



**Feeling Fortunate.**

**We have in our possession so many prophecies in which God instructs us on what truth is. Many people express reluctance to observe the Torah, when in fact, it is the greatest blessing.**

ESTD  
1997

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## Weekly Parsha

# Yitro

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And you should seek from all of the nation men of valor, who fear Hashem, men of the truth, those who hate improper gain. And you should appoint them over the people as leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties and leaders of tens." (Shemot 18:21) Sometimes it is just wonderful to

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# GOD IS NOT BLIND

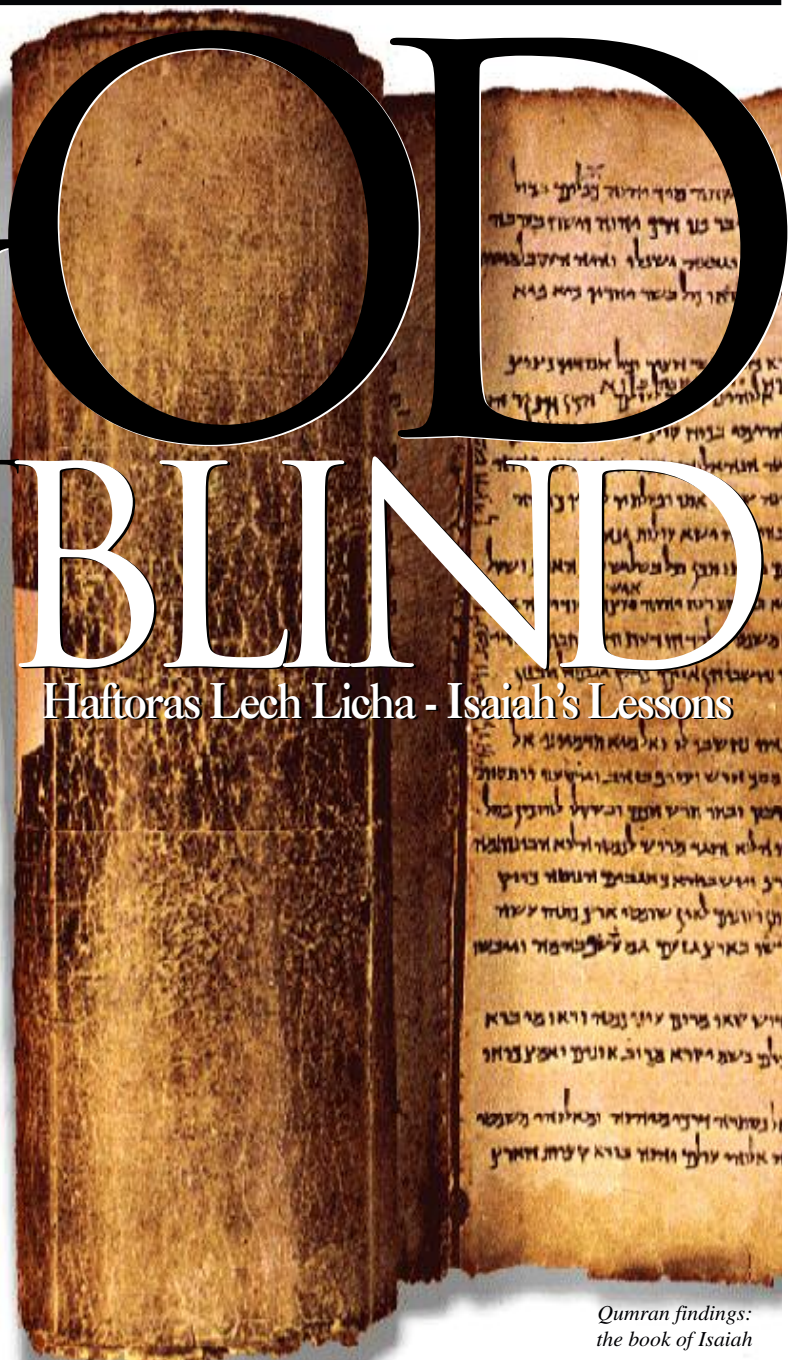
Haftoras Lech Licha - Isaiah's Lessons

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This past week, Sarit, an inspiring Judaic studies teacher, inquired into insights on the Haftarah of Parshas Lech Licha, which she plans to teach her students. I reviewed the area and became quite interested in the message of the prophet. I will cite a few, initial verses, and then examine each one: (Isaiah 40:27 through 41:4):

*"Why does Jacob say, and why does Israel speak, "my way is hidden from God, and from my God, my justice is passed by?" Do you not know, have you not heard, the God of the universe, Hashem [who] created the corners of the Earth, does not tire and*

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*Qumran findings:  
the book of Isaiah*

## Prophets

*How can man  
assume God does not  
know about His very  
creations?*

*does not get wearied – there is no probing His understanding. He gives strength to the weak and grants abundant might to the powerless. And youths will tire and be wearied, and young men will certainly stumble. And those who hope to God will be exchanged with strength, and they will sprout wings like eagles, they will run and will not weary, and they will go and will not be tired. Be silent to Me you islands, and nations of renewed strength, draw near, then you will speak, draw close to judgment as one. Who awakened the one from the East, at whose feet righteousness called; delivering before him nations and subduing kings; they were as dust before his sword, like blown straw before his arrow? He pursued them and emerged peacefully, on a path he never traveled. Who brought about and accomplished this? Who called out generation from the beginning? I am God – I am the First, and I will be with the last generations, I am He.”*

**“My way is hidden from God”**

What forces a person to say, “My way is hidden from God, and from my God, my justice is passed by”? Radak states this sentiment reflects the attitude of the Jews in exile, subjugated by other nations to endure painful hardships. One, whose sense of justice misleads him to feel God should save him, will express such a sentiment. One might even have a true evaluation that he is unjustly pained, and complains when he does not witness God’s immediate salvation. He might then conclude that God does not know his pain, for if He did, He would surely step in to save him. Of course, this is a myopic view of reality: innumerable factors and considerations are weighed by the One, true God, factors too numerous for mortal man to fathom or weigh justly.

**“God of the universe, Hashem [who] created the corners of the Earth”**

Rightfully so, the prophet speaking God’s response says, “God of the universe, Hashem [who] created the corners of the Earth.” Why is this the accurate and precise response to one denying God’s knowledge of mankind? The reason being that if God is the Creator of the universe and the “corners of the Earth” (including man) God could not have been the Creator, if He was ignorant of what he was creating! A carpenter cannot be ignorant of the chair he builds. So too, God cannot be ignorant of His creation - of mankind.

**“Do you not know, have you not heard?”**

The answer above is perfect. However, we might ask: Why was this answer introduced with the question, “Do you not know, have you not heard”? Again, the prophet here is speaking precisely what God commanded. This means that these introductory words are of equal importance. The words, “Do you not know, have you not heard?” are addressed to someone claiming God is ignorant. But who is the one who is truly ignorant here? Of course, it is the person who is complaining! He is ignorant of that which should be the most obvious truth, i.e., God knows what He creates! It is unimaginable that it could be otherwise. To alert the complaining person of his inexcusable error, the prophet ridicules him as if to say, “You say God is ignorant...it is YOU who is ignorant, and on top of that, the matter is most obvious!” This is the sense of the prophet’s words. He is commanded by God to be emphatic, and to act alarmed at how foolish the complainer is.

Why use “emphasis”? Such emphasis is used for the precise purpose of conveying to the fool how “far” from the truth he really is. Emphasis is the precise response when we wish to convey a high degree of something, for example, the saying, “I am so hungry I can eat a horse.” Here is a case of emphasizing a “positive” idea. But we also use emphasis to convey a opposite: “You made a wrong turn FIVE TIMES on one trip around the block!” This is quite funny, but delivers the point: in such a short distance, five wrong turns is emphasized as unbelievable. So too is the case the prophet here. He ridicules a person who says, “God does not know something”, by emphasizing the opposite: “Do you not know, have you not heard?” In other words, “You are the one who doesn’t know...God created the world (and man) so he MUST know our actions.”

**“God does not tire and does not get wearied – there is no probing His understanding”**

The prophet adds two new ideas with this phrase. We already stated that God, who creates man, knows man. This is sufficient in terms of man’s initial “creation”. God possesses the “quality” of knowledge. But what about the “quantity”, meaning, how much does God really know? What of man’s continued activities...is God “constantly” watching us? To remove any doubts, the prophet teaches that God does not tire. That which we experience as a cause for our limited scope of understanding cannot apply

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## Prophets



*The prophet spells out  
in such precision, how  
we may realign our  
thoughts with truth.*

to God. But the prophet goes on, stating that we cannot fathom, or probe God's knowledge. We are incapable of evaluating God's knowledge. Hence, for another reason, we cannot make a statement that God does not know about our pain: we simply know nothing about God's knowledge. This latter reason is a far more compelling argument. When man realizes that he knows nothing about God, he feels foolish that he suggested some positive notion about God – the One Being man knows nothing about. The prophet corrects the complainer's wrong ideas. God teaches us through the words of the prophets, replacing our false ideas with truths.

**“He gives strength to the weak and grants abundant might to the powerless”**

We just stated that God does not weary or get tired. Now we are taught “why” this is: He creates the laws of weariness and tiredness! Amazing. We never look at our own frailties in this light, that they are “created” laws. God designed our tiring natures, just as God designed our bodies. And this being so, is the best argument “why” God never tires: He is not governed by His creation, and tiredness is a creation. So the prophet teaches us “Why doesn't God get tired? Because God created tiredness.” The prophet teaches that since God “gives strength to the weak and grants abundant might to the powerless”, He is in full control of “tiredness”, and it does not control Him. Hence, God knows all of man's actions and pains.

**“And youths will tire and be wearied, and young men will certainly stumble”**

This illustrates how just the opposite is true: it is man who tires, but not God. It also teaches a deeper lesson: it is because of our own tiredness that we falsely project this frailty onto God. We learn that our initial sentiment that God does not know our pain due to His tiredness, is baseless, and a mere projection of human shortcomings. Furthermore, why mention in specific “youths” and “young men”? I feel these two groups were referred to so as to teach that even the strongest and most vibrant among us are subject to becoming tired. No one escapes this natural law. Not even the strongest.

**“And those who hope to God will be exchanged with strength, and they will sprout wings like eagles, they will run and will not weary, and they will go and will not be tired”**

Not only does God create the laws of nature, like man becoming wearisome, but He also

suspends His laws. This is the mark of the true Creator: nothing escapes His control. So even the very laws He created are subject to His will, and he can grant strength to those who are normally smitten with no enduring strength at all. God will give unnatural strength to those who follow Him. Samson was a prime example.

**“Be silent to Me you islands, and nations, of renewed strength, draw near, then you will speak, draw close to judgment as one”**

God addresses the nations abusing the Jews. He tells them to be silent, for now they will have to hear God's wisdom, and not haughtily assume they are victorious over the Jews whom they abuse. The nations of “renewed strength” will now see how long they get to retain their strength, when God decides otherwise, as punishment for their ill treatment of the Jews. The fact that they must “draw close to judgment as one” awakens them to the reality that they are not in control, but there is One who judges them, that being God. “Then you will speak” intimates that in fact, you won't have any complaints. At the very outset it was the Jews who spoke without wisdom. Now, God addresses the nations and rebukes them even before they open their mouths. God teaches that they won't possibly have any complaint, for God will eventually mete out to them perfect justice. “Draw close to judgment as one” means to say that they are all equally subjugated to God's absolute justice system. Furthermore, we find an answer to the Jews who initially spoke: God will render justice; regardless of why He doesn't do so immediately. That is not within man's understanding, as we stated earlier. Nonetheless, God guarantees He will deliver justice.

**“Who awakened the one from the East, at whose feet righteousness called; delivering before him nations and subduing kings; they were as dust before his sword, like blown straw before his arrow”**

God refers to Abraham, the man from the East. God illustrates with an example a proof of how He strengthens someone who follows His righteousness, to the degree that he subdued kings, as if they were nothing to his sword and arrow. “Examples” are the best form of proof. The fact that God not only promises to act in a certain way but also fulfills His promise leads to a firm conviction in man's heart.

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## Prophets

**“He pursued them and emerged peacefully, on a path he never traveled”**

Abraham fought four mighty kings, so strong; they defeated another group of five mighty kings. Yet, Abraham was determined to save his nephew Lote, and God protected him. Rashi states not one of Abraham's men died in battle, as indicated by the word “peacefully”. When he traveled roads unfamiliar, he was never lost. Nor was he deterred.

From God's perspective, God teaches how far He goes to shelter His loved ones. But what is learned about God, from the words “on a path he never traveled”? This teaches that although completely unfamiliar with his surroundings, meaning, with no military tactics and completely left in the hands of the enemy without strategy, God still shielded Abraham. Nothing is outside of God's control, when he wishes to protect His faithful servants.

**“Who brought about and accomplished this? Who called out generation from the beginning?”**

We now come full circle. God completes His message to those who would complain He is ignorant of man's plights. Who accomplished this for Abraham? It was God. Furthermore, God is the one who started all the generations of mankind. He is the sole cause, as it says, “from the beginning”. The very inception of something is brought about by its true, exclusive cause. Man's inception was God's act. This teaches further, than man's existence is inextricably tied to God's will. Man cannot endure that which God is ignorant of.

**“I am God – I am the First, and I will be with the last generations, I am He.”**

God answers His question: “I am God”. Why does God answer His own question? Perhaps this embellishes the idea that ‘only’ He can answer...only He has this knowledge. This is the primary lesson of this entire Haftorah. Man's knowledge does not compare to God's knowledge. Therefore, those Jews were wrong to question why God hadn't saved the yet.

Unkelos explains this verse to mean, “I am God: I created the world in the beginning even all eternity is Mine, and aside from Me, there is no other god.” God says He was with the first generations, to teach that He alone preceded mankind and created the world: no one else is responsible for man's existence. He alone – no other gods – will also be with the last generations. This teaches God's permanence. “Permanence” means that nothing is as real as God. God's very nature is

to exist. All else requires creation and expires over time. Why must we know this for this lesson? Perhaps, as the primary lesson was to teach man how his knowledge is insufficient to judge God, God further explains that by definition, man does not need to exist. He is temporary. But only That which endures throughout time, That which is eternal, is what we consider “absolutely true.” Thus, God is truth. Man's notions are vanities. Man is further instructed in this last verse to realize his meek position compared to God.

**“I will be with the last generations”**

Another idea expressed here is that God knows of the future generations. Knowledge of the “future” is yet another aspect of how God's knowledge far surpasses man's knowledge. The main message is again reiterated, but offering mankind further insight into this issue.

In general, the very “response” of God to those complaining Jews, is itself a proof of God's cognizance of man. How else could He “respond” if he does not take note of man?

**Summary**

Man possesses a tiny view of God's justice. Our complaints are borne out of real issues, but are expressed with infinitesimally small knowledge. Complaining about how God manages justice is a foolish endeavor...as He created justice! Only He knows all matters, so only He may sufficiently define something as a “good” or “evil”. Ours is to study so our knowledge becomes less imperfect. We are fortunate to have God's prophets to instruct us in God's ways, so we do not follow falsehoods.

We see how much knowledge is enclosed, and available, in the words of the prophets. Simply reading the Torah does a grave injustice to both the Torah, and us. If we are humble enough, we will recognize the enormity of wisdom that exists. Such a prospect will certainly drive us to uncover deeper insights, because we know they are as buried treasures waiting for us to uncover them.

**End Notes**

A possible reason this portion of Isaiah is the selected Haftorah of Lech Licha, is because Lech Licha addresses how God aided Abraham in the best fashion: offering him circumstances and commands to perfect him. Isaiah also refers to Abraham and to God's methods of perfecting mankind. God is not blind to our plights. ■



## Weekly Parsha

take a single passage of the Torah and consider the wonderful and exacting manner in which our Sages analyze its content. Every passage must make sense in all of its details. It must be internally coherent. It must be contextually consistent. It must correspond with established halachic principles. Let us consider one passage from our parasha and the manner in which our Sages analyze it.

Moshe and Bnai Yisrael are joined in the wilderness by Yitro – Moshe's father-in-law. Yitro observes Moshe judging and teaching the people. Moshe is fulfilling the role of judge and teacher without assistance. Yitro concludes that no single person can fulfill the role of serving as sole judge and teacher. He advises Moshe to recruit other leaders who will share his burden. Yitro describes the characteristics that Moshe should seek in these leaders. He also advises Moshe to appoint these leaders as leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Moshe will continue to serve as the highest judicial and governmental authority. Moshe accepts Yitro's counsel and creates the system he has proposed.

Our Sages disagree as to the meaning of this last instruction. What is a leader of thousands, hundreds, fifties or tens? Rashi's explanation is well-known. His explanation is based upon the comments of the Talmud in Mesechet Sanhedrin. According to Rashi, Moshe was to create a multileveled judiciary. Each of the lowest judges would be responsible for a group of ten people. Above these judges would be appointed a second level of judges. Each judge would be charged with the responsibility of leading fifty people. The leaders of the hundreds would each care for the affairs of one hundred people. Those appointed over the thousands would each have one thousand people assigned to his care. Rashi continues to explain that the nation numbered six hundred thousand men. This means there were six hundred judges appointed at the highest level. At the next level, there were six thousand judges. The next level required twelve thousand judges. The lowest level required sixty thousand appointments.[1] The table below represents Rashi's explanation of the system Moshe was to create. As the table indicates, Moshe was to appoint a total of 78,600 leaders – representing slightly more than 13% of the total adult male population.

JUDGES OF THOUSANDS	600
JUDGES OF HUNDREDS	6,000
JUDGES OF FIFTIES	12,000
JUDGES OF TENS	60,000
TOTAL APPOINTMENTS	78,600
TOTAL ADULT MALE POPULATION	600,000
% OF POPULATION IN LEADERSHIP	13%

Ibn Ezra questions Rashi's explanation. He argues that Yitro and Moshe set very high standards for the leaders Moshe would appoint. The qualities that each and every leader was required to possess are not common, easily acquired traits. These leaders were to be morally and spiritually beyond reproach. It is difficult to imagine that Moshe would find close to 79,000 people possessing this unusual combination of traits. Ibn Ezra also questions the need for appointing close to one eighth of the nation as leaders. This seems to be the beginnings of the greatest bureaucracy in recorded history!

Based on these objections, Ibn Ezra suggests an alternative explanation of our passage. According to Ibn Ezra, a judge of thousands was not charged with judging one thousand people. Instead, the meaning of the passage is that the highest judges were to be selected from most powerful and influential elite. In order to qualify for this position, the candidate was required to be master of a household of at least one thousand individuals. In other words, he must have at least one thousand servants and assistants and others under his control. Leaders for each of the subsequent levels were chosen from a group of candidates who led proportionately smaller households. At the lowest level, a candidate was required to be master over a household of ten people. According to this explanation, the pasuk is not indicating the number of leaders appointed or the number of people each was required to lead. Instead, the passage describes the number of servants and assistants a candidate must command to qualify for each level of leadership.[2]

Abravanel objects to Ibn Ezra's interpretation on both practical and philosophical grounds. From a practical perspective, he argues that Bnai Yisrael had just escaped from slavery in Egypt. It is hard to imagine that any of these former slaves were masters over the large households that Ibn Ezra describes as a requirement. From a philosophical perspective, he objects to the idea that wealth and power should be a criterion for selection.[3]

In addition to these objections, Ralbag points out that Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the passage is textually difficult to accept. Returning to the passage, it is clear that the passage is composed of two elements. The first portion of the passage describes the qualifications required of each judge. The second half of the passage describes the appointment of the judges. In other words, first Yitro suggests who should be selected and then how these leaders should be appointed. According to Ibn Ezra's interpretation, the passage loses its coherency. The second portion of the passage first describes the appointment of the leaders and then returns to the theme of the first portion of the passage; an additional qualification is described. If Ibn Ezra's interpretation were correct, the passage should read "And you should

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seek from all of the nation men of valor, who fear Hashem, men of the truth, those who hate improper gain. They should be leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties and leaders of tens. And you should appoint them over the people.”

This analysis leaves Ralbag with a perplexing problem. On the one hand he agrees with Ibn Ezra’s critique of Rashi’s explanation of the passage. However on the other hand, he does not feel that Ibn Ezra’s explanation is much better.

In order to resolve this dilemma, Ralbag develops a third interpretation of the passage. Now, Ralbag must offer an explanation that responds to all of the questions that he has asked on Rashi and Ibn Ezra. And ideally, it should also respond to Abravanel’s objections. This is quite a task! In order to avoid the questions on Rashi, Ralbag takes an approach similar to Ibn Ezra’s. The passage is not describing the number of people placed under the authority of each leader. Neither does the pasuk indicate the number of judges to be appointed. But unlike Ibn Ezra, Ralbag maintains that the pasuk is divided into two clear portions and the second portion of the passage does not deal with selection criteria; it deals with the process of appointment. According to Ralbag, Moshe was to assign to each judge the resources he would need to enforce his decisions. The highest judges were to be assigned one thousand subordinates; each judge at the lowest level was to be assigned ten subordinates. Each judge was to be given the authority and the resources he would need to carry out his decisions. With this explanation Ralbag, responds to all of the objections he has raised against Rashi and Ibn Ezra.[4]

**“And these are the laws that you should place before them.” (Shemot 21:1)**

One of the most interesting elements of

Ralbag’s explanation is that it is reflected in normative halacha. This above pasuk is the opening passage of Parshat Mishpatim. In Mesechet Sanhedrin, the Talmud asks why the passage does not read, “These are the laws you should teach them?” What is the meaning of placing the laws before them? The Talmud suggests that the meaning of the passage is that before judging a case a judge must have placed before him the “tools of the judge.” What are these tools? The Talmud explains that they include a staff with which to lead, a strap with which to administer lashes, and a shofar with which to announce excommunication.[5] This text from the Talmud is quoted by Tur and based on the authority of Rav Hai Gaon, he codifies this requirement into law.[6]

It is interesting the Tur places this law in the first chapter of Choshen Mishpat. The chapter deals primarily with the appointment of judges and their authority. Why does Tur include a detail regarding the physical organization of the courtroom?

According to Ralbag, Tur’s organizational scheme makes perfect sense. Yitro and Moshe agreed that in appointing judges, each judge must be assigned the means for carrying out his decisions. This assignment of resources is part of the process of appointment. The appointment is meaningless if it is only ceremonial and does not include authority and the resources to carry out justice. Tur’s organization of this first chapter of Choshen Mishpat reflects this same consideration. As part of his discussion of the appointment of judges and the extent of their authority, Tur includes the requirement that the judge have before him his tools – the tools used to carry out his decisions. Why must these tools be present? Consistent with Ralbag’s reasoning, Tur is suggesting that the placement of these tools before the judge is part of the process of appointment. Without these resources at his disposal, his appointment and status as a judge is incomplete. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 18:21.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 18:21.

[3] Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, p 156.

[4] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 134.

[5] Mesechet Sanhedrin 7a.

[6] Rabbaynu Yaakov ben HaRash, Tur Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 1.



*Taken from "Getting It Straight"  
Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity*



# Treason

**DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ**

I watched the tall, well-dressed man puff mindlessly on his pipe as he walked. He obviously felt secure, not even bothering to look around while making his way toward the small rented flat that served as his temporary home. Like others before him, he was making the classic mistake. Forgetting that home turf could be just as dangerous as enemy ground.

Gripping the four-inch stiletto in my right hand, I kept close to the shadows. His time was about to end. Traitors were the lowest rung on life's ladder, and I would not lose sleep over ridding the world of this one. He passed by the darkened doorway that shielded me from view. I sprang silently out and-

"Hi," said a familiar voice.

I almost jumped out of my chair.

"I'm sorry," said the King of Rational Thought. "Did I startle you?"

"Uh, well, yeah. I guess I was a bit immersed in this book."

"What are you reading?" he inquired, sitting down to join me for our lunch date.

"A spy novel," I replied, somewhat sheepishly. "I know you don't care much for fiction, but this one is actually quite good."

"You don't have to apologize," he smiled. "It's true that I tend to prefer reality over fantasy. But one can even make fiction a learning experience. What's happening in the book?"

I laid it down and reached for my menu. "The hero is about to take out a traitor responsible for the deaths of at least fifteen good people."

"Hmm," he said, perusing his menu. "An interesting subject for consideration."

I looked up. "The menu?"

"No. Traitors."

I decided on soup and salad. "What's interesting about traitors?"

"Well, let me ask you a couple of questions. When you go to war against someone, is it fair to say that you're angry at them for one reason or another?"

"Sure," I said. "Why else would you go to war?"

"And when one of your own turns into a traitor, you're angry at him too, right?"

"Yes."

"But isn't it true," he continued, "that traitors are always hated more than the enemy? While there is often some honor between professional soldiers of opposing sides, such as when generals sit down together at the end of a war, that never happens with traitors. Everyone hates them. True?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

I considered it. "Well, it's because an enemy isn't trying to hide. He's being clear that he's the enemy. A traitor isn't being clear."

"Yes," he said, "but so what? He's still the enemy. Why should you hate him more?"

I pondered again. Finally, I replied, "I can't quite see it, but it seems like it has to be connected with the clarity issue."

"Very close," he said. "When you have an enemy and you can see who he is, then you can take steps to deal with him. On the other hand, you have a certain sense of security around your friends. You trust them. But when one of them turns into a traitor, he or she has suddenly taken away your sense of security. You don't know who to trust. That's a very unsettling experience. Hence, you become angry because the 'friend' took away your sense of security."

"That's why there's always more emotion around getting revenge on a traitor than a sincere enemy," he said. "Even in spy novels."

"By the way," he added. "It's interesting to note that traitors are not necessarily welcome even in the country they helped. I understand that Benedict Arnold was never really accepted by the British after betraying the U.S. Perhaps they didn't trust him either."

"Maybe," I said, as the waiter brought lunch, "that's why marriages are so hard to save after one partner has been unfaithful."

"Good point," he said. "It's the same with friendships, business partnerships, and other human relationships. The bond of trust, once broken, is very difficult to repair."

"But it can be done," I said in a burst of confidence, picking up my novel. "Why, just look here. In the last chapter, the hero gets back together with his girl friend, after she's successfully double-crossed him, at least three foreign governments, and a cab driver in Brooklyn."

"After all," I said with a grin, "they don't call this a 'novel' for nothing." ▀



## Letters



# the Reality of Sinai

*The Ten Commandments:  
carved from sapphire*

**Marc:** How can you be so positive of the authenticity, veracity, and origin of the Torah? Also, suppose just for the sake of argument that Jesus, despite having no witnesses to prove his truthfulness, was being absolutely truthful. A lack of witnesses does not a liar make. (And let's not forget about Mohammed). So again, for the sake of argument, if Jesus were truthful, that would mean that you are going against G-d's word, however well meaning you might be. In the end no one really knows the truth, which brings me back to the sentence that I used to open this message. How can you be so positive of the authenticity, veracity and origin of the Torah? I would ask the same of all religious leaders of all faiths.

**Mesora:** You first question Judaism's veracity, but then contradict yourself by suggesting Jesus was God's prophet...without witnesses.

We took up this issue in the past 3 issues of our JewishTimes. Please see the articles on the Kuzari, and "The Flaws of Christianity" on our site under "Must Reads."

Your thinking is flawed: we do not accept someone as true, simply because they "might" be telling the truth. Certainly, when we have proven that they are not. Please read our articles.

**Marc:** What you accept as logical proof for your strong views and beliefs is clearly not universal; there are many others who do not share

your beliefs. You do not know you are correct, you only believe you are. Any mortal man who claims to know the truth is an absurd liar and a fraud. NO ONE CAN BE POSITIVE ABOUT THE AUTHENTICITY, VERACITY AND ORIGIN OF ANY RELIGION. Out of curiosity, I searched out Christian Web sites that disprove Judaism the same way that Mesora.org disproves Christianity. Essentially, you all disprove each other. It's really comical when you consider it, especially when all sides consider themselves to be 100% correct. Also, I have noticed that many of the questions asked on your Web site receive answers that don't really answer the question.

For example the answer to the following question makes absolutely no sense:

*"Reader: This person who is a history major at Harvard explains that it is common for there to be an evolution of ideas over long periods of time, as he cited many examples. He explained that, for example, within one 100-year decade after Ma'mad har Sinai, the idea could have evolved that 2 million people were there, when really only a few thousand were. Within the next 100-year decade, people believed that there was a mountain that people gathered around. Within the next 100 year decade, people believed that miracles were performed, and so on, and so one, etc, etc...until what we have as Har Sinai today. He also explained*

*that with the advent of the printing press, such mistakes are not likely to be made as easily in the future.*

*Mesora: Then there would be current alternative editions of the Bible with his suggested editions...but there are none. The facts disprove his theory."*

THE ANSWER MAKES NO SENSE BECAUSE IT IS CLEAR THE QUESTIONER WAS STATING THAT ANY FUTURE RELIGIONS WOULD NOT SUFFER THE SAME DOUBTS AS TO CONSISTENCY IN INFORMATION SINCE THE PRINTING PRESS ALLOWS FOR GREATER INTEGRITY WHEN PASSING ALONG INFORMATION AS ORIGINALLY RECORDED. THE PRINTING PRESS CANNOT CORRECT PAST BOOKS, ONLY SEE THAT THEY REMAIN CONSISTENT FROM THIS TIME FORWARD, WHICH BY THE WAY HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THEIR ACCURACY.

You consistently operate under the impression that you have successfully disproved every other religion but your own. How can you be so sure of the VERACITY, AUTHENTICITY and ORIGINS of the TORAH? Your answer, to be logical, must come from a source outside of the TORAH. You cannot cite your belief based on information from within the book in question.

**Mesora:** If you were presented with 100% proof for the truth of Sinai and the Torah, would you accept such a proof?

**Marc:** If you had such proof, wouldn't you have presented it not only to me, but also to the world instead of asking me a question? Also, your answer avoided any response to my stated questions. So the way I see it, you're holding an empty hand and bluffing. Now what is this proof you speak of?

**Mesora:** I asked a very easy question, but you did not answer it simply. This indicates you are not honestly seeking an answer, but wish to remain with doubts in place of a clear-cut proof. Perhaps a proof would place obligations on you, which you do not wish.

But you are right; I should display the answer to more than just you. Therefore, your email will be responded to in this week's JewishTimes. I will use your questions and my responses to display the error you are making, and wherein lies the precise difference between Judaism's proof, and the imagined proofs of other religions.

**Marc:** Now I see how you operate. You don't

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answer my questions, but instead keep asking me questions. Then you declare you will make the conversation public where you get the last word. And having the last word, you put yourself in a better light as the winner. I expect to see ALL of our exchanges displayed and unedited to let the reader make up his/her mind. Otherwise this is a complete lack of fair play. It would be nothing short of a clear-cut effort to force your point and would make it obvious that you lack confidence in your views.

When I said that you should respond to more than myself, it was not intended that you should in any way, shape or form distort or edit any of our exchanges. Unless you display the FULL exchange that we have had, the part that you choose to display on your web site will be an unfair representation of our e-mail communications. It is a fair concern that I will be misrepresented. If such is the case, then the facts speak for themselves but your general readership will be ignorant of such facts (of your dishonest editing).

Remember, you cannot use text within the Torah as proof of the Torah's accuracy, authenticity, veracity and origin.

Also, DO NOT print my last name. I don't need crazies trying to contact me. This is a legitimate request, one that I expect you to respect.

**Mesora:** Evidently you do not read our JewishTimes, especially these last three weeks. I invite responses from those with whom I debate. I do not operate with the "last word" tactic of which you accuse me. You too will be invited to respond to this critique.

You also project your modus operandi onto me, of this being a "contest" where there exists a danger that I might "be the winner", as you put it.

Marc, the goal in Torah discussion is "truth". There are no winners and losers. You must mature to a higher level of thought, if you too wish to engage in true Torah study, and not remain in your infantile thinking as you display with your numerous, baseless accusations. Thirdly, you accuse me of "editing" your words when I have not done so, nor have I given you any reason to feel this way. I will now address your arguments.

According to the theory of this Harvard student, 1) Histories can be altered through time, and 2) Printing presses make this difficult. Only the first statement concerns our discussion of distortions in history.

Accordingly, I responded that if there were in fact alterations to a given history, there would be the original version, plus the new alterations, as the alterations could not completely obscure the original. As certain ignorant or careless individuals – not entire populations – make such alterations, we would also encounter the original, undistorted

histories transmitted by those individuals that did not alter the original. But the facts speak for themselves: we do not witness this phenomenon of 'dual histories'. For example, world history of Caesar possesses one version alone - the same is the case with all other histories. Your assumption is thereby proven false, over and over again.

You also claim Torah must be verified from another source than the text. You are correct. That is what Judaism claims: the Torah earns credibility because of the "transmission of masses who attended Sinai." It is not the "book" per se which serves as the proof of Sinai...but the unbroken transmission would have never been witnessed, had the event never occurred. So, "unbroken transmission by mass attendees" is our proof, which is external to the written account.

In contrast, there was no transmission from the point of origin of the supposed Jesus miracles. In that case, 100 years passed and no one transmitted these miracles that he supposedly performed in front of "multitudes". Hence, this story has an internal flaw, exposing its fabrication.

**Marc:** Here is a site that claims it proves the existence of Jesus: [www.av1611.org/resur.html](http://www.av1611.org/resur.html)

Here is another that claims the truth of Islam: [www.islamworld.net/true.html](http://www.islamworld.net/true.html) I will just leave it at this for now. I look forward to seeing OUR FULL dialogue in the JewishTimes and to reading feedback. If you please, tell me when the dialogue is printed so I can check it out. Thanks.

**Mesora:** Marc, I read through the two websites you provided. I am surprised you accepted their arguments so readily – yet – you attacked Judaism.

The website attempting to prove Christianity as God's word constantly refers to their New Testament as their source of proof. Why don't you accuse them of trying to prove their book internally, as you accuse me? Nonetheless, we have shown that we do not prove Judaism from the Torah itself, but from the "unbroken transmission of mass witnesses". But your Christian website has not proved their New Testament, yet, continues to base their arguments on this unproven book. This website readily accepts Jesus as having healed the sick, walking on water, and raising the dead...with absolutely no proof. They simply quote the New Testament, and take it as God's word. So you contradict yourself again: you accuse me of offering no "external proof" to the Torah, while submitting that this website offers proof, yet, it is subject to your same accusation. But you feel this website contains some truth, otherwise, you would not have presented it as support for your claims.

Your other provided website attempting to prove Islam is even more corrupt, yet again, you accept

it on par with our arguments to prove Sinai. That Islamic website claims that Islam was the "religion given to Adam." It also claims it is, "the religion of all prophets." This website does not even attempt to substantiate its claims, yet, you readily accept this as a satisfying argument. In both websites, the lack of proof is glaringly obvious.

In stark contrast, Judaism is based on the unbroken transmission of the Sinaic event attended by 2 million people who testify to witnessing intelligent words emanating from a mountain ablaze. This story was written down at Sinai and transmitted from its very occurrence onward. It was not written down 100 years after the supposed "events" of Jesus, nor does Judaism claim it was the "religion given to the first man" without proof, as does Islam. Judaism is based on the unbroken transmission of million: people about whom we know their exact lineage, their family names, their travels, the dates of the 10 Plagues and Revelation at Sinai, and subsequent histories through today. Judaism is based on provable, rational principles, unlike any, other religion. Revelation at Sinai and Judaism are proven, as are all historical events: masses testified to the miracles on Sinai, and the phenomena were easily understood. Thus, fabrication of the Sinaic event is ruled out - masses cannot conspire, as "lies" are based on subjective motivation. And ignorance of what was witnessed is similarly ruled out, as the phenomena at Sinai were clear: a mountain was engulfed in flames, the people heard an intelligent voice emanating from that fire, and they also heard the sound of a shofar increasing in its intensity, which demonstrated that it was not of human origin.

Thus, the only two ways a history can be false were ruled out: we ruled out purposeful corruption of the Sinai story by proving masses attended the event, and thus, mass conspiracy is impossible. And we have ruled out accidental corruption of the Sinai story: we demonstrated that the event was easily apprehended, and no ignorance of that event was possible.

Now, once we disprove the theories of purposeful and accidental corruption of our current-day story, there is no other possibility of Revelation at Sinai being false. Hence, it was true. Judaism is successfully proven by sound reasoning to be the only religion given by God to mankind. All other religions - as seen from their foolish claims and flawed arguments – are exposed as mere fabrications.

But as I mentioned last week, even a sound argument may not be accepted, if the one listening has emotional blocks to accepting this truth. Sadly, many Jews are sympathetic to other religions, claiming they too possess God's word. What you suggested at the outset is also unreasonable:

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"What you accept as logical proof for your strong views and beliefs is clearly not universal; there are many others who do not share your beliefs. You do not know you are correct, you only believe you are. Any mortal man who claims to know the truth is an absurd liar and a fraud. NO ONE CAN BE POSITIVE ABOUT THE AUTHENTICITY, VERACITY AND ORIGIN OF ANY RELIGION."

You write, "Any mortal man who claims to know the truth is an absurd liar and a fraud". But I ask you, aren't you making a statement that 'you' feel is "truth"? You thereby condemned yourself.

Furthermore, you are convinced that no man can be convinced of the truth of any religion. You offer no reasoning, expecting all who read this to suddenly agree with your position. However, I hope after reading my words, you now see that Judaism can be proved, and is proven, by God's precise orchestration of that ancient, real event of Revelation at Sinai.

Revelation at Sinai must be clear to us all. With a 100% conviction in God's existence, and His plan that man follows the Torah – all men – and with our appreciation of His laws only obtained through Torah study, we will arrive at the most peaceful and agreeable life. We will remove any and all conflicts as to "what lifestyle shall I choose?" Conviction is available. It is as real as we are. We have intelligence for the purpose of arriving at absolute convictions...and our conviction in God's reality is primary.

Be on guard for emotions wishing to ignore this truth, as they are many. Be sensitive to detect these emotions as they arise, and earnestly confront each one with patience and intelligence, and do not cower. Discuss these conflicts with wise individuals of refined reasoning. They will assist you in ridding yourself from the continued assault your emotions make against your reason. For once you have answers to your doubts, you may remind yourself of them when your emotions flare up in the future. And they will. Objective proof is what Judaism is about: proof of Sinai, and proof of God. Once armed with ironclad proofs of Judaism's exclusive, provable claim to God's word, you will find a life of continued enjoyment in Torah wisdom. Your conviction that Torah is God's word will drive you to uncover His endless, enlightening wisdom.

"The fear if God is the beginning of knowledge, [but] wisdom and moral discipline do fools despise." (Proverbs, 1:7) The wisest man stated this.

Think about why he felt this way. ■



# I Kant Murder

**Reader:** Does God ever command murder under any set of circumstances? Immanuel Kant states never, and I would agree. A Pandora's box would be opened that you could not handle. These questions are academic and I am interested in your response. Thank you, Morris

**Mesora:** We learn from recorded history that God Himself flooded the Earth; He destroyed Sodom's inhabitants, and commanded the Jews to kill others as punishments, or to secure a moral society. We need not resort to theories not based on transmission of prophecy, when we have them in our possession in the form of the Torah.

When a society or an individual places others at risk, they are rightfully, and justly removed. For example, I am certain Kant would desire the execution of his would-be murderer. For Kant, as you quote him, seems to imply that murder is an evil, thus, God would never do evil. But if God desires there be no evil, then should not God desire that Kant be spared if he was innocent? Hence, Kant must be consistent and desire that his would-be murderer not perform that evil.

Kant confuses what are "absolutes": the absolute is that "good should exist". We arrive at the conclusion that at times, murder is a true good, against Kant's idea that murder is an absolute evil and unapproachable by God. Both, historical fact, and reasoning expose a fallacy in Kant's philosophy. ■



# In God's Image

**Reader:** Since any entity or any thing in the universe that has function must have structure (axiomatic), it follows that God has structure. Would it not follow that the structure of the human mind (not brain) as an "image of God" would be endowed with the same structure? This is a distillation of a great deal of information, but does not refer to form or shape or to corporeality.

**Mesora:** You incorrectly equate the universe to God. In fact, you have no basis to equate the Creator, with the "created". From your fist, false assumption, you make another one: you think that man's mind in some way reflects God. However, nothing can be equated to God, as we cannot know what God is. Similarly, I cannot equate what is in my hand, to what is in an opaque, black box. I know not what is inside, so any equation to an unknown is impossible. Once I understand my complete ignorance as to the contents of that box, I cannot extrapolate further equations. Thus, we must understand that man was made in the "image of God" otherwise. This phrase means to indicate that man possesses some element "through which" he may recognize God. But in now way does a created intelligence or soul possess any features similar to God. ■



# A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE

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RABBI RON SIMON

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Chazal have an expression: “Ein mukdam umeuchar baTorah”; There is no chronological order to the Torah. Well, maybe no precise order. At any rate, one sees that the presentation of the ideas of the Torah overrides the recounting of events along the historical timeline.

Various levels of depth can be found in their statement, but what is important here is that I am one Parsha behind, and I need a good excuse.

In Parshas B’shalach, (Exod. 14:10) we find Bnei Yisrael encamped at the Red Sea after their departure from Egypt. Pharaoh pursues them there, closing in on them with his army. The reaction of Bnei Yisrael is captured by the expression “vayitzaku”, “and they cried out”. The interpretation of this expression can go in two opposite directions. Either it can mean that they were crying out to G-d for assistance, or it can mean that they were storming against G-d for taking them out of Egypt, merely to deliver them into the hands of the Egyptians.

According to the second interpretation, that of Onkelos, the next verse seems consistent with this one. Bnei Yisrael turn their complaint from G-d to Moshe, denying not only that they can survive this crisis, but that the whole plan for the future is baseless. As it is stated, “that you have taken us out to die in the desert”. ‘The desert’ was where they were going to end up soon, not where they were right now. The implication of their statement is that their fate would not go according to the plan that Moshe had revealed to them.

The first interpretation of ‘vayitzaku’, that Bnei Yisrael were crying to G-d in prayer, seems to result in an inconsistency between the verses. How does the same group of people at one

moment humble themselves in prayer, and in the very next verse, not only complain, but deny the prophecy and the legitimacy of their spiritual leader?

The Ramban tries to resolve the problem by positing that there were two groups that existed among Bnei Yisrael, one that cried out in prayer and one that voiced a complaint and a denial. Unless the Ramban is speaking out of deference to Bnei Yisrael, as he possibly alludes to later, the idea that there were two distinct groups would seem to conflict with the exact juxtaposition of these two verses. The contrast created by this juxtaposition might possibly point to another idea.

It is conceivable that the same people, the nation as a whole, first cried out in prayer and immediately afterwards rebelled.

Prayer is complicated in that what drives an individual or group to pray can vary, and that also has consequences with respect to the nature of the prayer itself. Some prayer is a gut reaction to a threatening situation, or an assumed superficial state that satisfies some ritual need.

Other times, prayer is motivated by the recognition that everything depends upon G-d for its existence; the universe, ourselves and our



needs, and that we need to align ourselves with the ultimates, remaining focused on them to the degree that we can.

Bnei Yisrael was in a wavering state. The unpredictability of the specific chain of events that would lead to their deliverance, created instability in their lives and consequently in their personalities.

They reacted to a threatening situation by crying out for mercy. This drive for prayer did not emanate from an enduring relationship to the ultimates.

We should realize that many times the way is rough and unclear, and even if we were prophets, or had access to one, the details one wants to know are many times undisclosed. Bitachon, or trust is many times, more of a trait of forbearance than it is of surety.

Good Shabbos. ■

## Weekly Parsha

# the TABLETS the TORAH & MT. SINAI

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Certain facts or events, basic to our beliefs, are sometimes so quickly embraced, that our questions are overlooked, or not even detected. Children often ask us about our accepted foundations. Their questions are undiluted by social pressures, so they see the large holes in our beliefs, and not being repressed, they verbalize them. We hear their questions - from the mouths of babes - and wonder why we never realized such problems. Of course, our ignorance is the source of these problems. But if we didn't ponder the questions that children ask - and certainly if we have no answers - we are missing some basic principles of Judaism.

Such is the case with Sinai. Recently, I was reviewing Deuteronomy 10:1, where God instructed Moses to quarry a new set of stones for God's engraving of the second set of Ten Commandments. (God wrote the Ten Commandments on both sets, but God quarried only set #1, Moses was commanded to quarry set #2.) The first set of tablets, you recall, Moses broke in the sight of the people. A Rabbi explained this was done so the people would not worship the stone tablets as they did the Golden Calf. A new set of tablets was then required. Subsequently, I pondered, "Why do we needed the Ten Commandments engraved on stone tablets at all? If we need commands, we can receive them orally from God, or from Moses, so why are tablets needed? Also, why was there miraculous writing on the tablets? If Moses felt the people might err by deifying the first set, why was a second set created?" I also wondered why a box was required for the second set, but not for the first?

I then started thinking more into the purpose of the tablets, "Was this the only thing Moses descended with from Sinai? Was there a Torah scroll? What about the Oral Law? What did Moses receive, and when?" I also questioned what exactly comprised the content of the Written Torah and the Oral Law. Events subsequent to Sinai, such as the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy had not yet occurred, so it did not make sense to me that these were given at Sinai. I looked for references in the Torah and Talmud. What did Moses receive at Sinai?

I wish at this point to make it clear, that I am not questioning the veracity of our Written Torah and our Oral Law as we have it today. Our Five Books of Moses, Prophets, Writings, Mishna, Medrash, and Talmud are all authentic, and comprise authentic, Written and Oral Law. What I am questioning, is how and what was received, by whom, and when. I am doing so, as this is part of God's design of our receipt of Torah. If He gave it over in a specific fashion, then there is much knowledge to be derived from such a transmission. Certainly, the Ten Commandments must be unique in some way, as God created separate stones revealing only these ten. What is their significance?

The answers begin to reveal themselves by studying these areas in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Exodus 19, and 24 recount the arrival of the Jews at Sinai and the events which transpired:

*Exodus, 24:1-4, "1. And to Moses (God) said, ascend to God, you, Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy from the elders of Israel, and prostrate from afar. 2. And Moses alone, draw near to God, but the others, don't approach, and the people, do not ascend with him. 3. And Moses came and told over to the people all the words of God, and all the statutes, and the entire people answered as one, and they said, 'all the matters that God has said we will do.' 4. And Moses wrote all the the words of God..."*

Verse 24:12 continues: "And God said to Moses, 'ascend to Me to the mountain, and remain there, and I will give you the tablets of stone, and the Torah and the Mitzvah (commands) that I have written, that you should instruct them."

"And Moses wrote all the the words of God..." teaches that prior to the giving of the tablets of stone, Moses ascended Mount Sinai, learned ideas from God, descended, taught the people what he learned, and wrote "the words of God." (This was the order of events prior to Moses' second ascension to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments.) What were these "words"? Ibn Ezra says this comprised the section of our Torah from Exod. 20:19 - 23:33. This is the end of Parshas Yisro through most of Parshas Mishpatim. This was told to the Jews before the event of Sinai where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The Jews accepted these laws, and Moses wrote them down. This is referred to as the "Book of the Treaty." Moses entered them into a treaty with God, that they accept God based on the section mentioned. Only afterwards was that famous, historical giving of the Ten Commandments from the fiery Mount Sinai. The Jews were offered to hear the Torah's commands.

Earlier in Exodus, 19:8, we learn of this same account, but with some more information. When Moses told the Jews the commandments verbally, prior to the reception of the tablets, the Jews said as one, "all that God said, we will do, and Moses returned the word of the people to God." Moses returned to God and told Him the Jews' favorable response. Now, Moses knew that God is aware of all man's thoughts, deeds and speech. What need was there for Moses to "return the word"? Then God responds, "Behold, I come to you in thick cloud so that the people shall hear when I speak with you, and also in you will they believe forever..." What was Moses intent on reporting the Jews' acceptance of these commands, and what was God's response? Was Moses' intent to say, "there is no need for the event of Sinai, as the people already believe in You?" I am not certain. The Rabbis offer a few explanations why Revelation at Sinai was necessary. Ibn Ezra felt there were some members of the nation who subscribed to Egypt's beliefs (inherited from the Hodus) that God does not speak with man. God therefore wished to uproot this fallacy through Revelation. Ibn Ezra then, is of the opinion that

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## Weekly Parsha

Revelation was not performed for the Jews' acceptance of God, which they already had accepted, "and the entire people answered as one, and they said, 'all the matters that God has said we will do.'"

According to Ibn Ezra, God teaches the purpose of the miracles at Sinai: "Yes, the people believe in Me, but there is yet something missing: a proof for ALL generations", as God said, "...and also in you will they believe forever." It ends up that the Sinaic event of God giving the Ten Commands from a fiery mountain had one purpose; to stand as a proof for all generations. This is something many of us are already familiar with: Such a massively attended event at which an Intelligence related knowledge to man, from amidst flames, was and is undeniable proof of the existence of a Metaphysical Being in complete control of all creation. Sinai serves as our eternal proof of God's existence. We now learn from a closer look, that the Jews had already accepted God's commands prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments. That event was to serve as a proof of God's existence, but the Jews' agreement to those ideas was earlier.

#### What exactly did God give to Moses at Sinai?

The Torah tells us God communicated many commands without writing, and He also gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Ibn Ezra says the "Torah and the Mitzvah" referred to in Exod. 24:12 is as follows: "The 'Torah' is the first and fifth commands (of the Ten) and the 'Mitzvah' refers to the other eight." This implies that all which God gave physically, was the Ten Commandments on stone. Further proof is found openly, Deuteronomy 9:10, "And it was at the end of forty days and forty nights, God gave me the two tablets of stone, tablets of the treaty." We find no mention of any other object, such as a Torah scroll, given to Moses. We therefore learn that Moses wrote the Torah, and God wrote the Ten Commandments. (Saadia Gaon views the Ten Commandments as the head categories for the remaining 603 commands.)

The Torah was written by Moses, not God, Who wrote the Ten Commandments. What was God's plan, that there should be a Divinely engraved "Ten Commandments" in stone, and that Moses would record the Torah? And we see the necessity for the Ten Commandments, as God instructed Moses to quarry new tablets subsequent to his destruction of the first set. These stones were necessary, even though they are recorded in Moses' Torah! What is so important about these stone tablets? Not only that, but additionally, the Ten Commandments were uttered by God. Why? If He gave them to us in an engraved form, we have them! Why is God's created "speech" required? Was it to awe the masses, as we see they asked Moses to intercede, as they feared for their lives at the sound of this created voice?

According to Maimonides, at Sinai, the Jews did not hear intelligible words. All they heard was an awesome sound. Maimonides explains the use of the second person singular throughout the ten Commandments -

God addressed Moses alone. Why would God wish that Moses' alone find the sound intelligible, but not the people? Again, Maimonides is of the opinion that the people didn't hear intelligible words during God's "oral" transmission of the Ten Commandments. This requires an explanation, as this too is by God's will. We now come to the core issue of this article...

#### Why Moses Perceived the Miracle of Sinai Differently than the People

We must take note of Maimonides' distinction between the perceptions of Moses and the Jews at Sinai. It appears to me, God desired we understand that reaching Him is only through knowledge. God teaches this by communicating with the Jews at Sinai, but as Maimonides teaches, Moses' alone understood this prophecy on his level, Aaron on a lower level, Nadav and Avihu on a lower level, and the seventy elders still lower. The people did not understand the sound. This teaches that knowledge of God depends on one's own level. It is not something equally available to all members of mankind. God desires we excel at our learning, sharpening our minds, thinking into matters, and using reason to uncover the infinite world of ideas created by God. The fact that knowledge is an endless sea, is the driving force behind a Torah student's conviction that his or her studies will eventuate in deep, profound, and "continued" insights. This excites the Torah scholar, which each one of us has the ability to be. It's not the amount of study, but the quality of it. "Echad hamarbeh, v'echad ha'mimat, uvilvad sheh-yikavane libo laShamayim."

Sinai was orchestrated in a precise fashion. Maimonides uncovers the concept which Sinai taught: In proportion to our knowledge is our ability to see new truths. Moses was on the highest level of knowledge, and therefore understood this prophecy at Sinai to the highest level of human clarity. He then taught this knowledge to the people, but they could not perceive it directly when it was revealed. God desired the people to require Moses' repetition. Why? This established the system of Torah as a constant reiteration of the event at Sinai! A clever method. Sinai taught us that perception of God's knowledge is proportional to our intelligence. Thus, Moses alone perceived the meaning of the sounds. You remember that earlier in this article we learned that the people were taught certain Torah commands prior to the event at Sinai. Why was this done? Perhaps it served as a basis for the following Sinaic event which God knew they would not comprehend. God wished that when Moses explained to them what he heard, that the Jews would see that it was perfectly in line with what Moses taught many days earlier. There would be no chance that the people would assume Moses was fabricating something God did not speak.

God does not wish this lesson of Sinai to vanish. This is where Moses' writing of the Torah comes in. God could have equally given Moses a Torah scroll

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## Weekly Parsha

along with the tablets, but He didn't. Why? I believe Moses' authority - as displayed in his writing of the Torah - reiterates the Sinai system that knowledge can only be found when sought from the wise. It is not open to everyone as the Conservatives and Reformed Jews haughtily claim. The system of authority was established at Sinai, and reiterated through Moses' writing of the Torah. Subsequent to Moses, this concept continues, as it forms part of Torah commands, "In accordance with the Torah that they teach you..." (Deut. 17:11) God commands us to adhere to the Rabbis. God wishes us to realize that knowledge can only be reached with our increased study, and our continually, refined intelligence and reason. Words alone - even in Torah - cannot contain God's wisdom. The words point to greater ideas, they are doors to larger vaults, and they, to even larger ones. Perhaps this is the idea that the Jews did not hear words. As the verse says, "a sound of words did you hear". Maimonides deduces that no words were heard, otherwise, the verse would read "words did you hear", not "a sound of words". The Jews heard sounds with no words.

#### A Purpose of the Tablets

We now understand why Moses taught the Jews commands before Sinai's miracles. We understand why Moses wrote the Torah - not God. We understand why God created the miraculous event at Sinai, as well as the system of transmission of knowledge. But we are left with one question. Why did God create the Ten Commandments of stone? Why was the second set alone, housed in a box?

Let us think; they were made of stone, both sets - the broken and the second set - were housed in the ark, there was miraculous writing on these tablets (Rabbeinu Yona: Ethics, 5:6), they contained the ten head categories for all the remaining 603 commands (Saadia Gaon), and they were to remain with the people always.

Why did the tablets have only ten of the 613 commands? We see elsewhere (Deut. 27:3) that the entire Torah was written three times on three sets of 12 stones, according to Ramban. Even Ibn Ezra states that all the commands were written on these stones. So why didn't the tablets given to Moses at Sinai contain all the commands?

Perhaps the answer is consistent with the purpose of Sinai: That is, that the system of knowledge of God is one of 'derivation' - all knowledge cannot be contained in writing. God gave us intelligence for the sole purpose of using it. With the tablets of only ten commands, I believe God created a permanent lesson: "All is not here", you must study continually to arrive at new ideas in My infinite sea of knowledge. So the head categories are engraved on these two stones. This teaches that very same lesson conveyed through Moses' exclusive understanding of God's "verbal" recital of these very Ten Commands on Sinai: Knowledge is arrived at only through thinking.

Knowledge is not the written word, so few words are engraved on the tablets. But since we require a starting point, God inscribed the head categories which would lead the thinker to all other commands, which may be derived from these ten. God taught us that our knowledge of Him is proportional to our intelligence. This is why Moses alone perceived the "orally" transmitted Ten Commandments. Others below him in intelligence, i.e., Aaron, his sons, and the elders, received far less.

This theory is consistent with Saadia Gaon's position that the Ten Commandments are the head categories of all remaining 603 commands. Saadia Gaon too, was teaching that God gave us the necessary "Ten Keys" which unlock greater knowledge. Saadia Gaon saw knowledge not as a reading of facts, but as it truly is: a system where our thought alone can discover new ideas, and that new knowledge, opens new doors, ad infinitum. All truth is complimentary, so the more we grasp, the more we CAN grasp.

The tablets mirror the event of God's revelation, and the nature by which man may arrive at new ideas. Just as Moses alone understood the sounds at Sinai, and all others could not readily comprehend the sounds, so too the tablets. All is not revealed, but can be uncovered through earnest investigation. Moses possessed the greatest intellect, so he was able to comprehend Sinai more than any other person. Just as Sinai taught us that refined intelligence open doors to those possessing it, via Moses' exclusive comprehension, the tablets too were a necessary lesson for future generations. They were commanded to be made of stone as stone endures throughout all generations. (Placing the second set of tablets in a box may have been to indicate that the Jews were now further removed from knowledge, in contrast to the first set. They removed themselves via the Golden Calf event.)

Why was a "miraculous" writing essential to these tablets? Perhaps this "Divine" element continually reminds us that the Source of all knowledge is God. Only One Who created the world could create miracles within a substance, such as these miraculous letters. We recognize thereby, that Torah is knowledge of God, and given by God. These tablets are a testament to the Divine Source of Torah, and all knowledge.

We learn a lesson vital to our purpose here on Earth to learn: Learning is not absorbing facts. Learning is the act of thinking, deriving, and reasoning. "Knowledge" is not all written down, very little is. Thus, the Oral Law. Our Torah is merely the starting point. God's knowledge may only be reached through intense thought. We must strive to remove ourselves from mundane activities, distractions, and from seeking satisfaction of our emotions. We must make a serious effort to secure time, and isolate ourselves with a friend and alone, and delve into Torah study. Jacob was a "yoshave ohallim", "a tent dweller". He spent years in thought. Only through this approach will we merit greater knowledge, and see the depths of wisdom, with much enjoyment. ■