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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, came, and his (Moshe's) sons and his wife, to Moshe, to the desert, where he was camped, [by] G-d's mountain" Shemos 18:5). "We also (i.e. already) know (even before the Torah mentions it here) that they were in the desert" (Rashi), so why must the Torah tell us that in order to meet up with Moshe, Yisro had to go into the desert? "The verse is praising Yisro, for he was sitting on top of [his] world (lit: in the honor of the world, i.e. in a very prestigious position, living in comfort and honor), yet he voluntarily went out into the desert, a barren place (with harsh conditions and no natural resources) in order to hear words of Torah."

This comment by Rashi, based on the Mechilta, is quite puzzling. When we first met Yisro (2:16-17), Moshe helped his daughters water their flock. The neighboring shepherds had driven them from the well, and Moshe "rescued them, and watered their sheep." What did the local shepherds have against Yisro's daughters? Was it because they wouldn't accept female shepherdesses? (Rivka and Rachel didn't seem to have such a problem, but maybe Charan was more progressive than Midyan.) Rashi (2:16) tells us that Yisro had been a (or the) leader in Midyan, but after he denounced idol worship, he was excommunicated. Because of this excommunication, the locals tried to prevent him from watering his sheep (2:17). If Yisro had been excommunicated from his own community, how could Rashi tell us that he was leaving a position of honor to join Moshe in the desert?

It would be tempting to suggest that despite being excommunicated by the establishment in Midyan, Yisro had his own support group, his own power base. His ideas (the futility of idol worship and the truth about the One True G-d) were attractive enough to start a counter-culture in Midyan, and the "position of honor" he abandoned was being the leader of this movement. However, since he had a difficult time even getting water for his sheep, it is doubtful that there was any movement of note that supported him and gave him any honor.

Rabbi Eli Steinberg, sh"lita ("Minchas Eliyahu," published in 5770) gives a very straightforward answer to this question. "It would seem that the excommunication by the people of Midyan only lasted until the exodus from Egypt, but after the exodus from Egypt, when the whole world saw G-d's salvation (of His people), and His strength and His might, even those who worshipped false deities agreed with Yisro that their deities had no power, and he was then returned to his previous position of leadership and honor." R' Eli's father, Rabbi Peretz Steinberg, sh"lita ("Pri Eitz Hachayim," published in 5742) gives a similar answer, referencing how the other nations of the world took note of the miracles that occurred when G-d split the sea (15:14) along with what G-d had done to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt. The fact that the nation's leader was Yisro's son-in-law (Rabbi Steinberg adds) contributed even more to his newly-regained status, perhaps bringing him even more honor than before he was excommunicated.

Interestingly, Rashi (18:1) had told us that what caused Yisro to leave Midyan was hearing about the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek, not hearing about the exodus. Despite the exodus having such an impact that it started reversing Yisro's standing in Midyan, it was the events that happened a week later (or about a month later) that motivated Yisro to take Moshe's family and join him in the desert, not the exodus itself. Which didn't give him much time to enjoy his position of honor before he left Midyan. [If Yisro wasn't given back his place of honor until after the splitting of the sea, he had even less time (or no time at all) to enjoy his returned honor, as he would have left Midyan just as he was told he was getting back his leadership position.] And this might be the biggest praise of Yisro of all, as instead of reveling in his newly re-attained position of power (and risking becoming corrupted by it), even for a short time, Yisro left it all in order to learn G-d's Torah.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah at the conclusion of this week's parsha states that one was not allowed to mount the area of the altar by the use of a staircase. Rather, the altar had a ramp that facilitated access. The common understanding of this rule is that walking up a ramp allows one to approach the altar in a more physically modest fashion than ascending by means of a staircase. One can take shorter steps and not raise one's legs as high when climbing a ramp as compared to when navigating a staircase. However, the great men

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of Mussar saw in this prohibition a broader and deeper meaning. They took the Hebrew word "maalot" - meaning stairs or steps - and stated that it also meant arrogance, hubris, and egotistical behavior. The kohanim, as the priests in the Temple and by the nature of their positions as guardians of the Torah, would be tempted to look down upon the other Jews, the masses of Israel, as many of them were not Torah scholars and some even relatively unlettered. The Torah preaches against this dangerous elitism as it could possibly lead to intolerance and punishes those that feel that way with the curse of being pompous and arrogant people. The Talmud tells us that G-d, so to speak, abhors such arrogance in humans. G-d finds no room for Himself, so to speak, in the presence of those who mount His altar in arrogance - "b'maalot." Humility and love of others are the key characteristics demanded of the kohanim. They are truly the key characteristics that should be demanded of all those who find themselves in leadership roles, spiritual or temporal, in Jewish life and society.

Another requirement of the altar was that no metal tools could be used in its construction. The commentators, especially Rashi, explain that metal tools such as a sword or dagger were used to shorten and snuff out human life while the purpose of the altar was to lengthen and enhance life. These two opposite purposes could not be reconciled. Though there are times when self-defense is necessary and justified, service of G-d, in the eyes of Jewish history and thought, precludes violence and killing. The Torah itself details specific rules about warfare and its attendant consequences. We are not to be ultimate pacifists at all costs. Yet, King David, the greatest of all Jewish kings was precluded from building the Temple because of his participation in wars. Albeit that all of those wars were justified morally, legally and halachically. Nevertheless, when it comes to the Temple and to its altar, its consecration and construction cannot be through metal tools and men of war. Wars of self-defense are justified but they are not the goal and purpose of Jewish life. Serving G-d and man and lengthening and enhancing human life are the values that underpin the whole Torah. I think that this is perhaps why these laws regarding the altar of G-d find their place in the same parsha as the Ten Commandments and G-d's revelation to Israel at Mount Sinai. "Not by might nor by power, but rather by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

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 G-ds 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. Yitzchak (Isaac) couldn't see; Ya'akov (Jacob) was lame for a period of time and Moshe (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 G-ds 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 at the most holy space of all---the foot of Mt. Sinai.

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Immediately prior to the great revelation at Mount Sinai, G-d instructs Moses as to the nature of the covenant he is proposing to make with the children of Israel. On their willing acceptance of these terms, all else will depend.

In the course of this preamble, the Torah articulates what, in hindsight, could be called the first mission statement and the first sound-bite. In a mere four Hebrew words, G-d defines the vocation he is calling on the Israelites to make their own: "A kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

What does this mean? I have written elsewhere on the phrase "a kingdom of priests" (At least part of its meaning, I have argued, has to do with the invention of the alphabet, which occurred in or close to centres of Hebrew life in the age of the patriarchs, or possibly during the period in which the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. The Israelites were the first to internalise the possibilities of this new information technology, namely that it heralded, for the first time in history, a society in which everyone could read and write and thus have access to knowledge, the single greatest source of human dignity. In ancient times-indeed in Europe until the invention of printing -- the only class that was literate was the priesthood. "A kingdom of priests" thus meant, among other things, "a society of universal literacy").

What, though, of the phrase goi kadosh, "a holy nation"?

Rudolf Otto, in his book The Idea of the Holy, famously defined the holy as the mysterium tremendum et fascinans, a sense of being in the presence of something vast and awe inspiring. There is doubtless much truth in this idea, but the late Eliezer Berkovits argued the opposite: that whenever we encounter the word holy in relation to G-d it refers to his involvement with humanity, not his transcendence or mystery.

However, these analyses do not go far enough in explaining what the word holy means in the Torah. Its most obvious appearances in the Mosaic books are twofold, the first in relation to Shabbat-the day G-d himself proclaimed holy-and the inner chamber of the sanctuary known as the holy of holies. It is in these contexts that we are best able to learn what holiness means when applied to a people.

Lurianic kabbalah gave Judaism one of its most glorious concepts-an idea, to be sure, that had been present from the outset but had never been articulated as simply before. The idea was tzimtzum, divine "contraction" or "self-effacement."

Behind the idea of tzimtum is the realization that there is a contradiction between the infinite and the finite. If G-d is everywhere, how can anything else exist? Two different entities (G-d and that which is not G-d) cannot occupy the same space. The kabbalistic answer is that the very act of creation involved a self-limitation on the part of G-d. G-d, as it were, contracted His presence so that finitude-space and time and the things that occupy them-could emerge.

The Hebrew word for space and time, olam (which means both "universe", i.e. the totality of space, and "eternity", i.e. the totality of time) also means "hidden" as in the word ne'elam. Thus embedded in the Hebrew language is the idea that space and time are dimensions of the hiddenness of G-d, who is beyond space and time.

Yet were G-d entirely hidden from the universe it would be, experientially and functionally, as if He did not exist. At best Deism would be true (that G-d set creation in motion and thereafter did not intrude into the universe). G-d would be a Deus absconditus, a creator who deserted humanity.

Thus the very terms of creation involve a paradox. Without G-d the universe would not exist; but the presence of G-d threatens the existence of anything apart from him. "No man," says G-d, "can see me and live."

To this the Torah has an answer at once simple and profound. The universe was created in six days; yet creation itself involved seven days. The seventh day is declared by G-d himself to be holy-meaning, henceforth it will become the window in time through which we see the presence of G-d.

How do we do so? By renouncing our own status as creators (on Shabbat all melakhah meaning "creative work" is forbidden). On Shabbat we are passive rather than active. We become creations, not creators. We renounce making in order to experience ourselves as made. Shabbat is the room we make for G-d within time.

Likewise the tabernacle. Essentially this was a large portable tent, a framework and its hangings. Wherever it was erected, it defined a certain space as holy, meaning, set aside for G-d. Within that space nothing was to intervene between the worshipper and G-d. In particular, priests had to avoid contact with death or anything resembling it, since death is peculiarly human -- as in the term "mortal"-while G-d represents life. The Tabernacle is the room we make for G-d within space.

The immensely detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle and its service (like the equally detailed laws of Shabbat) are there to signal that nothing in holiness is the result of human initiative. To occupy holy space or time is to renounce human creativity so as to be existentially open to divine creativity. That is why Nadav and Avihu died because they brought an offering "that was not commanded." The holy is space / time as defined by divine not human will. We enter G-d's domain on his terms not ours. That is not a consequence of holiness but its very meaning.

Thus, not every time or space is holy. That is of the essence. A world in which all time was Sabbatical, or in which all space had the sanctity of the Tabernacle, would be one in which human beings could not exist as human beings. There would be neither time nor space for human endeavour or achievement. That is precisely what G-does not want to happen. He welcomes human work. That is what the Torah means when it says that we are created in G-d's image, meaning that we, like G-d, are creative. We, like G-d, are capable of imagining a world that is not yet and bringing it into being.

However, if no time or space were holy, the opposite danger would exist, namely that a world in which G-d is hidden would be one in which, for many people, G-d does not exist. This would be a world with no limits on human self-assertion-always the prelude to political, military, economic or environmental disaster. Therefore there must be some window-some point of transparency-in the screen between the infinite and the finite. That is what holiness is.

Holiness is the space we make for G-d. In the simplest and most elegant way, holiness is to humanity what tsimtsum is to G-d. Just as G-d effaces himself to make space for mankind, so we efface ourselves to make space for G-d. We do this by a temporary renunciation of creativity. Holiness is that bounded emptiness filled by the divine presence.

This idea was utterly incomprehensible to the Hellenistic mind. When the Greeks and Romans first encountered Jews, they could not understand Shabbat. They knew the concept of a holy day-every religion has such days. What they had never before encountered was a day made holy by rest, a day of being rather than doing. Many of them expressed their candid opinion that Jews observed the Shabbat because they were lazy. That was the only explanation they could give.

Likewise, an ancient tradition states that when the Roman General Pompey invaded Jerusalem and entered the Temple he was amazed to find that the holy of holies was empty. He expected to find in it the Israelites' holiest idol. The idea that empty space-like empty time-might be holy was beyond him.

Holiness is the space we make for the Otherness of G-d-by listening, not speaking; by being, not doing; by allowing ourselves to be acted on rather than acting. It means disengaging from that flow of activity whereby we impose our human purposes on the world, thereby allowing space for the divine purpose to emerge. All holiness is a form of renunciation, but since G-d desires the existence of human beings as responsible and creative beings, he does not ask for total renunciation. Thus some times are holy, not all; some spaces are holy, not all; some people are holy, not all. All nations contain holy individuals. What makes Israel unique is that it is a holy nation, meaning, a nation all of whose members are summoned to holiness. It was the first faith to see holiness as a property not of a sacred elite but of national life itself.

The concept of a nation is fundamental to Judaism, because the nation is a basic unit of culture. As a socio-political entity, it constructs its own form of order through law, ritual, and custom. It is where many smaller groupings, families and communities, come together to construct the basic terms of their common life. And G-d wants his presence to inform public life -- otherwise he would have limited his concerns to the individual and the soul.

Judaism knows the faith of individuals. That is what Bereishith is about. The Book of Psalms is the eternal lexicon of the soul in dialogue with G-d. Judaism also knows the faith of humanity as such. That is the meaning of the first eleven chapters of Bereishith and their culmination in the Noahide covenant, the covenant G-d makes with all mankind. But its great concerns are with the life we construct together and the terms on which we do so: justice, compassion, human dignity, peace, the limited and proper conduct of war, care for the dependent, welfare for the poor, concern for the long term viability of the environment, above all, the rule of law in which strong and weak, powerful and powerless, are subject to the same code of conduct applied equally to all. These institutions and ideals are essentially political; hence they require the constitution of a nation as a political entity.

That is the meaning of the phrase goi kadosh a holy nation. At Sinai the Jewish people, until then a mere aggregate of individuals, linked by family, memory and the experience of exodus, became a body politic with the Torah as its written constitution. The word goi-like its cognate term geviyah-means "a body." It is a metaphor for a group of individuals whose relationship to one another is as of the limbs to a body. Sinai creates the terms of collective existence. Henceforth the Israelites are implicated in one another's fate.

The word kadosh in this context therefore designates a third emptiness, not time (Shabbat), nor space (the Tabernacle) but the empty throne (cathedra, seat of authority). The place occupied in other nations by the monarch, ruler or Pharaoh, is, in the case of Israel, to be left empty for G-d. Israel is to become a republic of faith under His direct sovereignty. He is the author of its constitution, the framer of its rules, the one who guides it through its long journeys, sustains it in hours of need, and gives it hope in times of crisis. The

essence of the Sinai revelation is that the Israelites become the first-indeed the only-nation formed on the basis of a covenant with G-d.

Hence the significance of the setting: in the wilderness. All other nations become nations because they have lived together for a long time in the territory they see as home. Whether through war, assassination, coup d'?tat, plebiscite or general acclaim they elect an individual or group to be their leader, and a political structure which determines relationships between rulers and ruled.

Israel becomes a nation prior to all these things. It has not yet reached its land. It does not yet have a king. These things lie far ahead in the future. Sinai constitutes the creation of a nation long in advance of those things that normally lead to the birth of a nation, because it is not a normal nation but a holy one.

What then does it mean to be a holy nation? At least the following:

[1] Jewish history will continually point to something beyond itself, something that cannot be explained by the usual laws of history. That is what Moses means when he says: "Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day G-d created man on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of?... Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your G-d did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?"

This too is the meaning of Isaiah's remarkable statement: "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am G-d." 4 In its collective fate and destiny Israel will constitute the most compelling evidence of Divine involvement in human history. It will reach heights of achievement, and sometimes depths of degradation, that have no counterpart in the fate of other nations. As Tolstoy once wrote, "The Jew is the emblem of eternity."

[2] Jewish law-the eternal structure of its collective existence-will bear witness to its more-than-human character. Hence Moses' statement: "See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my G-d commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this 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'... What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?"

The graciousness of its welfare legislation, and the lucidity of its (unremittingly anti-mythological) faith will bespeak a social order more than human in its sheer humanity. As Matthew Arnold wrote: "As long as the world lasts, all who want to make progress in righteousness will come to Israel for inspiration, as to the people who have had the sense for righteousness most glowing and strongest."

[3] It will be a nation that recognises in all its laws the existence of something beyond itself. Thus the very land it inhabits will not be its own but G-d's ("The land shall not be sold in perpetuity because the land is Mine"). All forms of rulership, whether of judges, elders or monarchs, will be limited by the overarching sovereignty of G-d; hence the moral right of prophets to criticise kings and "speak truth to power." Israel will know no absolutes-not the state nor the individual nor the status quo-for there is only one absolute, namely G-d himself. This single fact will save it, in the course of history, from tyranny on the one hand, anarchy on the other, but it will always be the enemy of tyrants, because it will always refuse to worship anything less than G-d himself.

[4] Its governance will always rest on consent rather than obedience to power. This fact is implicit at Sinai, where G-d himself had to secure the assent of the people before giving it its laws (The Talmud entertains the possibility that G-d coerced the Israelites into agreement-by "suspending the mountain over their heads"-but then immediately concludes that if this were so, the covenant would be null and void). At more than one time in Jewish history, the need for consent has threatened to make the Jewish people virtually ungovernable. Despite this, Jews never compromised on that principle. Judaism is thus hyper-democratic-sometimes a political weakness, but always an assertion of human dignity.

[5] Historically, the most remarkable outcome of the Sinai covenant was that even when they lost their land and sovereignty, Jews did not cease to be a nation-because they became a nation before they reached the land or acquired sovereignty. In exile they became the world's first global people, the first virtual nation, defined not by shared territory, fate, culture, political system or even spoken language, but purely by a covenant enacted by their ancestors more than a thousand years earlier.

Kadosh therefore means: that which in itself points beyond itself. It means the time which signals eternity (Shabbat), the space which intimates being-beyond-space (the Tabernacle), and the nation whose history and way of life bespeak something outside the normal parameters of history and ways of life.

In one of my favourite quotations, the American writer Milton Himmelfarb once wrote:

"Each Jew knows how thoroughly ordinary he is; yet taken together, we seem caught up in the things great and inexplicable... The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seemed to happen around us and to us."

That is as good a way as any of saying what it means to be a holy nation.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house, your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's." [Ex. 20:14]

How are we to understand the tenth commandment?

Indeed its very appearance in the Ten Commandments is odd. Up until now the commandments have dealt with actions: what one is commanded to do and what one is forbidden to do. For example, we must remember the Sabbath by sanctifying it with Kiddush, we must honor our parents, we may not commit adultery, we may not steal. But now the tenth commandment brings us into the realm not of action but of feelings and emotions, the inner desires and fantasies that willy nilly enter our minds at all times of the day and night and over which we generally believe we have no control.

How can the Torah presume to legislate our emotions?

The "Sefer Hachinuch" sidesteps the issue by linking this command, as well, to action. He writes: "The commandment 'You shall not covet' is not transgressed until an action is taken." He arrives at this conclusion based on an interpretation of a verse in Deuteronomy [7:25]. The Sefer Hachinuch is not only saying that in order to be culpable for the sin of envy, one must act on his cupidity by taking something from someone else; he is essentially teaching that the emotion of envy EMERGES from the action of theft. When an individual becomes habituated to appropriate objects which do not belong to him, he will also find himself coveting more and more objects of his neighbors; and conversely, the individual who would never touch someone else's possession will stop being desirous of anything he himself does not own or cannot acquire.

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi expresses a similar idea with the principle that 'after the act, the heart follows', which is basically saying that the heart is a follower, not a leader; emotions follow actions, and not the other way around.

This concept is further evident in Nahmanides' comment on the verse, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" [Lev. 19:18]. In Hebrew the word, 'your neighbor' appears with a 'lamed' as a prefix, 'leraiacha'; which literally means "towards your neighbor". Apparently, suggests Nahmanides, the Torah is suggesting that we first act towards our neighbor as if we loved him as ourselves; "whatever is hateful unto us, we dare not do to him." As a result of such positive action, ultimately the emotional feelings will emerge as well. Proper action is the initial key; afterwards the right emotions will follow.

Therefore from this perspective, in order to achieve a desired emotional state, one must first take those steps in action which are concomitant with the desired emotion. For example, if an individual is addicted to smoking, which he knows is harmful to his body and which is therefore prohibited by Jewish Law, hypnosis is one technique for getting people to give up smoking. What must happen is cold turkey stoppage of taking a cigarette. The longer the body is able to resist the tobacco drug, the greater likelihood that the heart will follow and the addiction will weaken and go away altogether.

The Ibn Ezra has a second approach to the tenth commandment. He is a rationalist, who believes that not only is it possible for the intellect to control emotions but it is mandatory that this be the case. The example the Ibn Ezra gives is that of a country hick who never covets the Princess of the realm; he 'knows' and understands that she is unavailable to him. We must have the ability to engage our intellect to control our emotion, "mind over matter".

Maimonides takes a similar approach in his analysis of the sin of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden [Guide for the Perplexed, first chapters]. He symbolically interprets the serpent as representing the evil instinct, Eve as representing the emotional desire, and the Divine will as representing the intellect. The Bible is teaching us the critical importance of training ourselves in such a way that our rational knowledge gain dominion over our instincts and emotions.

In Judaism, the system of Lithuanian Talmudic scholarship represents the rule of reason over emotion; indeed my teacher and mentor Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik attempts to describe and understand this particular approach in his magnum opus "Halachic Man". He recounts a tragic moment when the beloved daughter of his great- grandfather was dying. The great Sage, who certainly loved his daughter most profoundly, understood, as he stood at her bedside at the crack of dawn, that she had only a very short amount of time to live. He calculated that there would be just enough time for him to put on t'filin and recite the Sh'ma before her sweet soul would depart from her body and render him forbidden from t'fillin and prayer; he garnered the inner strength to suspend his emotions for the requisite period of prayer, and then tended to his daughter's burial. Undoubtedly this required almost super-human ability to control emotional feelings. But the goal of the Lithuanian yeshiva world was to accomplish just that.

If we return to our cigarette addict, this school of thought would suggest teaching the ills of cigarette smoking, showing slides of what smoke-and-nicotine filled lungs look like, and documenting the correlation between lung cancer and cigarette smoking. One's

intellect must teach the reprehensibility of cigarette smoking.

A third approach to the tenth commandment is provided by Rabbenu BaHiya in "Duties of the Heart" and has been magnificently developed by Hassidut. This School of Philosophy, Education and Religious Life Style emphasizes the necessity of teaching and directing the emotions themselves.

This is what lies at the heart of the Friday night hassidic "tish" (table). The meal becomes like a sacrificial offering to G-d, the singing recalls the Levites in the Temple, and the Rebbe, leading the ceremonious meal, is like the High Priest bringing the holy sacrifices. All of one's senses must be nourished and nurtured in Divine Service: song, dance, taste, smell—all join together in religious prayer and ceremony. The emotions are not to be repressed by the intellect; the emotions are rather to be trained and redirected. It is possible to command an individual not to covet someone else's wife or someone else's villa by teaching him to covet someone else's spirituality and someone else's kindliness.

And as far as our smoker is concerned, if an individual feels he "must" have a smoke after each meal, why not try substituting his favorite symphony or a Shlomo Carlebach cassette along with desert? The new mood engendered by the music may serve to refine and enable the desires of the addict so that his yearning for cigarettes will hopefully dissipate.

Which is the best educational approach? The truth is that there are many gates to the Divine and many keys to the human soul. The sensitive educator will utilize all three—or any one which a particular person will find effective for him. Torah must speak to the intellect, the emotions, and the actions—all at the same time.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Man Over Moses

Parshas Yisro begins by relating how impressed its namesake, Yisro, (Jethro) is upon hearing the amazing events that transpired to the nation led by his son-in-law, Moshe. He decides to convert to Judaism. Yisro sends word to Moshe that he will soon be arriving at the Israelite camp. Yisro wants Moshe to leave his post and greet him in the desert before he arrives at the Israelite camp. The Torah tells us that Moshe did go out to greet Yisro: "the man bowed and kissed him and asked the peace of his dear one." (Exodus 18:8)

Rashi is bothered by the ambiguity. "Who bowed to whom? Who kissed whom? Who was the one to make the gesture? Was it Yisro, the father-in-law, who kissed Moshe, or did Moshe, the son-in-law, leader of millions of people, run to greet his father in-law a Midianite priest, and bow and kiss him?

Rashi quotes the Mechilta which refers us to Bamidbar (Numbers 12:3) where Moshe is called "the man Moshe" obviously the words, "the man bowed and kissed him" in our portion must mean that same man—Moshe.

Why, however, did the Torah choose a seemingly convoluted way to tell us that Moshe prostrated himself before his father-in-law? Would it not have been easier to tell us that "Moshe man bowed and kissed him and asked the peace of his dear one"? Why did the Torah use the words "the man" and send us to the Book of Numbers to learn who "the man" was?

Last year my brother, Rabbi Zvi Kamenetzky of Chicago, tried to contact a friend who was vacationing at Schechter's Caribbean Hotel in Miami Beach, Florida. After about 15 rings, the hotel operator, an elderly, southern black woman, who worked at the hotel for three decades politely informed my brother that the man was not in the room. "Would you like to leave a message?" she inquired.

"Sure," responded Reb Zvi, "tell him that Rabbi Kamenetzky, called."

The woman at the other end gasped. "Raabbi Kaamenetzky?" she drawled. "Did you say you were Raabbi Kaamenetzky?" She knew the name! It sounded as if she was about to follow up with a weighty question, and my brother responded in kind. "Yes." He did not know what would follow. "Why do you ask?"

"Are you," asked the operator, "by any chance, related to the famous Rabbi Kamenetzky?"

There was silence in Chicago. My brother could not imagine that this woman had an inkling of who his grandfather, the great sage. Dean of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath to whom thousands had flocked for advice and counsel, was. She continued. "You know, he passed away about ten years ago at the end the wintah?" She definitely had her man, thought Reb Zvi. Still in shock, he offered a subdued, "Yes, I'm a grandson."

"YOOOU ARE?" she exclaimed, "well I'm sure glad to talk to ya! Cause your grandpa—he was a real good friend of mine!"

My brother pulled the receiver from his ear and stared at the mouthpiece. He composed himself and slowly began to repeat her words, quizzically. "You say that Rabbi Kamenetzky was a good friend of yours?"

"Sure! Every mornin' Raabbi Kaaamenetzky would come to this here hotel to teach some sorta Bible class (It was the Daf-Yomi.) Now my desk is about ten yards from the main entrance of the hotel. But every mornin' he made sure to come my way, nod his head, and say good mornin' to me. On his way out, he would always stop by my desk and say good-bye. Oh! Yes! He was a great Rabbi but he was even a greater man. He was a wonderful man. He was a real good friend of mine!"

The Torah could have told us the narrative an easier way. It could have told us that Moshe bowed before, and kissed Yisro. It does more. It tells us that it

was a man who kissed Yisro. True, it was Moshe that performed those actions. But they were not the actions of a Moses, they were the actions of a mentch!

Often we attribute acts of kindness, compassion, and extra care to super-human attributes of our sages and leaders. The Torah tells us that it is the simple mentch that performs them. Inside every great leader lies "the man." Little wonder that the words "and the man Moses" that Rashi quotes from the Book of Numbers begin a verse that fits our explanation quite well. The verse reads "and the man Moses was the exceedingly humble, more than any one on the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3) It was the man Moses, who was exceedingly humble, more than any one on the face of the earth.

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Contributing editor Daniel Dadusc

R' Simlai taught: "Hashem commanded 613 mitzvot to Moshe -- 365 negative commandments, corresponding to the days of the solar year, and 248 positive commandments, corresponding to the parts of a man's body." R' Hamnuna taught: "What verse alludes to this? 'Moshe commanded the Torah to us...' The gematria of 'vru,'/'Torah' is 611. Add to this 'I am Hashem' and 'You shall not have any other gods,' which we heard from G-d's mouth, and you have 613 commandments." (Tractate Makkot 23b-24a)

Regarding the two commandments which Bnei Yisrael heard directly from Hashem, Rashi comments, "G-d spoke one and we heard two." This alludes to Chazal's teaching that Hashem spoke the commandments simultaneously and the Jewish people miraculously heard them as separate statements.

Unlike humans, who have many different body parts, Hashem is indivisible. It is thus fitting that Hashem spoke the commandments all at once, undifferentiated from each other. On the other hand, we, who have many organs, received the Torah as 613 mitzvot; as the verse says, "Moshe commanded the Torah— i.e., the many mitzvot—to us." Indeed, as the above gemara expressly notes, the 248 positive commandments correspond to the parts of the human body. Elsewhere we are taught that the 365 negative commandments correspond to 365 tendons or nerves in the human body.

In this light, we can understand the perplexing continuation of the above gemara. The gemara teaches: "King David came along and condensed the commandments to eleven. The prophet Michah further condensed them to three. The prophet Yishayah further condensed them to two. Finally, the prophet Chabakuk condensed them to one, i.e., 'A tzaddik will live by his faith'." How are we to understand this?

Just as all 248 organs and 365 tendons and nerves operate properly in a healthy body, so a healthy soul is one that observes all 248 positive commandments and all 365 negative commandments. However, even if a person becomes ill and parts of his body cease to function, there is still hope for his recovery so long as certain essential organs are healthy. Similarly, the gemara is teaching, there is hope for every person, even a sinner, so long as he still observes certain essential mitzvot. How many are those mitzvot? According to King David, they are eleven; according to Michah— three; according to Yishayah— two; and according to Chabakuk—one, i.e., emunah/faith. Chababkuk taught that a person who has ceased to observe all mitzvot—though he is spiritually ill—may yet recover from his illness if he retains his emunah.

In this way we can understand, as well, the story of the would- be convert who insisted on learning the whole Torah while standing on one leg. The sage Hillel told him, "That which is hateful to you do not do unto others. The rest is commentary; go learn it." Hillel did not mean that a person may be called Torah-observant if he merely treats others as he wishes to be treated. Rather, Hillel meant that if the convert would master this one mitzvah, he would subsequently grow into the others.

Of course, one should not use the foregoing explanation as an excuse to lessen the number of mitzvot that he observes. The mishnah teaches, "Hashem wanted to provide merit to the Jewish people, so He gave them many mitzvot." Rambam explains that because there are so many mitzvot, it is inevitable that a person will do one mitzvah correctly and will thereby merit a portion in the World-to-Come. Were there fewer mitzvot (or were one to observe fewer mitzvot), one's chances of succeeding at even one mitzvah would be dramatically less. In the end, though, it may be just one mitzvah, done perfectly, which guarantees a person his place in the World-to-Come. Even the great Talmudic sage R' Chaninah ben Teradyon, after he was told that he would die a martyr's death at the hands of the Romans, asked, "Will I merit a place in the World-to-Come?" The answer that he was given was that he had earned his place in the World-to-Come, not by teaching Torah at risk to his life, but because of one unusual act of charity which he had performed (See Avodah Zarah 18a). [Most people, however, will not know in their lifetime what their most successful mitzvah was.] (Yad Haketanah: Introduction) [Note: Yad Haketanah is an anonymously written early 19th century commentary on Rambam's Mishneh Torah.]