul and inner being. He found them all to be wanting in truth and in actuality and due to his honesty and intellectual acuity; he eventually came to reject them all.

He came to Jewish thought and behavior from the outside, from being one of the leading priests of paganism of his time. But in searching for the truth, he experienced his own inner revelation that coincided with the unique holy revelation at Sinai, as seen in this week's Torah reading. He would find it to be difficult to be an outsider coming into Israel but he would find it to be even more difficult to remain an outsider and ignore the apparent truth.

As is often the case, the outsider, so to speak, sees things more clearly than those intimately involved in a situation. There is an objectivity that an outsider can bring to bear on the circumstances at hand that are often lacking in those who are actually participating in the event.

Later on in the Torah, during the trek in the desert of Sinai, Moshe will say to Yitro: "you have been for us our eyes." By this statement Moshe implies that Yitro saw things even more clearly than did the Jewish people and that his appreciation of the greatness of Judaism and its Torah excelled above all. Perhaps that is why there is an opinion amongst many of the commentators and in Midrash as well that the visit of Yitro to the encampment of Israel in the desert took place before the granting of the Torah.

When this great event happened, it was Yitro above everyone else who could most appreciate what this historic moment really meant in terms of world civilization and the progress of humankind. The Jewish people may have taken the Exodus from Egypt in stride, as being there due. Yet, Yitro reminded them of the supernatural quality of the event. The same is true regarding the revelation at Sinai and therefore Yitro merited that this portion of the Torah be named for him. ©2018 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 Torah tells us that at the moment of revelation all the Jews at Sinai were able to see. (Exodus 20:15) Is it possible that of the several million there was not one single person who was blind?

Here Rashi responds and states that in fact a miracle occurred. In his words "there was not among them a single blind person." Rashi additionally points out that in fact not even one Jew was mute or deaf. After all, the Torah states "and all the people answered" (Exodus 19:8) and that the Jews declared "we will do and hear." (Exodus 24:7)

The full text of the Torah actually reads "and all the people saw the voices". It is certainly possible for one to see images, but wonders if it is possible for one to see voices. He suggests that the power of the people to see was so profound that it went beyond the usual. In his words, "they saw that which should be able to heard, which is impossible to see at any other place." In other words, at revelation, the moment was so powerful that they saw what is normally heard. Their vision was so powerful that they even saw voices.

Another thought comes to mind that differs from Rashi's suggestion. Perhaps at revelation, there were those amongst our people who were not in perfect physical shape. There may indeed have been some who could not hear. However, our text may be suggesting that even the hearing impaired were able to complement this limitation by a greater ability to see. This may be the meaning of seeing voices. Unable to hear, they compensated with their ability to see.

Similarly, there may have been those who couldn't speak or who couldn't see, but were able to somehow, with God's help, make up for this limitation at this most amazing moment in history.

The idea that those who are handicapped have a place in Judaism is fundamental to Torah. Some of our greatest leaders struggled with limitations. Isaac couldn't see; Jacob was lame for a period of time and Moses suffered from a severe speaking handicap. Despite these difficulties, they rose to unbelievable heights.

Which is the greater miracle at the time of revelation? On the one hand, it certainly reflects God's intervention if all people, even those who couldn't see, were given sight at that moment. On the other hand, revelation, which embraces even those with limitations, makes an extraordinary statement. It teaches us that just as at Sinai, everyone was welcome so too must we do everything in our power to see to it that everyone in our community is embraced.

In the end, the test of our community is the way it reaches out to the most vulnerable -- from the forgotten, to those who are often cast aside--to those with physical or emotional or learning disabilities. "And they saw the voices" reminds us that all Jews, even the most vulnerable, stood at the foot of the most holy space of all--the foot of Mt. Sinai. ©2018 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states regarding the preparation for receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, "And the Israelites encamped there near the mountain" (Exodus 19:2). The Hebrew word for "encamped" is "vayichan." What is particularly interesting is that "vayichan" is in the singular form; the grammatically correct form would be "vayachanu." What do we learn from the word "vayichan"?

Rashi, the great commentator, tells us that the singular form is used to tell us that they encamped "as one person with one heart." From here Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz commented that we see that love of our fellow man is a prerequisite for accepting the Torah.

Rabbi Yitzchok of Vorki noted that the word "vayichan" besides meaning "encamped" also comes from the word "khain," which means "finding favor." That is, the people found favor in the eyes of one another and therefore found favor in the eyes of the Almighty.

When you just see the faults and shortcomings of another person, you become distant from him. However, when you see the good and positive in other people, you become closer to them. This unity is a

fundamental requirement for accepting the Torah.

How is this developed? We find in the book Nachal Kidumim that togetherness between people is possible only when there is humility. When the Israelites came to Mount Sinai, which is the symbol of humility, they internalized this attribute.

When you have humility, you do not feel a need to gain power over others or feel above them by focusing on their faults. When you have the trait of humility you can allow yourself to see the good in others. The traits of love for others, seeing the good in them, and having humility go hand in hand. By growing in these traits you make yourself into a more elevated person who is worthy of receiving the Torah. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2018 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Judicial Qualities

By definition the Torah is a book of laws for the Jewish nation. Judaism is a religion of laws and statutes which govern a person throughout his life. The basis of the philosophy of Judaism is primarily the first of the Five Books of the Torah, Bereishit. The final four books are devoted to the laws which are the foundation of the religion as they deal with Man's relationship to the World, to his fellowman, and to Hashem. This week's parasha discusses the major group of laws from which all the others are derived, the Ten Commandments, the event which enables us to understand that all these laws come directly from Hashem, and the means by which the people will be judged according to these laws. The system of judgment can be seen to be almost as important as the laws themselves. Interestingly, the system through which the people are governed was suggested by Moshe's father-in-law.

The Torah tells us, "And it was on the next day that Moshe sat to judge the people and the people stood by Moshe from morning until night. And the father-in-law of Moshe saw all that he did to the people and he said, 'What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you sit alone with all the people standing by you from morning until evening?' And Moshe said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to seek Hashem. When they have a matter, one comes to me, and I judge between a man and his fellow, and I make known the statutes of Elokim and His Laws.' And Moshe's father-in-law said to him, 'The thing that you do is not good. You will surely become weary, you and the people with you, because the matter is heavier than you, you will not be able to do it alone. Now listen to my voice, I will advise you and may Elokim be with you, you be for the people opposite Elokim and you convey the matters to Elokim. And you should caution them regarding the decrees and the teachings and you shall make known to them

the path on which they shall travel and the deeds that they should do. And you shall see from among the entire people, men of means, people who fear Elokim, men of truth, people who despise money, and you shall appoint them leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leader of fifties and leaders of tens. They shall judge the people at all times, and they shall bring every major matter to you and every minor matter they shall judge, and it will ease from upon you, and they shall bear with you. If you will do this thing, and Elokim will command you, then you will be able to endure and this entire people as well shall arrive at its destination in peace.”

Yitro suggested a set of criteria for those who would assist Moshe. This suggestion must be broken down into two parts: (1) the division of the people into groups of ten, fifty, a hundred, and a thousand, and (2) what type of men should be chosen as leaders. Hirsch sees the numbers of judges that would be necessary to fill this recommendation as unwieldy. Hirsch posits that rather than being a judge over a thousand it would mean a judge who was picked out of a thousand possible judges as a judge of higher esteem and knowledge. The four levels of judges then were the four levels of knowledge and competence within the law. A more literal approach to the numbers is suggested in Gemara Sanhedrin (18a), which says that there would be a total of 78,600 judges meaning that one in seven people would be a judge. In this way, every man among the people who studied Torah and was a decent person could be a judge in a minor case.

The Gemara Nedarim (38a) explains that Hashem does not cause His Presence to rest on anyone who is not either a gibor, a man of courage, a chacham, a wise man, an ashir, a wealthy man, or an anav, a humble man. The Kli Yakar tells us that Moshe had all of these qualities and, for that reason, every judge would need all four qualities also. Moshe was told to use his ru'ach hakodesh, his ability to divine that came as a gift from Hashem, to determine who within the B'nei Yisrael fit these characteristics. The Or HaChaim tells us that Moshe chose the judges but that he brought them before the people for the decision of the level at which that judge would serve so that the people guided him in determining who were the best judges to lead the people. The S'forno explains that this process enabled those with the most support to be at a higher level. In this manner, someone dissatisfied with a lower court opinion could appeal it to someone at a higher, more respected level.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains that our passage refers to four different kinds of qualities in a person that would be chosen as a judge and four different levels of leaders (ten, fifty, one hundred, and one thousand). Each special quality corresponded to one of the levels of leadership. The responsibilities of the leaders also differed depending on the number of people for whom

the judge was responsible. Leaders of tens were actually shotrim, policemen or enforcers of the decisions of a higher court. They might administer lashings as a punishment decided by a higher court. These shotrim needed to be anshei chayil, men of courage and strength. Over them were the leaders of fifty whose primary responsibility was to supervise the shotrim so that they would give the correct number of lashes for the punishment and that they would not administer it too zealously. These men needed to be the yir'ei Elokim, those who feared Elokim. Over them were the leaders of one hundred who were the actual judges. These men needed to be anshei emet, men of truth, who both knew the laws well and would correctly adjudicate them. Over them were the leaders of thousands who were the Bet Din HaGadol, the equivalent of the Supreme Court. This Higher Court had to be sonei batza, those who hate money. These were men beyond reproach and who understood that the appearance of bribery or favoritism destroyed a person's perspective in judgment. These men therefore had the responsibility to oversee the judges so that all rulings were honest and truthful.

We have seen different approaches to the court and justice system. Whether like the Kli Yakar, who viewed each judge as an adjudicator, or whether like HaRav Sorotzkin, who saw different roles at each level, all would agree that the four qualities of a judge were courage, wisdom, satisfaction with his level of wealth, and humility. Whether each judge needed all four qualities or whether the one quality exhibited by each judge determined at which level he would judge, we can see that these qualities indicated men who were special enough to be in the position of a judge. It is obvious that we should all try to develop those same good qualities even if we are not judges. May Hashem enable us to achieve this goal. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI DAVID LAPIN

Torah Insights

There are not ten Commandments in the Decalogue; there are only nine. There are ten Statements though, which is why we call them the Asseret Ha'Dibrot (Ten Statements), not the Ten Commandments. According to the way we count the Decalogue, the first is not a commandment at all, it merely states: "I am Hashem your Divine Power who removed you from Egypt, from a place of slavery." (In the Christian version, the first commandment includes: "You shall have no other gods before me;" but in the Torah this is part of the second statement.) There seems to be no commandment at all in the first statement. What is the purpose of this first statement then, is it merely informational? ("Divine Power" is a more accurate translation for Elokim than "G-d", see Nefesh Hachaim and others.)

There is another place in the Torah where we

have ten statements. These are the Assarah Ma'amarot (Ten Sayings) with which the world was created at the beginning of Bereishit (Genesis). Each time it says Va'yomer ('and He said') is counted as one saying. According to the Zohar (Vayikra 11b) these ten sayings of Bereishit line up to parallel the Ten Statements in Shemot (Exodus). The first saying of Creation is "And Hashem said let there be light," according to the Zohar. This saying lines up with the First Statement of the decalogue, "I am Hashem your Divine Power." The parallel between these two phrases, the one describing the creation of light and the other describing the power of G-d in our personal lives, explains the significance of the First Statement, "I am Hashem your Divine Power who removed you from Egypt, from a place of slavery."

The light referred to on the first day of Creation cannot mean light in the literal sense of how we know light today because the sun and other luminaries had not yet been created. The light referred to on that first day, was energy, it was Divine energy. This energy could of course produce light, and now, knowing $E=mc^2$ we understand that this energy could produce all the energy and matter from which Hashem created the universe.

A further, metaphoric meaning of light is that which facilitates the sight and understanding of things that were previously obscured in darkness; hence terms such as enlightenment and insight. Appreciating this dimension of the word light, allows us to better appreciate the First Statement to which the creation of light aligns. Knowledge of Hashem as the source of Divine Power provides us with the light by which we can gain insight into the entire Torah, our lives and all of history, and find meaning in them. Knowing that there is such a thing as Divine Power and that as individuals we can access this power, is the foundation not only of every other mitzvah and all of Torah, it is also the lens through which we view and interpret life and history.

Consider the story of Dunkirk in the Second World War. We can read the story as secular history, and it is interesting and inspiring. But seeing it through the lens of the First Statement gives it a different complexion. Seeing this event through the lens of Emunah (knowledge of the Divine Power) attaches moral value to the event. This is Hashem engaging with the world, influencing the course of history, beginning in modern times once again the act of "taking you out of the Egypt from a place of slavery." Seeing it through this lens imposes moral obligation on us. What is our reciprocal responsibility to Hashem after His intervention to save the free world from tyranny?

The founding and flourishing of the State of Israel is another modern-day example. We can look at it without the lens of faith and it is simply an event in the evolution of Jewish and world history. Or one can view it through the lens of the First Statement and see it as

one of countless manifestations of Divine Power. Again, viewing it this way demands that we ask ourselves, "What behaviors does Hashem expect from us in this Land of miracles to which He has brought us back?" Seeing the world through the lens of the First Statement places a moral value on everything we look at, and often entails a moral response.

The same can be said for the personal events of our own lives. Throughout the book of Tehillim (Psalms) we see King David attaching personal meaning to every event he encounters. He sees Hashem's hand in it all. He feels himself to be walking by Hashem, and Hashem at his side everywhere. We can do the same. Life is more meaningful, and more fun, when you see little events and coincidences through the lens of "I am Hashem your Divine Power." Notice how when Hashem is in our hearts, events often align to make our lives easier, more beautiful and more meaningful. Whether it is quickly finding a convenient parking place, a coincidental meeting with just the right person or seeing a gorgeous flower or sunset, when we see it through the lens of "I am Hashem your Divine Power," we feel the difference this makes in the quality of our experience and the nature of our response. When we do this, "va'yehi Or ('and there was light') becomes a daily experience rather a one-off event that happened nearly 6,000 years ago. ©2018 Rabbi D. Lapin & torah.org

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Halacha L'Moshe M'Sinai

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The statement of "Halacha L'moshe M'sinai (the undisputed law from Sinai) expresses the belief that these laws were given by word to Moshe at Sinai and though not specifically enumerated in the Torah, were passed down by tradition (mesorah) by word of mouth from generation to generation. According to Maimonides these laws are undisputed.

What is the difference between a law that was passed down by Moshe and those that are specifically stated in the Torah? Laws openly written in the Torah but there are questions to its interpretation are decided stringently (l'achumra). On the other hand if the law is Rabbinic in nature and there are doubts to its interpretation, then we decide leniently (l'akula). What would be the law regarding doubt when dealing with "Halacha l'moshe m'sinai"?

For example all the measurements (shurim) are "halacha l'moshe m'sinai" (Measurements such as an Ammah or a Tefach). However the controversy arises as to what the exact length of these measurements are (the Chazon Ish or Rav chaim Naeh), or how long should the Lulav be or how thick should the Matzah on Pesach be?

According to the interpretation of Maimonides by the Ramban and the Rivash, in a situation of doubt

with "halacha l'moshe m'sinai" we decide leniently. However both the Ramban and the Rivash themselves believe that the stringent way should be followed (L'chumra).

The explanation according to the Rambam might be that when there is a question regarding a Torah law one really should be lenient. It was the Rabbis who stated that one should go l'chumra when there is a question of Torah law. However when we are interpreting Halacha l'amoshe m'sinai, we would follow the lenient view. Thus in the case of the Lulav for example (which according to Jewish law the taking of the Lulav on the first day is dictated from the Torah), we would be permitted to choose the lenient view.

However this interpretation is difficult. For the Rambam himself states, in his interpretation of the Mishnayot (perush Hamishnayot Mikvaat 6,6), that if the Mitzvah stems from the Torah and if one is in doubt as to the "Shiur" (the amount) which is Halacha l'moshe M'sinai", one should follow the stringent view.

How can we derive laws written before revelation at Sinai?

The reason anything is forbidden or permitted in Judaism is only because Hashem gave us these laws at Sinai through Moshe. We are commanded to circumcise because we received this charge at Sinai. It was not because Abraham our forefather circumcised himself and his family members but rather because this commandment was passed to Moshe (perush Mishnayot Maimonides Chulin). The Torah was given at Sinai and Jewish law was established then and what Avraham our forefather did, he did on his own.

As a result, though G-d said to Avraham "your name shall be Avraham" and our sages derive from this that anyone who calls Avraham by his former name "Avram" transgresses a positive commandment (Aseh), in actuality this Mitzvah is not included in the two hundred and forty eight positive commandments of the Torah because it occurred before the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

However if this is so, how is it that our sages derive that one must be quick to perform a Mitzvah (zriut) from the episode of Avraham arising early in the morning to fulfill the directive of G-d to sacrifice his son Yitzchak? - How did our sages learn from Lavan who waited a week (male shavua zot) before allowing Jacob to marry Rachel, that we don't mingle Smachot (ein

mearvin simcha b'simcha)? - How did our sages learn of the commandment that one must use a knife to slaughter an animal from the Akeidah (near sacrifice of Yitzchak) when the Torah states "and he took the knife to sacrifice his son"?

Some solutions to these questions might be:

1. We don't derive the actual Mitzvah from our forefathers rather just how to fulfill them.
2. We only derive laws that have a reason not a heavenly decree (gezerat Hakatuv)
3. If we have no other way to derive the law and it does not appear amongst the laws given at or after Sinai, we may derive the law from those laws that appear before the giving of the Torah.
4. We only derive the law in an instance where we can only explain it because of its appearance before Sinai.
5. We study the meaning of these words and they only provide explanations. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

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 Judaism that he didn't hide it, 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. ©2018 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.



