

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

YITRO

FEBRUARY 1-2, 2013

22 SHEBAT 5773

**DEDICATION : In memory of Eliyahu ben Esther - Eli Bibi, 21 Shebat
and in memory of Sarina bat Victoria - Sally (Gindi) Azrak 24 Shebat
HAPPY BIRTHDAY MONIQUE and ELLEN HADDAD –
HAPPY ANNIVERSARY ELLEN AND ISAAC**

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Editors Notes

This week we read the Torah portion that includes
the Aseret HaDibrot, known as the Ten
Commandments. The portion is named for Yitro. Yitro
was the father-in-law of Moses and is often referred
to as the first righteous convert.

I began writing an article relating to conversion, but
its incomplete and too long. So I had a choice. Either
shelve the article or forget about getting a newsletter
out this week. I chose the former and hope to keep
writing and then doing something I don't often do,
editing it.

I'll let you know what happens next week.

In the meantime my daughter Mikhayla sent me an
excellent article by Daniel Gordis which the author
suggests that Prime Minister Netanyahu should send
to Eric Yoffie, but will not.

Let me know your thoughts.

At the end of the newsletter is an article I wrote for
this portion a few years ago.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

**The Letter that Netanyahu Should, but Won't,
Send - A Jerusalem Post Column January 25,
2013 by Daniel Gordis**

Eric Yoffie, past president of the Union for Reform
Judaism, recently published an open letter to Prime
Minister Binyamin Netanyahu demanding that he
advance Jewish religious pluralism in Israel.

"[The] failure of Israel to offer recognition and support
for the streams of Judaism with which the great
majority of American Jews identify is nothing less
than a disgrace," Yoffie wrote. "American Jews...have
had enough. [T]hey will no longer tolerate that
Reform and Conservative rabbis are scorned and
despised in Israel; they will no longer sit silently while
Israel's official representatives offend them and
denigrate their religious practices.... The angry voices
are... coming from the heart of American Jewish
leadership."

He suggested, "You could point out that only two
million of the 13.5 million Jews in the world are
Orthodox, and that the overwhelming majority of
American Jews come from the Reform and
Conservative streams. You could say that these
streams are the heart of our Jewish family and the
core of Jewish support for Israel." What follows is the
response that Netanyahu should send, but won't.

Dear Rabbi Yoffie,
Thank you very much for your thoughtful letter. You
have dedicated your life to leading American Jewry
with wisdom and passion, and I'm honored that we're
discussing these matters openly.

Let me begin with the bottom line: I am committed to
addressing the issues that you raise. I will address
inequality in allocations to non-Orthodox synagogues,
will ensure that non-Orthodox rabbis are invited in
official capacities to state events, and yes, I will invite
non-Orthodox rabbis to teach at my Bible study
sessions. I will do that not only because it is the right
thing to do, but frankly because it would also be good
for Orthodoxy. What American Jewish life has in
abundance - and that Israeli religious life lacks almost
entirely - is an open marketplace
of ideas.

Because Orthodoxy in America has no state backing,
its leaders must attract their followers with visions of
Jewish life that speak to the intellectual, moral,
emotional and national instincts of American Jews.
American Judaism is richer for that; I would like to
play a role in freeing Orthodoxy in Israel from the
power base that actually stifles its creativity.

At the same time, Rabbi Yoffie, it's instructive that you warned me to act before I am "forced to act by the courts." You may be right that the courts would eventually rule in your favor. But your threat of going the judicial route is tantamount to admission that this issue has no political traction. Isn't that worth noting? Why are so many more Israelis concerned about the rights of Israel's Arabs than they are about the rights of Reform (or Conservative) Judaism in Israel? The reasons are many. But central among them is that Israelis are far from convinced that the vision of Jewish life that Reform Judaism offers can survive.

They see epidemic levels of intermarriage, which they know will destroy the Jewish people. They see the wealthiest, most socially accepted, and best secularly educated Diaspora community that the Jews have ever known producing the most Jewishly ignorant community in Jewish history. They see that outside Orthodoxy in America, virtually no young Jews are conversant with Jewish texts. They know that in most non- Orthodox Jewish homes, one will not find a Mikra'ot Gedolot, a Talmud or any of the other books that have, for centuries, been the backbone of the most basic Jewish discourse. Even non-Orthodox Israelis (who exhibit many of these same qualities) sense this, and worry. Pushed to the wall, they would admit that you are right that inclusion is only fair; but they would also note that they simply don't care that much, because they seriously doubt that many of the grandchildren of today's young non-Orthodox Diaspora Jews will live lives committed to the Jewish People.

You urge me to explore how Reform and Conservative Jews can be drawn into a deeper relationship with Israel, and I will. But let's stipulate what you and I both already know. For Israel to matter to Jews, Jews must see themselves first and foremost as a people, not merely as a religion. Religions don't have states; peoples do. The French have a country, but Baptists do not. The Italians have a state, but Methodists do not. As American non-Orthodox Judaism increasingly recasts itself as a religion in the image of American Protestantism, it is inevitable that the Jewish commitment to statehood will wither.

Rabbi Yoffie, please do not misunderstand me. I know that Orthodoxy also has much soul-searching to do. Many non- Orthodox Israelis are appalled by what's become of Judaism in Israel. There is often an ugly, even racist quality to some sectors of the Orthodox community, and I wish that our chief rabbis and Diaspora Orthodox leaders spoke out against it more. Ostensibly religious Jews often speak about Arabs in ways that are despicable; in part of the

community, the attitude toward women is reprehensible. All too often, intellectual narrowness comes with singular devotion to the study of Jewish texts; how I wish that the graduates of our yeshivot were interested in studying Aristotle alongside Maimonides and John Locke alongside Tractate Sanhedrim. But that rarely happens. Too many of the products of Israel's religious educational system have little interest in anything outside the tradition. Israel can, and must, be better than that. We all need to do serious soul-searching.

Whatever form of Judaism is going to safeguard the future of the Jews into the mid-21st century, it is going to have to be infinitely more grounded in Jewish learning, practice and peoplehood than the vast majority of American Reform and Conservative Judaism's laypeople are, but far more morally nuanced and open to the intellectual richness of the West than much of Orthodoxy is. All of us, Israelis and Diaspora Jews, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, are living in an era of collapsing worldviews. Israelis despair of ever seeing peace, and our politics are a response to that disappointment. Our religious worldviews are also collapsing.

You yourself delivered a deeply moving sermon at the Reform Biennial last year, in which you spoke publicly about how one of your two children has found a home in Orthodoxy, while the other is not involved in the religious dimension of Jewish life. You gave that courageous speech, I believe, because you wanted the 5,000 Reform Jews who attended the biennial not to rest on their laurels, but to recognize that for all its success, Reform Judaism is in danger of being unable to sustain the level of Jewish commitment that any serious Jewish future requires. So let's work together. I'll do as you suggest and work toward greater inclusion. But you, in the meantime, must engender a serious conversation among American Jews about whether or not the varieties of Judaism that they so desperately want validated in Israel can actually sustain a Jewish future. Many Israelis suspect that they cannot, and I know that you share their concern. We need each other - we need each other's validation, but we also need each other's critique. I hope that this exchange is but the beginning of an ongoing exchange of ideas, and look forward to working together for the sake of our people's future.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Yisro brings Moshe's wife and two sons to join him in the desert. In 18:10, Yisro proclaims his belief in Hashem (G-d) and identifies His manifest

justice as the primary motive for his belief and conversion.

2nd & 3rd Aliyot: Yisro observes Moshe's daily schedule as chief administrator, judge, and teacher. He advises his son-in-law to delegate some responsibilities to a hierarchy of worthy judges and administrators. This would allow Moshe to focus his attention on those issues that demand his specific attention. Moshe listens to Yisro's advice.

4th Aliya: This begins the preparation for Revelation. It is the 1st day of Sivan, and the Bnai Yisroel have been in the desert for 43 days. Moshe is told by Hashem to explain to the nation that they are a "kingdom of priests..."

5th Aliya: Moshe tells the nation of G-d's expectations and they respond, "all that Hashem will command we will do." Moshe is further instructed to tell the people to prepare themselves by immersing themselves and their clothing in a Mikveh, and to remain apart from their spouses for 3 days. Mt. Sinai is to be fenced off so that no person or animal could ascend the mountain until the shofar sounded the conclusion of Revelation. On the 3rd day, Revelation began with lightning, thunder, the sounding of a Shofar, and Mt. Sinai completely engulfed in clouds, smoke, and fire. Moshe led the nation to assemble at the foot of a trembling Mt. Sinai.

6th Aliya: Hashem summoned Moshe to ascend the mountain and instructed him to re-emphasize the prohibition against anyone ascending the mountain during Revelation. Moshe descends and discharges G-d's wishes. With Moshe standing among the people at the foot of the mountain, Hashem spoke the Ten Commandments to the entire people.

7th Aliya: This last Aliya describes the reaction of the nation to Revelation. In 20:19, the Pasuk factually states that the Bnai Yisroel (Jewish Nation) collectively heard G-d speak. It is among the most fundamentally important statements in the entire Torah. The Parsha concludes with the three commandments regarding the Mizbeach (Altar).

This week's Haftorah is from Yishaya 6 and 7. (Sephardim read only Yeshayahu 6:1- 13). Continuing the theme of Revelation, the Haftorah recounts the famed vision known as Maaseh Hamerkavah - the vision of Hashem as He sits upon His throne surrounded by various angels singing His praises.

Yishaya prophesied during the reign of Achaz, the King of Yehudah. This vision is repeated in greater

detail in Yechezkel, and is usually associated with Yechezkel, rather than Yishaya. However, in this awesome vision, Yishaya is told of the eventual destruction of Yerushalayim. He is sent to relate this prophecy to the new King Achaz, who would prove to be an evil and wicked monarch.

The concluding prophecy is far more optimistic than the beginning one. Achaz is told not to fear the coming war with Aram and Israel. In the merit of his, yet to be born son, Chizkiyahu, their alliance would fail. Chizkiyahu would eventually be crowned as "The Prince of Peace," and return the Jewish people to an unprecedented devotion and commitment to Torah scholarship and observance. Unfortunately, the Jewish People would return to their evil ways and Yerushalayim would be destroyed

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“Moshe took out the nation to face Hashem from the camp.” (Shemot 19:17)

On the morning of the day that the Jewish people received the Torah, the people woke up to frighteningly loud sounds of thunder and blinding flashes of lightning. Moshe moved around the camp to bring the people out from the safety of their tents to face Hashem.

The Ben Ish Hai says our pasuk is out of order. It should say that the nation came out of the camp to face Hashem. Instead it says that Moshe took out the nation to face Hashem from the camp. Therefore he suggests that the Torah is alluding to the fact that all the souls of future generations were also present at Matan Torah. Moshe took out the “nation facing Hashem” – the souls that were still waiting in their place beneath the Heavenly Throne – besides the people “from the camp” and brought both groups to the foot of the mountain.

Rabbi Moshe Mizrahi explains that this is the meaning of the Midrash that says that every word of Torah that every scholar would introduce to the body of Torah literature in all generations was already given at Sinai. Each of these scholars gained his Torah knowledge directly from Hashem, through Moshe Rabenu, at Har Sinai. Each scholar was there and the hidushim (new ideas) that he discussed during his stay in this world was taught to his soul at Har Sinai.

Hashem knew that true sadikim would be few in number and so he spread them through the generations, each one at a time when his contributions would be most appropriate. The Torah

teachings of these great ones are more than another link in the chain of Torah tradition; their teachings came to them directly from Har Sinai. They are our direct connection to Har Sinai and by obeying their instructions we connect directly to that unbelievable event of the giving of the Torah! Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And Yitro heard." (Shemot 18:1)

This is the perashah which tells us about the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, perhaps the greatest event that ever took place in the world. Wouldn't it be proper to have the entire perashah devoted to that special occurrence, rather than begin with Yitro joining the Jewish? What was so important about Yitro that this had to precede Matan Torah?

The answer is the first word - *g@n\$J°H³u* - and he heard! The Torah is teaching us that if we don't hear, we will not be able to receive the Torah. Hearing means being able to concentrate and focus on someone else and not only on ourselves. It means to accept that we're not perfect and we can hear advice and criticism. The whole world was aware that the Jews came out of Egypt with great miracles but did nothing about it. Yitro, however, heard and came. Because he was willing to truly hear and understand, he changed his own life and ultimately gave some very useful advice to Moshe. That is why the giving of the Torah must be preceded by the story of Yitro, to teach us what hearing can bring.

We often ask others how they are, but do we really hear their answers? Our kids are constantly talking to us, but are we truly listening? Even if we do allow the words of others to enter our ears, do we hear "between the lines"? Let us learn from Yitro to truly hear and listen to what's around us and this will make our lives a little bit better. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

IT IS NOT MY JOB

People often pride themselves on being good judges of character. The truth is, however, that fathoming the true nature of another person requires a perceptive eye and a sensitive "nose." Many will admit, after all is said and done, how wrong they were when evaluating a job candidate by means of the resume-interview process. The person who was "so perfect" for the position sometimes fails terribly and needs to be fired, while the employee who was hired with reluctance sometimes turns out to be one of the stars of the company.

Evaluating a human being is a complex process with staggering, mind-boggling variables. No one can assess the challenges another has had to face, or accurately measure another person's true value or abilities. It is very difficult to judge potential against achievement. That is Hashem's business, and His alone. It's never a good idea to play Hashem. When you judge another, judge leniently, and when you are evaluating yourself, be tough.

Our Sages teach that those who judge others favorably are given the benefit of the doubt when Heaven is judging them. When you take a critical view of other people's behavior, give them a break! This is not your job. Your job is to constantly review your own behavior and monitor your own self-improvement. By avoiding encroaching on Hashem's job and sticking to your own territory, you will buy yourself the benefit of the doubt in His evaluation of your behavior. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Yitro's Response

In the first section of Parashat Yitro, we read of the arrival of Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, at Beneh Yisrael's camp at Mount Sinai. Yitro is described as "Kohen Midyan" – the priest of the nation of Midyan. He was a prominent clergyman, but he ultimately recognized the truth of the belief in G-d, and went out into the desert to join Moshe and Beneh Yisrael.

Rashi writes that what led Yitro to this decision to join Beneh Yisrael were two miracles of which we read in the previous Parasha, Parashat Beshalah. Namely, he heard about the splitting of the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds), and the war against Amalek. These two great triumphs inspired Yitro and drove him to leave his faith and his people, and to join Beneh Yisrael.

We might ask why Yitro was especially inspired by the war against Amalek. It is easy to understand why the miracle of the sea would have a profound effect; according to one view, this event incorporated 250 miracles, and Beneh Yisrael themselves describe in the Az Yashir song of praise how the nations of the marveled over this miracle. The war against Amalek, however, does not appear to have been such a remarkable event. To be sure, Beneh Yisrael's victory over Amalek was miraculous, but what set this miracle above the numerous other miracles performed for Beneh Yisrael, that it led Yitro to the drastic measure of abandoning his faith and joining them?

There is also another aspect of this story that requires explanation. The Torah relates that before Yitro's arrival at the Israelite camp, he sent a message to Moshe informing him of his imminent arrival, seemingly indicating a request for a large, honorable welcome. Moshe indeed arranges a grand ceremony to welcome Yitro to the camp, and the question arises as to why a noble man like Yitro would request such a reception. Did Yitro really crave public honor, to the point where he asked Moshe to prepare a large reception for him?

The Be'er Yosef explained that Yitro decided to join Beneh Yisrael to counterbalance the effects of Amalek's brazen attack. After the miracle of the Yam Suf, Beneh Yisrael were deemed invincible. The nations around the world were awe-struck by the slave nation that overpowered the mighty Egyptian empire without even taking up arms. Beneh Yisrael were looked upon with dread and reverence, as an untouchable people. Amalek, however, changed that perception. Amalek launched its assault in order to break this aura of invincibility, to demonstrate that Beneh Yisrael are not really that different than other peoples, to show that they, too, are vulnerable to surprise attack and can be dealt a debilitating blow.

Upon hearing of Amalek's attack, Yitro decided to join Beneh Yisrael. This decision was not borne out of inspiration, but rather out of a realization that bold action was needed to rectify the effects of Amalek's assault. Amalek succeeded in lowering Beneh Yisrael's estimation in the eyes of the world, and Yitro therefore responded by doing what he could to bring honor and prestige to Beneh Yisrael. If he, a highly respected pagan priest, would leave his people and join Beneh Yisrael, he figured, the world will notice. Word will spread that this is a special nation that has now emerged on the world scene. It was in response to the epic Hilul Hashem caused by Amalek's assault that Yitro decided to join Beneh Yisrael, out of a determination to do whatever he could to reverse the effects of this attack and restore the sense of awe and grandeur that Beneh Yisrael had achieved after the miracle of the sea.

And this is why Yitro, uncharacteristically, requested a large, public reception. He wanted his arrival to be made as public as possible, in order to achieve his goal. As he was joining Beneh Yisrael for the purpose of restoring their honor and prestige, he wanted his arrival to be made into a public spectacle, rife with pomp and fanfare, so that news of this event would spread far and wide, and people around the world would recognize the greatness and special stature of the Nation of Israel.

Rabbi Wein

There are differing opinions as to when exactly Yitro appeared in the camp of the Israelites in the desert. There are those who follow the rabbinic dictum that one cannot infer chronological order from the juxtaposition of narratives as they appear in the Torah. Rashi definitely adheres to this view in many instances. However Ramban and others maintain that a general chronology of events can correctly be deduced from the order of the narrative portions of the Torah.

According to this latter view, Yitro appears to join the Jewish people before the revelation at Sinai and before the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle. This makes his appearance and newly found commitment to Jewish life and Torah values even more remarkable. Yitro is the epitome of the restless, wandering, curious, seeking soul of humans.

According to Midrash, Yitro experimented with all forms and types of worldly faiths and religions before arriving at Moshe's doorstep in the wilderness of Sinai. And, he exclaims that "only now do I know" what I am searching for and where eternal truth and soulful serenity lie.

All humans embark on the same journey as did Yitro. All of us are looking for the ultimate meaning of our lives and what our purpose on earth truly is. Some of us, like Yitro of old, are forced to take many detours and encounter many dead-end paths before finding our road to fulfillment. Unfortunately, there are many who never find their way clear of the maze of society, mores and the distractions that are the roadblocks to our search for our true selves and purpose. But many of us, again like Yitro, are able to fight our way through our previous errors of direction and reach the sanctuary of a Torah life and a moral existence. Yitro stands as a living and eternal example of this great spiritual accomplishment.

For the Jewish people and, in fact, for all humankind, the Lord simplified the matter with the revelation at Sinai of the Ten Commandments, an event that is described in detail in this week's parsha. These Torah rules address all of the challenges of life – material gain and acquisitions, paganism, falsehoods, generational interaction and respect, sexual probity and family loyalty, a day of rest and spirit and not 24/7 living, honesty and ego-centered jealousy, to name the main categories. In effect the Torah provides for us a shortcut to reach the high road of accomplishment and satisfying purpose in life.

But there are those of us in life that feel themselves smarter and create their own shortcuts in life,

avoiding the lessons of the Ten Commandments. The world's prisons are full of such people. The Torah purposefully placed the Ten Commandments in the parsha of the story of Yitro to illustrate to us that the long road that Yitro was forced to travel in life and God's shortcut lead to the same place – to Moshe's tent and to Mount Sinai.

As always the final choice of belief and behavior is left to each one of us individually. Fortunate are those that adhere to Sinai first and foremost without having to initially traverse the entire world of ideas and beliefs to eventually arrive at Sinai where their soul will be satisfied and their life purpose delineated clearly

Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth

The revelation at Mount Sinai – the central episode not only of the parshah of Yitro, but of Judaism as a whole – was unique in the religious history of mankind. Other faiths (Christianity and Islam) have claimed to be religions of revelation, but in both cases the revelation of which they spoke was to an individual (“the son of G-d”, “the prophet of G-d”). Only in Judaism was G-d's self-disclosure not to an individual (a prophet) or a group (the elders) but to an entire nation, young and old, men, women and children, the righteous and not yet righteous alike.

From the very outset, the people of Israel knew something unprecedented had happened at Sinai. As Moses put it, forty years later:

Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day G-d created man on 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 other people heard the voice of G-d speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? (Deut. 4: 32-33).

For the great Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages, the significance was primarily epistemological. It created certainty and removed doubt. The authenticity of a revelation experienced by one person could be questioned. One witnessed by millions could not. G-d disclosed His presence in public to remove any possible suspicion that the presence felt, and the voice heard, were not genuine.

Looking however at the history of mankind since those days, it is clear that there was another significance also – one that had to do not with religious knowledge but with politics. At Sinai a new kind of nation was being formed and a new kind of

society – one that would be an antithesis of Egypt in which the few had power and the many were enslaved. At Sinai, the children of Israel ceased to be a group of individuals and became, for the first time, a body politic: a nation of citizens under the sovereignty of G-d whose written constitution was the Torah and whose mission was to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Even today, standard works on the history of political thought trace it back, through Marx, Rousseau and Hobbes to Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Politics and the Greek city state (Athens in particular) of the fourth century BCE. This is a serious error. To be sure, words like “democracy” (rule by the people) are Greek in origin. The Greeks were gifted at abstract nouns and systematic thought. However, if we look at the “birth of the modern” – at figures like Milton, Hobbes and Locke in England, and the founding fathers of America – the book with which they were in dialogue was not Plato or Aristotle but the Hebrew Bible. Hobbes quotes it 657 times in *The Leviathan* alone. Long before the Greek philosophers, and far more profoundly, at Mount Sinai the concept of a free society was born.

Three things about that moment were to prove crucial. The first is that long before Israel entered the land and acquired their own system of government (first by judges, later by kings), they had entered into an overarching covenant with G-d. That covenant (brit Sinai) set moral limits to the exercise of power. The code we call Torah established for the first time the primacy of right over might. Any king who behaved contrarily to Torah was acting *ultra vires*, and could be challenged. This is the single most important fact about biblical politics.

Democracy on the Greek model always had one fatal weakness. Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill called it “the tyranny of the majority”. J. L. Talmon called it “totalitarian democracy.” The rule of the majority contains no guarantee of the rights of minorities. As Lord Acton rightly noted, it was this that led to the downfall of Athens: “There was no law superior to that of the state. The lawgiver was above the law.” In Judaism, by contrast, prophets were mandated to challenge the authority of the king if he acted against the terms of the Torah. Individuals were empowered to disobey illegal or immoral orders. For this alone, the covenant at Sinai deserves to be seen as the single greatest step in the long road to a free society.

The second key element lies in the prologue to the covenant. G-d tells Moses: “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of

Israel. 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now, if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, you will be My treasured possession, for the whole earth is Mine. You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation . . .'" Moses tells this to the people, who reply: "We will do everything the Lord has said."

What is the significance of this exchange? It means that until the people had signified their consent, the revelation could not proceed. There is no legitimate government without the consent of the governed, even if the governor is Creator of heaven and earth. I know of few more radical ideas anywhere. To be sure, there were sages in the Talmudic period who questioned whether the acceptance of the covenant at Sinai was completely free. However, at the heart of Judaism is the idea – way ahead of its time, and not always fully realised – that the free G-d desires the free worship of free human beings. G-d, said the rabbis, does not act tyrannically with His creatures.

The third, equally ahead of its time, was that the partners to the covenant were to be "all the people" – men, women and children. This fact is emphasised later on in the Torah in the mitzvah of Hakhel, the septennial covenant renewal ceremony. The Torah states specifically that the entire people is to be gathered together for this ceremony, "men, women and children." A thousand years later, when Athens experimented with democracy, only a limited section of society had political rights. Women, children, slaves and foreigners were excluded. In Britain, women did not get the vote until the twentieth century. According to the sages, when G-d was about to give the Torah at Sinai, He told Moses to consult first with the women and only then with the men ("thus shall you say to the house of Jacob" – this means, the women). The Torah, Israel's "constitution of liberty", includes everyone. It is the first moment, by thousands of years, that citizenship is conceived as being universal.

There is much else to be said about the political theory of the Torah (see my *The Politics of Hope*, *The Dignity of Difference*, and *The Chief Rabbi's Haggadah* as well as the important works by Daniel Elazar and Michael Walzer). But one thing is clear. With the revelation at Sinai something unprecedented entered the human horizon. It would take centuries, millennia, before its full implications were understood. Abraham Lincoln said it best when he spoke of "a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." At Sinai, the politics of freedom was born

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL "You shall not murder." (20:13)

This command is an essential corollary of the First Dictum "I am Hashem." "He that shed the blood of man, by man his blood must be shed, for G-d made man in His image" (Beresheet 9:6). Included in this Dictum is the duty of rescuing a fellowman's life, and also the necessity to guard ones own life in safety and in health. Thus RMBM includes these matters under one heading: "Laws of Murder and of Guarding Life" in which he deals also with the law of Maakeh (unstable ladder) and similar admonitions of safety.

"You shall not kill" even unintentionally. The entire tractate of Makot is here included. And especially today all rules of traffic safety for drivers and pedestrians are certainly intended by this Commandment. The precautions against fire in the home and in public institutions, and the building codes for prevention of fire or collapse, are without question included in this Dictum of Hashem. Parents are here admonished by Hashem to protect children from open windows, burning candles and stove fires and from contracting avoidable illness.

When a husband or wife afflicts a mate so seriously that illness and death are caused, this Commandment has been transgressed. Killing by embarrassment or by depriving of a livelihood is another form of bloodshed. Suicide is also hereby forbidden.

Thus "You shall not kill" Includes: You shall not cause death, or premature death, by neglecting your health or your safety; or by endangering the health or safety of others. One who shortens his own life or his fellowman's life is a transgressor of this Dictum. Even killing a dying man is included here because even one minute of life is sacred.

Therefore when one wastes his life without purpose, or even part of his life, it is a form of transgression of the intent of this Commandment.

EDITORS NOTES: Yitro! Why is one of the most famous portions in the Torah, the one in which the Ten Commandments are given and listed named after a man who bears the title of chief idol priest?

"Can you hear me now?" We think its just a guy in a hardhat doing a Verizon commercial asking that question, but is there more to it? And what about the clichés, "went into one ear and out the other", or "speaking to him is like speaking to a stone"?

In last week's portion of BeShalach, we read that the "nations heard". And this week we begin by learning that Yitro heard. I recall discussing with Rabbi Abittan the concept of hearing and listening. Sometimes we hear words but they have no affect. Sometimes we hear words and we think that we'll act on them, but we don't. And sometimes we hear, we commit and we act on those words.

I recall a story that I heard many years ago from Rabbi Mansour. It took place in Jerusalem in the 20's. The family of Rav Chaim Yehuda Leib Auerbach was moving into a three bedroom apartment. The apartment had been occupied by a number of people including a young man who recently arrived from Europe and was heading off to work at a kibbutz. When the Auerbachs moved in, the young man asked permission to stay for another week. The Auerbachs agreed provided that the man would abide by and respect Shabbat.

On Shabbat the Rebetzin walked by the young man's room only to see him writing a letter. She was upset and asked her son Shlomo Zalman z'sl who would eventually become a gadol hador to speak with the man.

Shlomo Zalman knocked on the door and explained to the man that his mother was upset as the man agreed to observe the Shabbat and obviously was not. The young man was puzzled. He knew on Shabbat one did not work or light a fire, but he wasn't doing anything wrong. Shlomo Zalman explained that writing was a creative act and was not permitted.

The man apologized for not knowing explaining he never learned. But then looked at the Shlomo Zalman and asked. "Do you think I don't know G-d? I do. Come lets take a walk and I'll tell you a story".

"It was during the First World War in Europe. I was a soldier and the battlefields were bloody. We fought from trenches. We on one side and those we were combating on the other. Bullets would fly and every so often there was a brief pause to collect the wounded and the dead. In the trench with me were two religious Jews and during those pauses they sat together reading from small Psalm books they carried with them. Even within the horrors of war they had this aspect of calm that comes from deep faith and I was very jealous. Why didn't my father teach me anything about being Jewish, I whispered to myself. So I turned to Hashem and said to him, if You are really here on this battlefield with us, if you really hear me and care about me, send me a sign and get me out of here. Let a bullet injure my trigger hand so they'll send me back home and I'll survive this war.

A moment later in the midst of the silence a single shot was heard. And that shot struck my right forefinger. You can still see that the finger does not bend. I was sent from the front and was committed to going to a Yeshiva and learning about G-d and everything those other Jews knew that I didn't. G-d had spoken to me in the foxhole and now I would act on it. But once I got home I realized it would take only a short time to get my degree in agriculture so I put off the Yeshiva while I finished my studies at the university.

Six months later, diploma in hand, I set out for the Yeshiva. But the fervor of a miracle in the battlefield had cooled. A few days later I grew bored and left to pursue further studies in agriculture.

Commenting on the story later in life, Rabbi Auerbach observed that sometimes we hear, sometimes the voice is so loud that it penetrates us and we know, but unless we act all is for naught. (Although this young man did make aliyah, and did dedicate himself to the return of the Jewish people to the land and to building the land and I imagine its more than possible that some of his great grandchildren are learning today in a yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael).

Rabbi Mansour quoted the words from Aleynu LeShabeyach we say three times every day. "Veyadata HaYom, VeHashebota LeBabecha". You will know that day and your heart will return.

We may ask for signs and its rare that we get such open and clear responses as the one the soldier got, but if we really pay attention, if we really listen, if we really open our eyes, we can see them. Hashem is always speaking to us. Sometimes it's loud and sometimes its in a whisper, but its there. And when we do hear it and when we do know, its up to us to act.

The entire world heard what Yitro heard. They heard and they feared. They heard and they knew. They heard but failed to act. The opportunity was there for all of them, but the opportunity would pass them by. In the entire world only one man heard and acted. He was Yitro, I guess the portion could have been named for anyone in the world, but in the end it was named for the one man who acted.

We need to remember to get to the place takes many steps. We hear and we know, but the key is to act. The Verizon commercial asks, if you can hear me now. Yes, we can. But the real answer to the question comes from another commercial, it's the one for Nike where we are told, Just do it! So lets learn from Yitro. Today, get up and DO IT!