

Dvar Torah by Rabbi Chanoch Yeres

to his community at
Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe
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YITRO

At the end of the p'sukim of this week's parsha in which we receive the Torah, G-d gives Moshe three commandments:

not to make gods of gold or silver,
not to build an altar of stone with iron tools,
and not to construct steps leading up to the Altar (20:19-23).

The first of these commandments seems superfluous, the prohibition against making idols, is already stated explicitly in the Ten Commandments. However, the other two prohibitions seem to have little to do with the first commandments and almost nothing to do with Mt. Sinai? Furthermore, the Israelites have yet been commanded about sacrifices. What relevance then could these commandments have for Israel?

The answer to these questions can be derived from the preface to these Mitzvot. "You have seen that I have spoken to you (directly) from the heavens."

In the previous verses Israel requested that rather than hearing

G-d's awesome power directly, Moshe should act as their intermediary. By commanding these three mitzvot, G-d informs the Israelites that while in the future He will not appear in such awesome power, nevertheless, their direct line to G-d always remains open even without an intermediary.

Now we can better understand these commandments. The Abarbanel explains that the need to instruct us again not to make idols is to stress that we are not to create idols to stand between Israel and G-d.

In addition, the command not to use metal instruments in building the Altar is to reject any man-made technology for this holy purpose. It is understood that man abuses his technological advances for corruption and violence.

Finally, not only the actual Altar, but even the approach must be in absolute purity. Man must approach G-d in modesty and not with GILUI ERVA that is unavoidable in walking up steps to that AVODA.

This group of Mitzvot, therefore is very relevant to the Mount Sinai experience. G-d wanted to reassure Israel that while grand public miracles like Sinai will not be visible in the future but this in no way diminishes the personal relationship which would continue between G-d and the Jewish

people. We see this idea permeated through this text as G-d refers to himself numerous times. All these references to G-d can be seen as a reminder of the holiness necessary to approach Him and furthermore, it is a reassurance to us, even today, that G-d's personal relationship with His Chosen Nation will not waver nor diminish. 