

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

YITRO

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 6:1-13

FEBRUARY 10-11, 2012

18 SHEBAT 5772

DEDICATIONS : DEDICATION : In memory of Eliyahu ben Esther - Eli Bibi,
and in memory of Sarina bat Victoria - Sally Azrak

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During winter break we spent a day at the Holocaust Museum in Washington. The designers, curators and scholars who put this museum together did an incredible job. It was especially moving for Chantelle who studied for so many years under Yaffa Eliach (may Hashem grant her a refuah shelemah) to see one of her crowning achievements. Our daughter Mikhayla is going to Poland next week. And I was thinking of our trip and her trip when I was handed a long note.

It was a few weeks ago when I received that note and in it, a version of the following story by someone who noted they heard it on the way to a wedding from a cab driver who heard it from a Slonimer Chasid who told him that he knew the two people involved personally. I recalled that the story was printed previously and I may have even told it over in a newsletter. The version below was Told by Harav Moshe Kupetz

shlit"a, and written by Moshe Kormornick posted at ShortVort.com. Its one of those bright lights that came out of one of the darkest periods in our history.

During the Holocaust, a large group of Polish women were rounded up to be sent to the gas chambers. As the group gathered their possessions to take with them into the camp the evil Nazi officers called out to all the villagers who were standing by watching, "Anything that these Jews leave behind you may take for yourselves, because for sure they will not be coming back to collect them!"

Two Polish women who were standing nearby saw a woman towards the back of the group, wearing a large, heavy, expensive coat. Not wanting to wait to see if others got the coat before them, they ran to the woman and knocked her to the ground, grabbing her coat and walked away.

As the Jewish women were being led away, these two Polish women lay down the coat to divide the spoils of what was hiding inside. As they rummaged through the pockets, they discovered gold jewelry, silver candlesticks and other heirlooms, but still, as they lifted the coat it seemed heavier than it should be.

After further inspection they found a secret pocket, and hidden inside the coat was a little baby girl. Shocked at their discovery, one of the women insisted to the other, saying "I don't have any

children, and I'm too old to have now. You take all the gold and silver and let me take the baby". The deal was agreed and the Polish woman took her new 'daughter' home to her delighted husband . They raised the Jewish girl as their own, treating her very well, but never told her anything of her history. The girl excelled in her studies and became a successful pediatrician, working in the top hospital in Poland.

After some years the girl's 'mother' passed away. A week later, she received a knock at the door. An old woman invited herself in and said "I want you to know that the woman that passed away last week was not your real mother..." and she proceeded to tell her the whole story. The girl did not believe her at first but the old woman said to her "When we found you, you were wearing a beautiful gold pendant with strange writing on it which must be Hebrew, I am sure that your mother kept the necklace, go and look" and with that parting advice she left. The girl went into her 'mother's' jewelry box and found the necklace just as the woman described. She had it extended and wore it every day, but thought nothing more of her Jewish roots.

Sometime later, she went on holiday abroad and saw two Lubavitch boys. Seizing the opportunity she told them entire story and showed them the necklace. The boys confirmed that a Jewish name was inscribed on the necklace but did not know what to say about her status.

They recommended that she send a letter to the Lubavitcher Rebbe explaining everything. She sent off the letter and received a speedy reply saying that it is clear from the facts that she is a Jewish girl and since she had a special talent, she should use her invaluable skills in Israel, a place in desperate need of talented pediatricians.

She took the Rebbe's advice and moved to Israel where she approached a Beis Din who declared her Jewish. She was accepted into a hospital to work, and she met her husband and raised a family. Some years later...

When there was a terrorist attack at the Sbarro cafe in the center of Jerusalem in August 2001, this woman was walking nearby with her husband. When she heard of the blast, she told her husband to return home to the kids and she proceeded to rush to the scene where she treated the wounded and helped the injured to the hospital.

When she arrived at the hospital she met an elderly man who was in a state of shock. He was searching everywhere for his granddaughter who had become separated from him. She calmed him down and went with him to search amongst all the patients in order to find his granddaughter. Asking how she could recognize her, the frantic grandfather gave a rough description of a gold pendant necklace that she was wearing.

After searching amongst the injured, they finally found the granddaughter who was wearing the necklace. At the sight of this necklace, the pediatrician froze. She turned to the old man and said "where did you buy this necklace from?"

"You can't buy such a necklace" he responded, "I am a goldsmith and I made this necklace. Actually I made two identical ones for each of my daughters. This is my granddaughter from one of them, and my other daughter did not survive the war" ...And this is how the Jewish Polish girl was reunited with her father!

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

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 is 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. Although I wrote much of this a couple of years ago, I was reminded of the Rabbi's advice and we spoke about it this week.

Sometimes we hear words but they have no effect. 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 let's 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 didn't 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!

Shabbat Shalom,
David Bibi

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. 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

Rabbi Reuven Semah

**"That which is in the heavens above or on the earth below"
(Ten Commandments 20:4)**

The Ben Ish Hai teaches us a seemingly simple parable that contains a profound message, with which he homiletically explains a pasuk in the Ten Commandments.

Once, a property owner decided to take apart a wooden ladder that was attached to his house. He felt the ladder gave robbers and trespassers easy access to his roof, so he told his servant to take it apart. The servant, who wasn't blessed with much intelligence, started his job. As he steadily climbed up the ladder, on each step he broke the rung beneath him. He managed to make it all the way to the roof, but then looking down, he discovered that he had no way to get down. Some bystanders got him down with difficulty and gave him advice. "First you should have gone up to the roof and taken apart the ladder as you came down, from top to bottom."

The next day, the boss told his servant to take apart a ladder that went into a deep pit in the backyard. The servant remembered the advice, "top to bottom," and started working. As he went down into the pit, he made sure to break every rung above him. When he got to the bottom, he was stuck with no way out. Everyone laughed at him. "But you told me top to bottom," he said. They explained that it all depends on the circumstances. "When you are working on a ladder up to a roof, you work top to bottom," they told him. "But when you are dealing with a ladder descending into a pit, you break it as you go bottom to top."

The Ben Ish Hai says a person has both physical and spiritual needs. We have a tendency to constantly compare ourselves with those around us. We have two choices. We can either contrast ourselves with those "above" us – those who have more than we do – or those "below" us, who have less than we do.

When it comes to material needs, some tend to look at those who have more, yet when it comes to their spiritual health, their eyes aim to those below them. In essence, they are acting just like the foolish servant and are the laughing stock of the universe.

This week the Torah says, "which is in the heavens above or in the earth below"

(20:4). The road to a successful, happy life is to know when to look where. When it comes to heavens, matters of spirituality, one should always look up. Compare your spiritual condition with those greater than you. When it comes to the earth, material matters, look down and compare yourself with those who have less.

Happiness is not about wealth and comfort but about perspective and attitude.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

**"Do not bear Hashem's name
(in an oath)" (Shemot 20:7)**

One of the Ten Commandments is to not swear falsely or in vain. To swear falsely is self understood, but to swear in vain means to proclaim a fact which is obvious such as swearing that a book is a book, or anything similar to that. The Gemara tells us that the earth trembled when this prohibition was uttered because using

Hashem's name in vain is truly a terrible thing with dire consequences. This should make us be careful whenever we mention Hashem's name in any situation. In addition, this should make us hesitate to swear in any manner, even without using Hashem's name, but all the more so when mentioning the Holy Name. Many times people say "I swear to G-d" in order to make a point - this is not something to take lightly. We must watch our mouths and get into the habit of saying "Beli Neder" ("Without an oath") even when not mentioning "I swear".

Here is a short list of what is considered an oath:

- 1) By G-d, this is so-and-so.
- 2) G-d is my witness that I did or did not do this.
- 3) By my life that such and such happened or didn't happen.
- 4) I should be cursed if this isn't true, etc.

We see from here that even without using the word 'oath' or 'swear', we could be obligating ourselves in a very heavy way. We must also be careful from saying "I am going to do this misvah (such as giving charity, going to shul, etc.)" without saying "Beli Neder" because it's also considered binding. Also, if we do certain practices three times it may be considered as a vow, so we should say "Beli Neder." Let us attempt to be on guard and not swear in any which way or form. If one has a doubt, contact a Rabbi to see if he may need Hatarah. Shabbat Shalom.

INSTANT GRATIFICATION

One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"Do you like instant coffee?" Abraham asked.

"No. I only drink the real brew," replied Aharon.

"Same here," said Abe. "I don't understand how people eat microwave food either."

Many people would agree with Aharon and Abe, preferring the "real thing" to the instant variety of everything from soups to dinners.

The only problem with the "real thing" is that preparing it takes much longer.

Sometimes, however, fast is not good.

In the Torah (Debarim 23:2), Hashem states, about the enemy:

"I will not chase him out in [only] one year, lest the land become desolate and the [wild] animals will overpower you."

In life, we must find the proper balance. In a low-priority situation – such as when you don't have time to make fresh-brewed java – instant may not be the same, but the trade-off is worth it. However, when it comes to education and self-improvement, the long-term goal is best served by a step-by-step climb to success. Instant gratification is fine for frivolities, but when dealing with issues that really matter, "no pain no gain" is the way to go.

Put in the effort and reap the long-lasting benefits. Patience sometimes pays, even in a wireless, digital world.

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com, MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com

That Little Extra Push
Parashat Yitro tells of Ma'amad Har Sinai, God's revelation to Am Yisrael at Mount Sinai, during which Moshe Rabbenu ascended to the top of the mountain to receive the Torah.

The Sages in the Midrash and Talmud provide us with additional information concerning this seminal event, including a remarkable incident that occurred when Moshe ascended the mountain. The Midrash relates that God showed Moshe a scene from the distant future – a great Rabbi teaching a Torah class to his students. The concepts this Rabbi taught were so deep and profound, that even Moshe Rabbenu could not understand the material. As it turns out, the Rabbi in this prophetic image shown to Moshe was none other than Rabbi Akiba, one of the greatest and most influential of the Tanna'im (Sages of the Mishnaic period).

Realizing that he could not understand Rabbi Akiba's lecture, Moshe decided that he was unworthy to receive the Torah. He told the Almighty that Rabbi Akiba, and not he, should be the one chosen to receive the Torah from God and transmit it to Am Yisrael. God, however, informed Moshe that he was chosen for this exalted role.

This extraordinary account gives us an opportunity to learn about and draw inspiration from Rabbi Akiba, one of the most heroic and important figures in Jewish history. He was a man of unparalleled genius, to the point where, as we have seen, even Moshe Rabbenu could not fully

understand his lecture. Additionally, as the Talmud relates, he had 24,000 students – far more than any Torah educator at any point in history. Tragically, all those thousands of students perished in a deadly plague. Rabbi Akiba, remarkably, did not despair, even after suffering such a devastating calamity. He found five qualified students and taught them, and they became the pillars of our Torah tradition.

But even more fascinating than Rabbi Akiba's role as a leading Sage is the humble beginnings from which he came. Rabbi Akiba was ignorant for many years. He never had a Torah education, and he was a simple shepherd working for a wealthy man named Kalba Sabua. But Rabbi Akiba was not only ignorant, he actually despised Torah scholars. He himself attested that before he enrolled in yeshiva and began to learn, he felt the urge to bite Rabbis! This was the extent of the animosity he harbored toward Torah and its scholars.

How is it possible that a person with such contempt for Torah could emerge as one of the greatest Sages of all time?

The Arizal (Rabbi Yishak Luria of Safed, 1534-1572) explained that undoubtedly, Rabbi Akiba was endowed with a special soul, which allowed him to attain such towering heights of Torah knowledge and piety. For many years, however, until age 40, his greatness was blocked; there were "shells" covering his sacred soul. His soul resembled a brilliant and powerful light which was covered by many thick layers of material which blocked the light from shining and illuminating its surroundings. When Rabbi Akiba married his wife, Rahel, she urged him to enroll in yeshiva and pursue a Torah education, even though he was already 40 years

old and could not even read Hebrew. That little push that his wife gave him was able to open the clogged drain, so-to-speak. Once he began putting in the effort, the thick layers that obstructed his powerful soul were gradually removed. Soon enough, the power of his soul was able to burst forth in full force, propelling him to such great heights that even Moshe Rabbenu could not understand his lecture.

Although the Arizal's insight certainly relates to deep concepts of Kabbalah, it also contains a powerful message that applies directly to each and every one of us. If Rabbi Akiba, who wanted to bite Torah scholars, was endowed with a special soul with a potential for unparalleled greatness, then it is certainly possible that each of us, too, is granted such lofty potential. We might not feel naturally driven toward spiritual greatness, but this potential may very well be within us. Like Rabbi Akiba, we just need that extra little push to get us moving, to propel us forward, and then the "Kelipot" ("shells") fall away and we can reach our potential. It would be a terrible mistake to resign ourselves to mediocrity and assume that we are destined to achieve nothing more. We never know what our ceiling is until we make the effort. We must give ourselves that extra push, try just a bit harder, invest just a bit more effort, and we will then find ourselves able to achieve far more than we ever imagined possible.

Rabbi Wein

At the revelation at Sinai the Lord set the goal for the Jewish people – "to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These noble goals, like all great ideas and lofty ideals, require definition. What is

meant by a kingdom of priests? In Jewish life the priests, the descendants of Aharon, were people who were freed from the daily mundane chores of life and were supported by the masses of Israel who sustained them physically and financially.

Now if the entire nation was to be a kingdom of priests, in those terms of support and life, it obviously was an impossibility to maintain such a kingdom. Therefore the idea of the kingdom of priests must mean a broader reality. It is the challenge of being a kingdom of teachers of others – "for the lips of the priest shall guard knowledge and Torah will be asked to be taught from his mouth."

We are all teachers by example if not by profession. How we act influences our children, our neighbors, our customers and our coworkers. And a priest in the service of the Jewish people was someone who served the public and private needs of Jews. He was someone who was on call to answer the needs of the community, whether in the required Temple service or in the private endeavors meant to enhance the status of the community or of help to other individuals. The priest was the social worker, the peace maker, the cement that binds a community together and gives it its necessary sense of unity and cohesion. Every Jew is obligated to attempt to be such a priest.

A holy nation is also a phrase that requires definition and detail. Holiness in its Hebrew root means dedication, loyalty and an ability to break down the barriers of society that oftentimes prevent us from achieving spiritual satisfaction and nobility of purpose. A holy nation must therefore mean a nation that is able to retain its unique identity. It

cannot be swallowed up by the prevailing and ever changing majority cultures that will always surround it.

Holiness requires the ability to care for everyone while remaining apart from everyone at one and the same time. Holiness refers to the body and not just to the soul and the spirit. It speaks to discipline and order, self-control and resisting impulse. The great challenge here is to instill these virtues and traits of character and behavior in an entire nation and not only in a few special chosen, extraordinary individuals.

These goals of probity and correct behavior are to be the national goals of the Jewish people and the hallmark of its society. Other societies look for greatness and morality from the few. Not so the society of the Jewish people, where these demands and goals are laid upon all who are part of the household of Israel.

A holy nation is not restricted to being so only in the house of worship and study. It is to be a holy nation in every walk of life, at home and in the marketplace, in the halls of government - and certainly in its treatment of others. That is the blueprint of Sinai that was set before us millennia ago and still binds us to this very day.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky - Parsha Parables

A Moshe Mentsh

Parshas Yisro begins by relating how impressed its namesake, Yisro, 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, the 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?

The Story

A number of years ago, my brother, Rabbi Zvi Kamenetzky, menahel of Mosdot Ohr Emet in Toronto, 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 Raabbi Kaaamenetzky?" There was silence on the other end. 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. He was a great Rabbi but he was even a greater man! -- Oh! Yes! He was a wonderful man. He was a real good friend of mine!"

The Message

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 Moshe, they were the actions of a mentsh!

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 Moshe" that Rashi quotes from the Book of Numbers begin a verse that fits our explanation quite well. The verse reads "and the man Moshe was the exceedingly humble, more than any one on the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3) It was the man Moshe, who was exceedingly humble, more than any one on the face of the earth.

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

The Custom that Refused to Die

There's an enthralling story about the Ten Commandments and the role they played in Jewish worship and the synagogue.

It begins with a little-known fact. There was a time when there were not three paragraphs in the prayer we call the Shema, but four. The Mishnah in Tamid (5: 1) tells us that in Temple times the officiating priests would say, first, the Ten Commandments and then the three paragraphs of the Shema.

We have several pieces of independent evidence for this. The first consists of four papyrus fragments acquired in Egypt in 1898 by the then secretary of the Society of Biblical Archaeology,

W.L. Nash. Pieced together and located today in the Cambridge University Library, they are known as the Nash Papyrus. Dating from the second century BCE, they contain a version of the Ten Commandments, immediately followed by the Shema. Almost certainly the papyrus was used for prayer in a synagogue in Egypt before the birth of Christianity, at a time when the custom was to include all four paragraphs.

Tefillin from the Second Temple period, discovered in the Qumran caves along with the Dead Sea Scrolls, contained the Ten Commandments. Indeed a lengthy section of the halakhic midrash on Deuteronomy, the Sifri, is dedicated to proving that we should not include the Ten Commandments in the tefillin, which suggests that there were some Jews who did so, and the rabbis needed to be able to show that they were wrong.

We also have evidence from both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds (Bavli, Berakhot 12a ; Yerushalmi Berakhot 1: 8) that there were communities in Israel and Babylon who sought to introduce the Ten Commandments into the prayers, and that the rabbis had to issue a ruling against doing so. There is even documentary evidence that the Jewish community in Fostat, near Cairo, kept a special scroll in the ark called the Sefer al-Shir, which they took out after the conclusion of daily prayers and read from it the Ten Commandments (Jacob Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fāṭimid caliphs*, I, 221).

So the custom of including the Ten Commandments as part of the Shema was once widespread, but from a certain point in time it was systematically opposed by

the sages. Why did they object to it? Both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds say it was because of the "claim of the sectarians."

Jewish sectarians – some identify them as a group of early Christians but there is no compelling evidence for this – argued that only the Ten Commandments were binding, because only they were received by the Israelites directly from God at Mount Sinai. The others were received through Moses, and this sect, or perhaps several of them, held that they did not come from God. They were Moses' own invention, and therefore not binding.

There is a midrash that gives us an idea of what the sectarians were saying. It places in the mouth of Korach and his followers, who rebelled against Moses, these words: "The whole congregation are holy. Are you [Moses and Aaron] the only ones who are holy? All of us were sanctified at Sinai . . . and when the Ten Commandments were given, there was no mention of challah or terumah or tithes or tzitzit. You made this all up yourself." (Yalkut Shimoni Korach 752).

So the rabbis were opposed to any custom that would give special prominence to the Ten Commandments since the sectarians were pointing to such customs as proof that even orthodox Jews treated them differently from the other commands. By removing them from the prayer book, the rabbis hoped to silence such claims.

But the story does not end there. So special were the Ten Commandments to Jews that they found their way back. Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, author of the Tur (14th century) suggested that

one should say them privately. Rabbi Joseph Karo argues that the ban only applies to reciting the Ten Commandments publicly during the service, so they could be said privately after the service. That is where you find them today in most siddurim – immediately after the morning service. Rabbi Shlomo Luria had the custom of reading the Ten Commandments at the beginning of prayer, before the start of Pesukei de-Zimra, the Verses of Praise.

That was not the end of the argument. Given that we do not say the Ten Commandments during public prayer, should we none the less give them special honour when we read them from the Torah, whether on Shavuot or in the weeks of parshat Yitro and Vaetchanan? Should we stand when they are being read?

Maimonides found himself involved in a controversy over this question. Someone wrote him a letter telling the following story. He was a member of a synagogue where originally the custom was to stand during the reading of the Ten Commandments. Then a rabbi came and ruled otherwise, saying that it was wrong to stand for the same reason as it was forbidden to say the Ten Commandments during public prayer. It could be used by sectarians, heretics and others to claim that even the Jews themselves held that the Ten Commandments were more important than the other 603. So the community stopped standing. Years later another rabbi came, this time from a community where the custom was to stand for the Ten Commandments. The new rabbi stood and told the congregation to do likewise. Some did. Some did not, since their previous rabbi had ruled against. Who was right?

Maimonides had no doubt. It was the previous rabbi, the one who had told them not to stand, who was in the right. His reasoning was correct also. Exactly the logic that barred it from the daily prayers should be applied to the reading of the Torah. It should be given no special prominence. The community should stay sitting. Thus ruled Maimonides, the greatest rabbi of the Middle Ages. However, sometimes even great rabbis have difficulty persuading communities to change. Then as now most communities – even those in Maimonides' Egypt – stood while the Ten Commandments were being read.

So despite strong attempts by the sages, in the time of the Mishnah, Gemara and later in the age of Maimonides, to ban any custom that gave special dignity to the Ten Commandments, whether as prayer or as biblical reading, Jews kept finding ways of doing so. They brought it back into daily prayer by saying it privately and outside the mandatory service, and they continued to stand while it was being read from the Torah despite Maimonides' ruling that they should not.

"Leave Israel alone," said Hillel, "for even if they are not prophets, they are still the children of prophets." Ordinary Jews had a passion for the Ten Commandments. They were the distilled essence of Judaism. They were heard directly by the people from the mouth of God himself. They were the basis of the covenant they made with God at Mount Sinai, calling on them to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Twice in the Torah they are described as the covenant itself:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you

and with Israel." Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments. (Ex 34: 27-28)

Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets. (Deut. 4: 12-13)

That is why they were originally said immediately prior to the Shema, and why despite their removal from the prayers Jews continued to say them – because their recital constituted a daily renewal of the covenant with God. That too is why Jews insisted on standing when they were being read from the Torah, because when they were being given the Israelites "stood at the foot of the mountain" (Ex. 19: 17). The Midrash (Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 12, ed. Mandelbaum, p. 204) says about the reading of the Ten Commandments on Shavuot: "The Holy One blessed be He said to the Israelites: My children, read this passage every year and I will account it to you as if you were standing before Mount Sinai and receiving the Torah."

Jews kept searching for ways of recreating that scene, by standing when they listened to it from the Torah and by saying it privately after the end of the morning prayers. Despite the fact that they knew their acts could be misconstrued by heretics, they were too attached to that great epiphany – the only time in history God spoke to an entire people – to treat it like any other passage in the Torah. The honour given to the Ten Commandments was the custom that refused to die.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI
AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL**

“Remember the day of Shabbat to keep it holy” (20:8)

This is an essential corollary of the previous commandments. The principle of Creation from Nothing is the fundamental understanding that Hashem is the Creator, meaning that He is the originator of all that exists. This is the teaching of the Shabbat: “I am Hashem” (from the word Hove’, meaning “existence”). But the Shabbat signifies also the election of Israel (see 31:13); thus it commemorates also “your G-d that took you out of Egypt.” Thus the fourth commandment is essentially for the first three.

The Shabbat is explained as a memorial of the Creation in six days (20:11); but Shabbat signifies “a stop” (cessation), and as a memorial of Creation it would be more suitable to be named Maass (doing) or Briah (Creation). We learn therefrom the extremely important principle taught by the Shabbat: although everything was made by the Creator, yet after the first six days He no longer demonstrated openly His work. Now He caused everything to appear as if it functioned of itself without the Creator’s help. This is intended by the expression: “Which G-d created to do” (Bereshheet 2:3), meaning “to do of itself” (Ibn Ezra). Thus Shabbat means the cessation of the Creator’s open deeds” and the beginning of what seems the self-management of Nature.

By this deception, Mankind is tested, whether or not they would recognize the truth that even now nothing functions of itself, and that even now Hashem himself illuminates the world and causes all of its phenomena to exist and

to function. The sun does not give its own light, for even before the creation of the sun there was light. Just as the original light existed without the sun, so even now it is Hashem alone that gives light.

It is this test that makes Life worthwhile, for if Hashem had not made a cessation (Shabbat) to His open demonstration of His Presence, men would deserve no reward for recognizing Him. Quoted from “A Nation is Born” by Rabbi Miller ZT’L

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