

PHILOTORAH

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו וא'להינו שתשלח מהרה רפואה שלמה מן השמים, רפואת הנפש ורפואת הגוף לחולי קורונה בישראל, בעם היהודי, ובעולם. ולנפגעי מעשי טרור בישראל, ולנפגעי מעשי אנטישמיות בכל מקום שהם - בתוך שאר חולי ישראל. אמן.

YITRO

כ' שבט
ה'תשפ"ב



Jan 21-22, '22

Yerushalayim

in/out times for
Shabbat Parshat

YITRO



4:29 PM

Plag 3:59 PM



5:43 PM

R"t 6:22 PM

For other locales
see Z'MANIM link





Intercalation

With TU BiShvat just past (assuming you are reading this from Monday night and beyond), let us take a look towards the two Adars.

Intercalation (timekeeping), insertion of a leap day, week or month into some calendar years to make the calendar follow the seasons.

My guess is that most readers know about most of what I will write - but I hope everyone will pick up a new point or two.

Torah Law requires that our months are based on the cycle of the Moon as it revolves around the Earth (as the Earth & Moon revolve around the Sun.

And we are required to celebrate Pesach in the Spring (and Sukkot in the Fall).

The Moon takes a bit more than 29½ days to go through its cycle of phases.

It follows that a year of 12 lunar months is 354 days long (plus or minus a day).

Pesach in the Spring necessitates adjusting the Lunar calendar by

adding approx. 11 days per year to align our holidays with the seasons, which are based on the 365-day solar year.

(Numbers are rounded to simplify the topic.)

Adding a number of days each year is not doable, so a month is added a bit more often than once in three years. To be specific, the fixed calendar calls for 7 years with two Adars and 12 years with one Adar, in every 19-year Lunar (or Lesser) Cycle.

Specifically, the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th of a Lunar cycle have 13 months; the others have 12 months.

That's 3 years, 3 years, 2 years, then 3, 3, 3, 2.

To see for yourselves, take the year-number and divide it by 19. For this year, $5782 \div 19 = 304$ remainder 6.

This means that 304 Lunar cycles have past since Creation and that we are in the 6th year of the current 305th MACHZOR KATAN. The 6th year of the cycle is a SHANA M'UBERET, a 13-month year.

Hence we will announce and bench the month of Adar HaRishon next Shabbat (Mishpatim).

In the fixed calendar, the first Adar (which is the additional one) has 30d.

YITRO



17th of 54 sedras;
5th of 11 in Sh'mot

Written on 138 lines in a Torah, (46th)

15 Parshiyot; 4 open, 11 closed

75* p'sukim - ranks 47th
(only 7 sedras have fewer p'sukim)

1105 words, 4022 letters - ranks 46th

Yitro is the smallest sedra in Sh'mot

*Tradition is that Yitro has 72 p'sukim, not 75. If we count DIBROT rather than p'sukim for the Aseret HaDibrot, then the number drops to 72 (from 75) and that probably explains the difference.

HOWEVER... when we read the Aseret haDibrot with TAAMEI HA'ELYON (as Dibrot), there are only 9 p'sukim/dibrot, since the first two are definitely combined. Total: 71. Go figure.

MITZVOT

Yitro contains 17 of the 613 mitzvot;
3 positive and 14 prohibitions

Note that 14 of the 17 mitzvot in Yitro are within the Aseret HaDibrot. That means that Ten Commandments is not really the best translation for Aseret HaDibrot. The Ten Statements might be a better rendering of Aseret HaDibrot - or Aseret HaD'varim, as the Torah calls them. Also note that a 15th mitzva for the Aseret HaDibrot is counted from Va'etchanan - V'LO TIT-AVEH (unhealthy desire).

Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[P> X:Y (Z)] and [S> X:Y (Z)] indicate start of a parsha p'tucha or s'tuma. X:Y is Perek:Pasuk of the beginning of the parsha; (Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha.

Numbers in [square brackets] are the Mitzva-count of Sefer HaChinuch AND Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot. A=ASEI; L=LAV (prohibition). X:Y is the perek & pasuk from which the mitzva comes.

Kohen - First Aliya 12 p'sukim - 18:1-18

[P> 18:1 (27)] Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, hears "all that has happened" to the Children of Israel and comes to Moshe with Tzipora and Moshe's (actually, Tzipora's - that's how the Torah describes them!) two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. Moshe, Aharon, and the Elders welcome Yitro with great honor. Yitro praises G-d for all that He has done for the People.

SDT: The straight reading of this portion is that Yitro heard about the Crossing of the Sea and the battle with Amalek. These are the events recorded in the previous sedra. Other commentaries point to certain textual references about Sinai and are of the opinion that Yitro came after Matan Torah, some time during the almost one year that the People were camped near Sinai. If this is so, then we have an example of "there is no set order in the Torah's account..." and we can add the

events of Sinai to the list of what Yitro "heard and came". Of course, when the Torah does not follow chronological sequence, there are reasons... sometimes we get insights into what those reasons might be.

VAYICHAD YITRO, Yitro was delighted with all of the good that G-d had done for the people of Israel. That's the "plain" meaning of the word. Rashi mentions another possible meaning of the word - of the skin breaking out in "goose-bumps", perhaps a subconscious feeling of mortification for the downfall of his former colleagues. One has to be sensitive and careful with what one says to a convert or potential convert.

Levi - Second Aliya 11 p'sukim - 18:13-23

On the "following day", Yitro observes Moshe judging the People from morning until night. He offers suggestions for a more efficient system. Moshe should teach the People what G-d requires of them, and he should also handle the most difficult questions and disputes. But the bulk of the daily judging should be assigned to qualified individuals who will be in charge of groups of ten, fifty, a hundred, and a thousand people. Yitro explains that this new system will not only make things easier for Moshe, but the people too will be benefited.

(This portion of the sedra definitely seems to have occurred after Matan Torah, even if you want to say that Yitro's original arrival was before.)

SDT: "On the following day..."

The plain meaning would be, on the day following Yitro's arrival. Rashi, however, quotes the Midrash in saying that the day was the morrow of Yom Kippur, that very first Yom Kippur when Moshe came down from the mountain with the second set of Luchot. This makes an important statement, that not only is building the Mishkan an essential part of the "getting back to life following the Golden Calf disaster" period, but so is the everyday social and civil functioning of the people.

In the big picture, we see that Parshat Yitro with the main description of Matan Torah precedes Mishpatim with its mundane, everyday, down-to-earth laws. Yet at the beginning of Yitro, we find this out-of-sequence portion of the Mishpatim-related concept. And at the end of Mishpatim, we have the rest of the story of Maamad Har Sinai. So which really comes first - the lofty, spiritual dimensions of Judaism, or everyday life? We can (and should) look at it as a package deal.

However you look at the first part of the sedra, the story of Yitro seems to be an interruption between the events of the Exodus and the Splitting of the Sea, the Manna, the battle against Amalek on the one hand, and Matan Torah on the other.

But it is definitely NOT an interruption - it is a prerequisite for Matan Torah. Moshe's view of the judging process, as he explains to Yitro who asks him what he's doing, is that the people come to him LIDROSH ET HA'ELOKIM, to seek out G-d. Yitro's point is that there is a lack of civility among the disputing individuals which must be handled BEFORE they can pursue Knowledge of G-d. This interlude about civil justice can teach us that good interpersonal relations allows us to really benefit from Matan Torah. Similarly, Derech Eretz Kodma LaTorah.

Shlishi - Third Aliya 4 p'sukim - 18:24-27

Moshe accepts Yitro's suggestions and selects the judges. Commentaries point out that the actual qualifications of the judges that Moshe selected were more "modest" than Yitro had recommended. In theory, the very highest caliber person should be sought after as judge. In reality, we often have to settle for the best we can find in our society.

Moshe sends Yitro off on his journey to Midyan (to convert his family, says Rashi).

Notice that the first three Aliyot are all part of a single parsha, the parsha of Yitro (not to be confused with weekly sedra of Yitro). Pull that parsha out of the Torah for a moment (don't worry, we'll put it right back), and the next

thing we read about is Israel traveling from Refidim towards Sinai. This follows smoothly from the battle with Amalek which took place in Refidim. Sequentially, the removed parsha of the Yitro episode is not missed at all. Therefore, it seems obvious that the Yitro portion is there for its lesson value alone. Which is fine, and is how we understand the EIN SEDER MUKDAM U'M'UCHAR BATORAH phenomenon. The Torah is not just going to put things out of chronological order for no good reason (as mentioned earlier).

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya 6 p'sukim - 19:1-6

Here begins the Torah reading for Shavuot morning

[P> 19:1 (25)] The Torah now returns to the sequence of Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim to Matan Torah. On Rosh Chodesh Sivan (six weeks after leaving Egypt) the Children of Israel arrive at Sinai.

Worth reviewing...

In the third month following the Exodus, on THIS day, they (the Children of Israel) arrived at the Sinai Wilderness. Why THIS day; THAT day is how you tell a story. The answer is that Torah isn't a once-upon-a-time, a-long-time-ago story book. The Torah is a living guide for us, to be constantly rediscovered. Every day, each Jew should imagine him- or herself at Sinai receiving the Torah anew. Today we have come out of

Egyptian bondage; today we stand at the foot of Mt. Sinai eagerly awaiting Divine Revelation, and today we commit ourselves to G-d and what He asks of us. Today is the first day of the rest of our lives - as the saying goes (*attributed to Charles E. Dederich, a reformed alcoholic and developer of a company to help drug addicts - a good saying for different situations*). The words of Torah which we learn and live should never become stale. They should be in our eyes as if TODAY we have received them. We should learn Torah and do mitzvot with the freshness and enthusiasm of a first-time experience. This too fits well with the "Yitro model". The challenge: Be a true Torah Jew all your life, for as many years as G-d gives you, but have an enthusiasm that is more common to converts and Baalei T'shuva.

After settling at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moshe ascends to G-d (whatever that really means) and G-d tells him what he is to say to the women and men (sequence is intentional and based on the analysis of the terms Beit Yaakov and then Bnei Yisrael). A clear connection is made between G-d's having taken us out of Egypt and His taking us to Him as His Chosen People - with the condition that we follow Him and His Torah. It is true that a Jew is a Jew regardless of his keeping the Torah or not, but it is clear that G-d has always demanded of us that we be committed to Torah and Mitzvot in order for our relationship with Him to be mutual and actively positive from both sides.

Chamishi 5th Aliya 13 p'sukim - 19:7-19

Moshe presents G-d's words to the Elders (and the People), who answer with a resounding "All that G-d says we will do". (Not yet with the famous Naaseh V'Nishma - that comes in next week's sedra.) Moshe then tells the people to prepare for three days to receive the Torah. During this time, the Mountain was off-limits (to people and to animals). On the morning of the third day, the People gather at the foot of the mountain to the accompaniment of the supernatural sounds and sights of the Shofar, thunder, lightning, and smoke. G-d will speak to Moshe in such a manner that the People will be witness to this direct communication. When Moshe will speak, G-d will answer with a "voice" (and not just via a vision or spiritual telepathy - so that the people could be part of the experience).

SDT: G-d tells Moshe that the People should "sanctify themselves today AND tomorrow". It is relatively easy to sanctify oneself on the day of the great miraculous events of Matan Torah. The challenge to each of us is to sanctify ourselves on the many tomorrows that follow. The days after the wondrous events... The days when our lives return to "normal". This is what being Jewish is about. Yom Kippur is special and holy. Our additional challenge is to sanctify the day after

Yom Kippur. We sanctify the mundane. Therefore, there really is nothing that is actually mundane for us.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya 20 p'sukim - 19:20-20:14

G-d descends onto Har Sinai (so to speak) and calls to Moshe to join Him. G-d tells Moshe to repeat the warning against approaching the mountain. Moshe then goes down to the people to tell them G-d's words.

[S> 20:1 (1)] G-d (Elokim) speaks all the following things, saying...

What follows is/are Aseret HaDibrot, the Ten Commandments. They are comprised of 13 p'sukim which contain 14 mitzvot of the Torah's 613.

[S> 20:2 (5)] What we call the first two commandments (or sayings or statements) are combined in a single parsha of 5 p'sukim. They can be seen as two sides of the same coin. You must believe in G-d; you may not believe in other gods... Some Chumashim consider the ANOCHI pasuk and LO YIHYEH... to be a single pasuk. In Taamei HaElyon they are definitely joined into a single pasuk.

Mitzva Watch

The first commandment sounds like a statement by G-d - an introductory remark, perhaps, to what follows, but is viewed by Rambam, the Chinuch,

and others, it is the mitzva to believe in G-d [25, A1 20:2]. (And others do view it as an introductory statement.)

The second commandment contains several prohibitions related to idolatry. Specifically, not to believe in other gods [26, L1 20:3] (this mitzva includes the prohibition of having no belief at all - atheism), not making idols [27, L2 20:4], nor bowing to them (even without believing in them) [28, L5 20:5], nor worshiping idols in any manner [29, L6 20:5]. Note that this commandment deals with both the thought and actions of Avoda Zara (idolatry).

[S> 20:7 (1)] The third commandment prohibits swearing in vain [30, L62 20:7].

This is defined as (1) swearing to the truth of something that is obviously true and well-known - e.g. that the Sun is hot; (2) to swear in denial of an obvious truth - that the Moon is made of cheese. Interestingly, this is not considered a lie or a false oath, since - hopefully - everyone knows that the Moon is not made of cheese. Only when the truth of a matter is unknown do we use the term lie and false oath. A vain oath is just as serious as a false one, so this distinction is largely academic, but it emphasizes the seriousness of being flippant in regard to swearing; (3) to swear to violate the Torah - e.g. that one will eat pork. Such an oath is immediately void since we are considered to have taken a prior oath (at Sinai) to not eat pork.

Hence, the oath is in vain and is a disrespectful use of G-d's name; (4) to swear to do something that is impossible - e.g. to stay awake for a full week. The common denominator of these types of vain oaths is that they all "cheapen" the use of G-d's name and threaten the smooth functioning of society which often must rely on the seriousness of a real oath.

In addition to actual vain oaths, this prohibition is considered by some authorities to include the saying of a BRACHA L'VATALA, and its partner, a BRACHA SHE-EINO TZ'RICHA. Saying G-d's name in vain is forbidden but is not considered part of this Commandment #3. It falls under one or more other mitzvot.

[P> 20:8 (4)] Commandment #4 deals with Shabbat and contains the positive mitzva to remember the Shabbat with Kiddush [31, A155 20:8], and the prohibition of all manner of Melacha, specific categories of creative activities [32, L320 20:10].

The mitzva of ZACHOR includes saying Kiddush as Shabbat enters, and Havdala as Shabbat leaves. (Officially, K&H are said in davening as a fulfillment of the Torah command, and again with wine, in fulfillment of a Rabbinic command. It's a bit more complicated than that, but this is the basic idea.) Prohibitions of Melacha are divided into 39 categories, each of which contains other related activities, usually with the same goal.

E.g., PLANTING is one of the 39 categories; watering, pruning, fertilizing all help the growth of plants and are TOLADOT of PLANTING, and are also considered Torah violations of equal seriousness to the parent melacha, Planting-ZOREI'A.

Aside from these two mitzvot about Shabbat, there are three others in the Torah - last week's prohibition of T'CHUM SHABBAT, next week's positive command to abstain from melacha (the other side of the prohibition here), and Vayakhel's prohibition of courts carrying out punishments on Shabbat.

[S> 20:12 (1)] The fifth commandment is to honor one's parents [33, A210 20:12].

Grandparents, in-laws, older (or possibly oldest) brother (maybe sister too), and teachers are included in this mitzva, but with different parameters. Honor of parents is usually considered to refer to that which one does for one's parents, in contrast to reverence (fear) of parents which includes that which should not be done because it would be disrespectful.

[S> 20:13 (2/11 of the pasuk)] #6 is the prohibition of MURDER [34, L289 20:13], which is considered the antithesis of Belief in G-d, since murder directly negates creation of human being in His image.

[S> 20:13 (2/11)] Commandment #7 against ADULTERY [35, L347 20:13] is the prohibition of having relations

with a married woman, but as a "chapter heading" it also points to the other forbidden relations.

[S> 20:13 (2/11)] LO TIGNOV, #8 [36, L243 20:13], which is specifically defined as kidnapping, but is also the category header of many mitzvot in the Torah in the category of THEFT.

[S> 20:13 (5/11 of a pasuk)] #9 is the prohibition of "bearing false witness" [37, L285 20:13].

We can see in this mitzva, as well as many others, how important it is to G-d, so to speak, that we be able to function as a society. Both oaths and testimony are necessary for the determination of TRUTH, in the absence of having direct first-hand knowledge. So much of the dealings between people involves the trust we place in each other's word, especially when backed by an oath, and in the confidence we place in the testimony of witnesses. Without these elements of our inter-personal relations, we would be incapable of functioning as a society and each of us might as well look for a cave somewhere to live as a hermit.

[S> 20:14 (4/15 of a pasuk)] #10 is the prohibition of COVETING [38, L265 20:14]. It sums things up in that it focuses on thoughts that can lead to all types of sins. Being part of The Big 10 points to the significance of thought, in addition to deeds. The second part of this commandment is in its own parsha...

[S> 20:14 (11/15)] specifies the prohibition of coveting one's fellow's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that is his.

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 9 p'sukim - 20:15-23

[S> 20:15 (4)] The People are awestruck by the supernatural phenomena of the Sinai experience and they keep their distance. They ask Moshe to tell them what G-d wants rather than hearing His Voice directly.

After the second statement, the People panicked and asked Moshe to tell them what G-d wants, so that they would not hear "G-d's voice" directly. G-d agreed, on the condition that we listen to the word of the true prophet who speaks in G-d's name. (There are variant opinions as to how much we heard directly from G-d.)

[S> 20:19 (5)] G-d tells Moshe to remind the People that they heard G-d speak; that they shall make no graven human images (even for art) [39, L4 20:20]; when they will make an altar and offer sacrifices upon it; if the altar be of stone, its stone shall not be cut with metal tools [40, L79 20:22]. The Altar may not be approached with immodest steps [41, L80 20:23] but rather via its ramp.

Maftir is last 5 p'sukim.

Haftara 21 p'sukim

Yeshayahu 6:1-7:6, 9:5-6

Parallel to the Torah's account of the awesome experience at Sinai, this passage from Yeshayahu describes his first awe-inspiring vision of angels proclaiming Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh. Both sedra and haftara present us with "visions" of G-d's awe, majesty, and holiness. Also, in the sedra, G-d tells us that we will be to Him a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation. In the haftara we see a model of K'dusha (the angels), and also a glimpse of a potential Moshiach.

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler

Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

Yitro

This week's parasha describes for us the great "theophany", the revelation of G-d, at Har Sinai - an event witnessed by the entire nation, experienced by millions of people. This Shabbat's haftara relates to us the personal "theophany" of the navi Yish'ayahu who alone sees the vision of Hashem's throne and His glory and is charged to bring the vision and divine message to the entire nation. The prophet's vision and message is found in the sixth perek of Yish'ayahu

but it is the earliest of all the prophecies delivered by this great navi; indeed, it is his formal "induction" to the service of Hashem. Much in the same way, B'nei Yisra'el are "inaugurated" into the service of G-d at Har Sinai, with Hashem declaring V'ATEM TIHYU LI MAMLECHET KOHANIM, "And you will be a kingdom of kohanim (better: attendants) for Me." And just as the people trembled and stood afar in fear of witnessing G-d's revelation, so too did Yish'ayahu believe he would die for having "seen" Hashem.

It is interesting to note that the Ramban, in his commentary on the Aseret HaDibrot, points out that the pronouncements of G-d heard by the nation were understood by each and every person according to his or her own abilities. It was not simply a communal experience but an intensely personal one as well and, perhaps, the choice of this perek as the haftara was meant to teach that Yish'ayahu's individual encounter with G-d described therein was, ultimately, not that different from the one experienced by all of Israel at Har Sinai.

In essence, however, it is the contrast between the two events that cries out to us, for the glory revealed to B'nei Yisra'el at Sinai was

meant to impress upon them the power and majesty of Hashem and, accordingly, the absolute necessity of accepting and keeping His mitzvot. The vision seen by the navi, on the other hand, was part of his inauguration into G-d's service to accept the mission of admonishing the nation who failed to perform the mitzvot and to warn them that G-d's punishment would not cease "until the cities become desolate... and the land become... wasted and Hashem will drive the people away..."

We look back today upon the thousands of years that saw the fruition of this terrifying prophecy but we look today at the reversal of this vision as the people have returned to their Land, rebuilding from the destruction, repopulating the cities and replanting the fields so the land gives forth its fruit once again.

But, as our haftara reminds us, we must realize that the miracle we see will continue as long as we continue to heed the words pronounced so long ago at Har Sinai. 🌩️



B'shalach - Shira

🐦 that leaves one challenging Unexplained



The both direction arrows in quotes is something that is said forwards and backwards. The Moon was the clue to Kiddush L'vana, in which we say Shalom Aleichem and Aleichem Shalom. &? means and what else do we say forwards and backwards in KL? The answer is a partial pasuk from the Shira - TIPOL ALIHEM EIMATA VAFACHAD... and KAAVEN YID'MU...



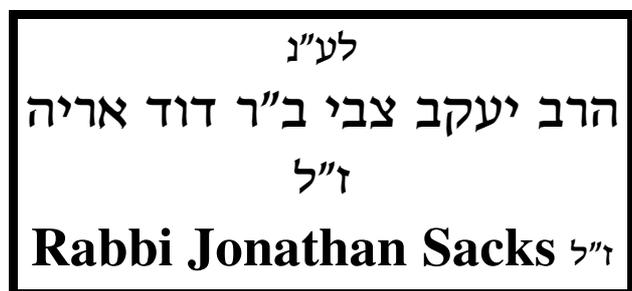
Yitro

Hearing ear of VAYISHMA YITRO, and Yitro heard... Max Baer Jr. played Jethro (Yitro) for 9 years on the Beverly Hillbillies B"H was said by Yitro when he heard all the things that G-d had done for Israel. From that we are taught that one makes a bracha on miracles The scales and gavel represent the justice system, Yitro's suggestions, Moshe's response, etc. Yitro's advice included the assignment of "captains" of groups of 1000, 100, 50, and 10 - represented by the Roman numerals M,C,L,X Bnei Yisrael's arrival at Har Sinai is described by the word VAYICHAN, as Rashi puts it, we were like one person with one heart Shofar is one of the symbols of the Sinai experience, as we more than mention on Rosh HaShana The washing machine is for the people to clean their clothes during the preparatory days for Matan Torah Wine cup is for Kiddush (Zachor) and the negation circle is for the prohibition of Melacha, including writing, watering plants, digging, knitting, building, fishing, shearing sheep Do not steal (the Xed out thief) and do not go up to the Mizbei'ach with steps (the negated ladder) are two prohibitions in the sedra Volcano represents Har Sinai smoking from the fire of G-d's presence An angel flew to the Heavenly Mizbei'ach and picked up a glowing coal in a pair of tongs. He then touched the coal to Yeshayahu's lips, representing a

purifying process that would allow the prophet to speak on behalf of G-d MEM SOFIT, which is better called a "Closed" MEM, appears in the haftara in the middle of a WORD, rather than at the end, where we are used to seeing that kind of MEM negated golf tee and saw as in LO TISA, Dibra #3 Paratrooper wings (two) plus butterfly (4 wings) are for the angels described by Yishayahu as having 6 wings the logo in the lower-left is of Mt. Sinai medical facilities symbol for UV, ultra-violet light or radiation. In Hebrew, AL-SEGOLI. Feminine form for the color violet is SEGULA, as in G-d's promise that we will be for Him the AM SEGULA above all other nations - hence, ULTRA-SEGULA cover of Scholastic Press's Goosebumps series... When Yitro came to Moshe, having heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the battle against Amalek (and maybe about Matan Torah also), Moshe detailed all that had happened to Bnei Yisrael. The Torah describes Yitro's reaction with the words VAYICHAD YITRO. Rashi says that the plain meaning of the word is that Yitro rejoiced because of all the things he heard. Rashi gives a second explanation of the word VAYICHAD. That Yitro's skin erupted in goosebumps. A nervous or frightened reaction, perhaps, to what happened to the Egyptians, to whom he had been allied and with whom he possibly identified. From here, our Sages tell us, we learn to be extremely sensitive to the convert, who has changed his life

completely by becoming Jewish, but still has memories and feelings about his former life 👑 The can of RAID bug spray a word that occurs in the sedra twice and two other times in the Torah, besides 9 more times in the rest of Tanach - RAID! 👑 The words at the top and bottom of the right-hand side of the ParshaPix are the five tastes - Sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and umami are five tastes - T'AMIM. Two of them are TAAMEI HA-ELYON, the upper notes, and three are TAAMEI HATACHTON, the lower notes 👑 the flashlight is called a torch in British English; a torch is a LAPID, as in part of the description of the atmosphere of Har Sinai 👑 Rabbi She'ar Yashiv Cohen z"l for the son of the navi Yeshayahu - She'ar Yashiv (in the haftara) 👑 the soldier is an Anshei Chayil (not the one Yitro or Moshe meant 👑 a couple of Unexplaineds

ParshaPix - the fun way to go over the weekly sedra with your children, grandchildren, Shabbat guests



The plan for the new cycle of Torah readings is to continue to share a weekly piece from Rabbi Sacks's past Covenant & Conversation essays.

The Structure of the Good Society

Yitro

In the House of Lords there is a special chamber used as, among other things, the place where new Peers are robed before their introduction into the House. When my predecessor Lord Jakobovits was introduced, the official robing him commented that he was the first Rabbi to be honoured in the Upper House. Lord Jakobovits replied, "No, I am the second." "Who was the first?" asked the surprised official. The chamber is known as the Moses Room because of the large painting that dominates the room. It shows Moshe bringing the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai. Lord Jakobovits pointed to this mural, indicating that Moshe was the first Rabbi to ever be honoured in the House of Lords.

The Ten Commandments that appear in this week's parsha have long held a special place not only in Judaism but also within the broader configuration of values we call the Judeo-Christian ethic. In the United States they were often to be found adorning American law courts, though their presence has been challenged, in some states successfully, on the grounds that they breach the First Amendment and the separation of church and state. They remain the supreme expression of the

higher law to which all human law is bound.

Within Judaism, too, they have always held a special place. In Second Temple times they were recited in the daily prayers as part of the Sh'ma, which then had four paragraphs rather than three. It was only when sectarians began to claim that only these and not the other 603 commands came directly from God that the recitation was brought to an end.

The text retained its hold on the Jewish mind none the less. Even though it was removed from daily communal prayers, it was preserved in the prayer book as a private meditation to be said after the formal service has been concluded. In most congregations, people stand when they are read as part of the Torah reading, despite the fact that Rambam explicitly ruled against it.

Yet their uniqueness is not straightforward. As moral principles, they were mostly not new. Almost all societies have had laws against murder, robbery and false testimony. There is some originality in the fact that they are apodictic, that is, simple statements of "You shall not", as opposed to the casuistic form, "If ... then". But they are only ten among a much larger body of 613 commandments. Nor are they even described by the Torah itself as "Ten Commandments". The Torah calls them the ASERET HA-D'VARIM, that is, "ten utterances". Hence the Greek trans-

lation, Decalogue, meaning, "ten words".

What makes them special is that they are simple and easy to memorise. That is because in Judaism, law is not intended for judges alone. The covenant at Sinai, in keeping with the profound egalitarianism at the heart of Torah, was made not as other covenants were in the ancient world, between kings. The Sinai covenant was made by God with the entire people. Hence the need for a simple statement of basic principles that everyone can remember and recite.

More than this, they establish for all time the parameters - the corporate culture, we could almost call it - of Jewish existence. To understand how, it is worth reflecting on their basic structure. There was a fundamental disagreement between Rambam and Ramban on the status of the first sentence: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Rambam, in line with the Talmud, held that this is in itself a command: to believe in God. Ramban held that it was not a command at all. It was a prologue or preamble to the commands. Modern research on ancient Near Eastern covenant formulae tends to support Ramban.

The other fundamental question is how to divide them. Most depictions of the Ten Commandments divide them into two, because of the "two tablets of stone"(D'varim 4:13) on which they were

engraved. Roughly speaking, the first five are about the relationship between humans and God, the second five about the relationship among humans themselves. There is, however, another way of thinking about numerical structures in the Torah.

The seven days of creation, for example, are structures as two sets of three followed by an all-embracing seventh. During the first three days God separated domains: light and dark, upper and lower waters, and sea and dry land. During the second three days He filled each with the appropriate objects and life forms: Sun and Moon, birds and fish, animals and man. The seventh day was set apart from the others as holy.

Likewise the ten plagues consist of three cycles of three followed by a stand-alone tenth. In each cycle of three, the first two were forewarned while the third struck without warning. In the first of each series, Pharaoh was warned in the morning (Sh'mot 7:16; 8:17; 9:13), in the second Moshe was told to "come in before Pharaoh" (7:26; 9:1; 10:1) in the palace, and so on. The tenth plague, unlike the rest, was announced at the very outset (4:23). It was less a plague than a punishment.

Similarly, it seems to me that the Ten Commandments are structured in three groups of three, with a tenth that is set apart from the rest. Thus understood, we can see how they form the basic structure, the depth grammar, of Israel as a society bound by covenant to God

as "a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation" (19:6).

The first three - no other gods besides Me, no graven images, and no taking of God's name in vain - define the Jewish people as "one nation under God". God is our ultimate sovereign. Therefore all other earthly rule is subject to the overarching imperatives linking Israel to God. Divine sovereignty transcends all other loyalties (no other gods besides Me). God is a living force, not an abstract power (no graven images). And sovereignty presupposes reverence (Do not take My name in vain).

The first three commands, through which the people declare their obedience and loyalty to God above all else, establish the single most important principle of a free society, namely the moral limits of power. Without this, the danger even in democracy is the tyranny of the majority, against which the best defence against it is the sovereignty of God.

The second three commands - the Shabbat, honouring parents, and the prohibition of murder - are all about the principle of the createdness of life. They establish limits to the idea of autonomy, namely that we are free to do whatever we like so long as it does not harm others. Shabbat is the day dedicated to seeing God as Creator and the universe as His creation. Hence, one day in seven, all human hierarchies are suspended and everyone, master, slave, employer,

employee, even domestic animals, are free.

Honouring parents acknowledges our human createdness. It tells us that not everything that matters is the result of our choice, chief of which is the fact that we exist at all. Other people's choices matter, not just our own. "Thou shall not murder" restates the central principle of the universal Noahide covenant that murder is not just a crime against man but a sin against God in whose image we are. So commands 4 to 7 form the basic jurisprudential principles of Jewish life. They tell us to remember where we came from if we are to be mindful of how to live.

The third three - against adultery, theft and bearing false witness - establish the basic institutions on which society depends. Marriage is sacred because it is the human bond closest in approximation to the covenant between us and God. Not only is marriage the human institution par excellence that depends on loyalty and fidelity - it is also the matrix of a free society. Alexis de Tocqueville put it best: "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone."

The prohibition against theft establishes the integrity of property. Whereas Jefferson defined as inalienable rights those of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", John Locke, closer in spirit to the Hebrew Bible, saw them as "life, liberty or possession". Tyrants abuse the property rights of the people, and

the assault of slavery against human dignity is that it deprives me of the ownership of the wealth I create.

The prohibition of false testimony is the precondition of justice. A just society needs more than a structure of laws, courts and enforcement agencies. As Judge Learned Hand said, "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it." There is no freedom without justice, but there is no justice without each of us accepting individual and collective responsibility for "telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth".

Finally comes the stand-alone prohibition against envying your neighbour's house, wife, slave, maid, ox, donkey, or anything else belonging to him or her. This seems odd if we think of the "ten words" as commands, but not if we think of them as the basic principles of a free society. The greatest challenge of any society is how to contain the universal, inevitable phenomenon of envy: the desire to have what belongs to someone else. Envy lies at the heart of violence. It was envy that led Kayin to murder Hevel, made Avraham and Yitzchak fear for their life because they were married to beautiful women, led Yosef's brothers to hate him and sell him into slavery. It is envy that leads to adultery, theft and false testimony, and it was envy of their neighbours that led the Israelites time and again to abandon

God in favour of the pagan practices of the time.

Envy is the failure to understand the principle of creation as set out in B'reishit 1, that everything has its place in the scheme of things. Each of us has our own task and our own blessings, and we are each loved and cherished by God. Live by these truths and there is order. Abandon them and there is chaos. Nothing is more pointless and destructive than to let someone else's happiness diminish your own, which is what envy is and does. The antidote to envy is, as Ben Zoma famously said, "to rejoice in what we have" (Mishna Avot 4:1) and not to worry about what we don't yet have. Consumer societies are built on the creation and intensification of envy, which is why they lead to people having more and enjoying it less.

Thirty-three centuries after they were first given, the Ten Commandments remain the simplest, shortest guide to creation and maintenance of a good society. Many alternatives have been tried, and most have ended in tears. The wise aphorism remains true: When all else fails, read the instructions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- (1) Why have the Ten Commandments become so important in Judaism?
- (2) Can you find any other themes that group commands together within the Ten Commandments?

- (3) Why is envy considered by Rabbi Sacks to be a 'meta-command', standing separate from all the others?

יהי זכרו ברוך

PTDT

PhiloTorah D'var Torah

Creation vs Exodus

Friday night Kiddush refers to both creation (ZEICHER L'MAASEI V'REISHIT) and to the Exodus (ZEICHER LITZI'AT MITZRAYIM). Two super-major 'events' in history.

G-d has previously promised to take us out of Egypt and to enter into a mutual covenant with us. V'LAKACHTI ETCHAM LI L'AM and V'HAYITI LACHEM LELOKIM. Both sides of the covenant. But in the same pasuk (Sh'mot 6:7), G-d also emphasizes that we with KNOW - VIDA-TEM, that it was He Who took us out of Mitzrayim.

But then, in the fourth Dibra (or Davar or Commandment), G-d reminds us that He created every thing in the World.

On the other hand, in the second version, G-d links the Shabbat to

Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim.

Which brings us back to Friday night Kiddush, where Creation and the Exodus are given equal attention.

The deciding factor is the first DIBUR - ANOCHI HASHEM ELOKECHA... I am HaShem Who took you out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery. And this is the text of both versions of the Aseret HaDibrot - both in Yitro and in Va'etchanan.

It is clear that the Exodus wins the competition presented in the title of this PTDT.

How come?

It is suggested by various commentators (Rabbi Neil Winkler among them) that Creation is for all people of the world and Y'tzi-at Mitzrayim is exclusively for we, the Jewish People.

Good answer, but there is more.

The people of Israel had just been freed from Egyptian slavery and oppression. Creation was a long time ago. The people could relate better to I am HaShem who took you out of Egypt than to I am HaShem who created the world.

Not the best answer, because of G-d renewing MAASEI V'REISHIT - the acts of Creation, every day and

always. So Creation is something we are eternally aware of - all the time.

But there is another reason.

The miracles of the Exodus - from the plagues until the Splitting of the Sea, are continual demonstrations of G-d's Creation. Who can turn water to blood? Who can put fire into icy hailstones? Who can split the sea?

Only the creator of water, hail, and the sea. ANOCHI of the Aseret HaDibrot is a confirmation of Creation as well as announcing Who took us out of Egypt.

ANOCHI... Who took you out of Egypt by performing a multitude of miracles that confirm ANOCHI... ASHER BARA-TI ET HA-OLAM - without having to say it explicitly.

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



MY GOD!

Yitro

This week's Torah reading is very dramatic. It's not just that our ancestors received the first installment of God's Torah, the Ten Commandments. The extravagant transmission of this material was actually staged and performed by

God. Forget about the pyrotechnics, what can be compared to the very presence of our Creator. But this amazing Divine Manifestation is preceded by some remarkable assurances granted by God to our ancestors and their descendants. That's us!

So, let's take a look at one of these promises made by God to those fortunate souls gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai, which included us: Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession (S'GULA) among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel (Sh'mot 19:5-6).

There's so much going on in those two verses, that I'm going to focus on just one part of this offer, 'you shall be My treasured possession', The critical word in that phrase is S'GULA. Rashi explains that this term means 'a cherished (beloved) possession'. The S'forno adds, 'even though all humans are important to Me, you will be treasured above the rest'.

Many of us are familiar with this term, S'GULA, in a more mystical context. This word has been borrowed to refer to certain

phenomena which protect from harm. Most famously, the red string (ROYTE BENDEL) from Kever Rachel that many people wear or place on a baby's crib or stroller. Perhaps, the comment of the Ohr HaChayim helps to understand that practice. He explains that a S'GULA is beyond 'the natural'. I'm often dismayed by these talismans. I want to try to understand what God had in mind for us, as God's S'GULA.

Rabbeinu Bechaye suggests that this term is mostly used in a relative sense. Here it compares us to the rest of mankind. God loves all descendants of Adam, created in the Divine Image (B'TZELEM ELOKIM), but there is a special bond with us the progeny of Avraham Avinu. He goes on to explain that this unique relationship is expressed in God's direct concern for our nation. All other ethnicities relate to heaven through intermediaries (MELACHIM), but the Jewish people deal directly God. That's the treasure.

The Netziv adds that Jews themselves can, as a result of this special designation, transcend the nature of this realm. He says that this idea is seen in the lament of Yeshayahu about what the Jews are missing because of our straying from God's path: Where is He who put in

their midst the Holy Spirit? Who made His Glorious arm march at the right hand of Moshe? (Yeshayahu 63:11-12). The S'GULA is this proximity to the Divine Presence (SH'CHINA). Sadly, it's most notable when lacking.

But the Mei Shilo'ach takes us in another direction, which truly resonates with me. The Rebbe of Izhbitz says that the S'GULA isn't an precious item to be placed in a safe. It's the vault itself. The S'GULA is the unique ability to contain Divine Presence in our very being. It's a gift to sense that Presence resonating inside of us.

I think that Reb Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro of Piacseczno was following the Izhbitzer in his comment on this phenomenon in his famous work, CHO VAT Ha TALMIDIM (The Students' Obligation). That skilled and caring educator informs us of how wonderful it is to be a simple, normal Jew following the Torah. This was a gift and it is a condition being made with every Jew from the simplest water bearer and on upwards. Before the experience at Sinai, God was letting us know how amazing is the portion being presented. It makes us the S'GULA as well as a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation.

However, it wasn't really a gift. It was a prerequisite. We are this special

vessel only when there are Torah and mitzvot inside of us. We can move through this life as an amazing object of beauty and admiration on that condition. That visible brilliance and splendor is a reflection of what is transpiring inside.

The Rebbe admonishes that, God forbid, if this potentially precious vessel is empty of the holy and the spiritual, then it is not brilliant; it is not splendid; it is not a S'GULA.

The Ohr HaChayim which I quoted from earlier, remarks that a S'GULA has no intrinsic value. A S'GULA reflects or projects a K'DUSHA and a power which emanates from elsewhere. There is no power in those red strings. If, however, that mundane object reminds us of the prayers of Rachel Imeinu, and her tears for her offspring, then great power has been accessed. The power of every S'GULA is in the connection to the source of the sanctity it represents. Never in the object itself.

What an honor and privilege to be God's representatives in this realm! Our parsha informs us of that boon. But we must never forget that it's all predicated upon: IF you will faithfully obey Me, and keep My Covenant! 

Walk thru Davening

with Rabbi David Walk

The Evolution of Prayer

Shmoneh Esrei - part 1

Our people have been praying since Avraham Avinu. The Avot are credited with 'inventing' SHACHARIT when the sun rises, MINCHA as it sets, and ARVIT during the distressing darkness. But what did they say? Except for a few snippets scattered throughout Tanach, we don't know what they shared with God during these encounters. Rambam explained 'that every person should daily, according to his ability, offer up supplication and prayer' (Laws of Prayer 1:2). He goes on to explain that this process should include praises, requests and thanksgiving. But through tribulations and exile people lost the focus or clarity to accomplish this task on their own without guidance. So, during the time of Ezra, the Men of the Great Assembly composed the Shmoneh Esrei prayer. My first articles on Jewish prayer will focus on this master work of liturgical composition.

The most remarkable aspect of this prayer's design is its flexibility. The introductory material of praises for God and the concluding section of

thanksgiving vary only very slightly throughout the year. However, the middle part is always dedicated to the purpose of this particular prayerful encounter with God. Generally, the goal of the prayer is supplication to God for the needs of both the individual and the community. This petitionary text of thirteen blessings is exchanged on Shabbat and Chag for a single blessing which expresses the sanctity or special nature of the day.

On those days upon which the Torah (Bamidbar chapters 28 & 29) decreed a MUSAF (additional offering) in the Beit HaMikdash, we have a Musaf prayer. This iteration of our basic prayer format has one blessing in the middle which is based upon that day's special additional offering. It's these prayers which remind us of the dual nature of our davening. These prayers continue the obligation of daily prayer begun by the Patriarchs, but also are formatted to remind us of our presently abandoned offerings in the Beit HaMikdash.

Before we begin our analysis of the text of the Shmoneh Esrei, I think that it's important to note three innovations that our Sages thought important enough to impose upon those reciting their master prayer. The first is to stand with our feet

together. This obligation to be on our feet gives our prayer its most popular name, the AMIDA - the Standing Prayer. Our Sages based this custom on the angels who are described as 'standing upon a single leg' (Yechezkel 1:7), in the famous passage about God's Divine Throne, the MERKAVA.

Rav Kook uses this custom to explain that we have two great services to God. One is Torah study, and is described by the term HALACHA - movement. Torah study and its resulting legal observances are a work of persistent progress. We are expected to always move forward both individually and communally. Communally, we must always allow HALACHA to evolve and remain relevant no matter what innovations appear in contemporary society. Individually, every one of us is required to study and develop so that we are always reinventing ourselves as we mature and age. HALACHA is always a work in progress.

Prayer, on the hand, is a statement of where we are at the given moment that any prayer is recited. Prayer is sort of in a stasis. Today I stand before God and try to describe my situation and needs, at that moment in my spiritual journey. Sharing that information is a major part of what I

communicate in my attempt to contact the Infinite.

The second rabbinic innovation is to face Yerushalayim, or if one is privileged to be in the Holy City, then to turn towards the Temple Mount. This wrinkle in our daily devotion adds two dimensions to our attempt to communicate with God. First, it gives the individual supplicant a sense of national unity. All the world's Jews are focusing on the same point. This adds a new dimension to our communication with our Maker. We are not alone. I'm a small part of a much greater effort.

Turning towards the place of the once and future Beit HaMikdash, also reminds us that our prayers are, in part, a replacement for the Temple offerings. It also calls attention to the fact that we believe that Yerushalayim is the interface between this world and the heavenly realm. All of our prayers travel to the Divine Throne via the Temple Mount. Zionism unites us politically, nationally and spiritually.

The third addition instituted by our Sages to help us daven better is to begin our Shmoneh Esrei with the verse: O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise (T'hilim 51:17). This plea reminds of an extremely important reality: Daven-

ing is very difficult! It's so hard to communicate with God that Divine support is required. It's almost a chutzpa to address our Creator. We seek permission for this possible impertinence.

Rebbe Nachman points out the numerical value (GEMATRIA) of HEICHAL, God's divine palace, 65, is also the value of the first word in our verse ADONAI. One requires the permission of the BA'AL HaBAYIT to receive the honor of visiting God's Sanctum. As God's servants we need the Master's indulgence to enter the Divine presence. This verse reminds us of the WOW factor involved when entering God's presence. Humility is required for this enterprise.

So, now we're ready to open our mouths in prayer, praise, supplication. In the following articles, I'll try to make our Sages' wonderful Shmoneh Esrei prayer come to life. I hope that I'm equal to the task. 

Rav Kook Torah

by Rabbi
Chanan Morrison • www.ravkooktorah.com



Reward & Punishment

How did Moshe present the Torah to

the Jewish people?

According to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, Moshe first announced the penalties for transgressing the Torah's precepts. Then he described the rewards that one gains for observing the mitzvot.

The Talmud, however, quotes a second opinion that asserts the order was just the opposite. First Moshe described the rewards for observing the Torah, and only afterwards did he publicize the penalties for violating it.

This disagreement, Rav Kook explained, reflects two very different educational approaches.

First: Liberate the Soul

Rabbi Yehuda felt that in order to educate and enlighten, it is necessary to first battle one's darker tendencies, the body's self-centered and materialistic forces. Only then will the soul be free to elevate itself in purity and realize its lofty potential.

Initially, the unbridled traits of crassness and vice must be neutralized and uprooted. The bad and the ugly must be separated from our true desires and inner essence. We need to recognize evil's despicable and destructive nature.

Then, when the light of the Torah illuminates, there is nothing to

obscure its clarity. Our spiritual enlightenment is unsullied and pure. For this reason, Moshe began by announcing the penalties for transgressing the Torah, thus weakening the grip of evil. With the foundations of vice uprooted from their souls, Moshe went on to describe the rewards for observing the Torah, so that their souls' yearnings for good and truth would be wholehearted.

Refining All Forces of the Soul

But there is another educational approach, one that seeks to take advantage of the crass, unbridled forces and sublimate them for holy purposes. We do not attempt to uproot the bad from the start. Rather, we flood the soul with pure, holy light. If there exist some negative traits among the soul's forces, they do not hinder the light. On the contrary, the Divine light shines more brightly, as it utilizes those raw energies which gravitate towards evil to serve holy matters.

After the negative traits have been utilized for the highest good, we then uproot any remaining dregs which could not be refined and streamlined into elevated life.

According to this approach, Moshe began by describing to the Jewish people the rewards for observing the

Torah. He spoke words which are MEISHIVIN DA'ATO SHEL ADAM, thereby bolstering their self-confidence and kindling the inner light in their souls. As the sparks were elevated to the ultimate good, all life-forces were drawn towards holy service. Negative powers were also refined, and boosted their souls' spiritual strength.

Only the most hardened dross remained unredeemed. In order to eliminate these darkest traits, Moshe described the penalties for abandoning the Torah. Then their souls' capacity for holiness was fully engaged, in complete strength and purity.

*Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV,
pp. 181-182 on Shabbat 87a*

Weekly Column by

Rabbi Ephraim Sprecher



Twin Torahs

Yitro 2020

“In the third month after the Exodus from Egypt, the Children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sinai” (Sh'mot 19:1). Rashi explains that Israel arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai on Rosh Chodesh Sivan, 6 days before we received the Torah there. According to the Talmud in

Shabbat, the month of Sivan is represented by T'OMIM (Gemini) which means TWINS. Why did G-d choose to give us the Torah in the month symbolized by twins?

One explanation is because G-d gave us Twin Torahs, the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. This is what King David means "G-d has spoken once, but these two have I heard" (T'hilim 62:12).

Rav Dovid Feinstein gives another interesting interpretation of why the Torah was given under the sign of the Twins. The Torah is called Torat Chesed (Mishlei 31:26). The Talmud in Sota 14a teaches that King Solomon calls it Torat Chesed because the Torah begins with Chesed, where G-d clothed Adam and Chava, and ends with Chesed where G-d buries Moshe. In order to keep the Torah properly, we must relate to our fellow Jews in the same way that one twin brother relates to another. The Torah wants us to strive for twin-like sensitivity to each other's joys and sorrows.

This was the level that Israel attained at Mount Sinai under the monthly sign of the Twins. Thus, the Torah states "Israel encamped there, in front of the mountain." Rashi wonders, why the word VAYICHAN - ENCAMPED is in the singular form when there were 600,000 men there plus many women and children? Rashi answers because at the Giving of the Torah all of Israel was

united as one person with one heart. As the famous song goes, "UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL."

This is the goal to which we should aspire in all of our relationships with our fellow Jews. Even though we are separate individuals each with different unique personalities and needs, we are still closely connected to our fellow Jews with love and responsibility for one another. As the Torah states in Vayikra 19:18, "Love your fellow Jew as yourself" and Rabbi Akiva said that this is THE cardinal rule of the entire Torah.

ESP

CHIZUK IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

*by **Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness**
Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh*

Yitro '18 edited

Yitro was an open-minded individual. In his quenchless search after spiritual truth he was willing to sample all varieties of religion. Yitro studied most every form of idolatry extant in his time and was not satisfied. When he heard what HaShem had done for His people, he was instantly won over and dramatically declared (Sh'mot 18:11) ATA YADATI! "Now I know that

Hashem is the greatest of all deities, for the Egyptians, in their plot to execute Yisrael, so were they punished".

Rashi explains that the Egyptians had received their just deserts - they who had plotted to drown the Jews, were drowned themselves.

In the words of the S'forno: "G-d saved His people in the same way that the Egyptians had plotted against the Jewish People." S'forno mentions Makat B'chorot as an additional example of this principle of MIDA K'NEGED MIDA, noting that the first-born of the Egyptians were killed - since we find that the Jewish People who were victimized are referred to as B'ni B'chori Yisrael - "My firstborn Yisrael" (Sh'mot 22,23).

Onkelos explains Yitro's claim in a similar vein, with a subtle but important difference. According to Onkelos, the Egyptians were punished in a manner that was commensurate to "that which they had thought" of doing to us. As the Gri"z (Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik zt"l) points out, Onkelos's wording: DI'CHASHIVU suggests that the Egyptians were held accountable not only for their deeds, but also for that which they had planned to do - including plans which were never implemented. The Gri"z compared

this to the answer Rav Itzaleh Veloziner once gave to a question posed to him by a member of the Czarist government. The government official wanted to understand the meaning of the verse in T'hilim 117:1. The pasuk says: "Glorify Hashem all peoples, praise Him all nations. For His kindness to us is overwhelming." The minister was puzzled by the seeming disconnect between the two parts of this verse: Why should the nations be expected to praise Hashem for the kindness shewn to the Jewish People? Rav Itzaleh replied as follows: "We Jews do not know what goes on in the inner sanctum of the ministries in Petersburg. We are not aware of all the plots hatched against the Jewish People. Only you, in the government, know the full extent of the kindness and Chesed bestowed upon the Jewish People as you witness how your plans are foiled time and time again. Therefore, when the time eventually comes, and the gentiles will honestly repent their anti-semitic past, they will be in a position to praise and glorify the Almighty for His kindness to the Jewish people, above and beyond our own ability to do so" (R'shumot Talmidim p. 248).

This idea, that nations of the world will be held accountable for their nefarious plots targeting the Jewish

nation, behooves us to take note of, and appreciate, the opposite as well. Just as we are to remember those who afflicted us and were responsible for our suffering, so too must we recognize those who were instrumental in bringing about our rebuilding and return.

If the nations are castigated for working against the Jewish People then, ipso facto, they must be praised when they assist the Jewish People to realize their dreams vis a vis Eretz Yisrael.

In 2017 we celebrated the Centennial of the Balfour Declaration. Many Jewish individuals toiled mightily to secure its passage, (especially Dr. Chaim Weizmann, future president of Medinat Yisrael), yet, we must not forget the many Christian Zionists in the British government who were ultimately responsible for its passage. They, too, prayed for a return of the Jewish People to Zion. (Someone recently described how Christian ministers in 18th century England propagated the belief in the viability of a return of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael long before the advent of the Chovevei Zion movement).

So, too, today. The recent American pronouncement that Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish State, was

strongly influenced by the fervent Zionist convictions of the American evangelical movement. In his passionate talk to the Knesset, the then Vice President Pence was clearly expressing his own personal beliefs. Listen to his words:

"We stand with Israel because your cause is our cause, your values are our values, and your fight is our fight. We stand with Israel because we believe in right over wrong, in good over evil, and in liberty over tyranny... Jerusalem is Israel's capital... In the weeks ahead, our administration will advance its plan to open the United States Embassy in Jerusalem... before the end of next year."

From Balfour to Pence!

Balfour introduced the concept of the Jewish Homeland. The current American administration is helping us reinforce the idea of Jerusalem as the historic capital of the Jewish People.

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Yet today as we ponder this past Shabbat and think of the threat to the Synagogue in Texas and its members, we realize that that the pendulum has switched direction and the US today is seeing the greatest number of anti-semitic acts in a long time. Is it not time to reconsider

where we are and where we are headed?

Returning to Yitro, we must take note of the parasha's description of the process Yitro underwent. Yitro's true greatness lies in the fact that once he becomes convinced, his convictions are translated into immediate action: VAYISHMA YITRO... VAYAVO YITRO - Yitro heard - he reached his conclusions - and he promptly acted upon them setting out into the desert to come join the encampment at Sinai.

There are many Religious Zionists out there who have "Heard" - they have clearly identified the pattern before their eyes; They have no doubt in their heart regarding the direction history is leading us - they find it difficult however to connect their own personal VAYISHMA with the next stage of VAYAVO - to them we say - BO'U HABAYTA! - it is time to take the plunge and come home!

*Ed. note: Not a plunge but a giant step up!*



*Excerpted from Living the Halachic Process by Rabbi Daniel Mann - Eretz Hemdah, with their permission [www.erezhemdah.org]*

## When to Commemorate Halachic Anniversaries in Leap Years

**Question:** If one's parent died in the month of Adar in a regular, non-leap year, when does he observe yahrtzeit in a leap year (when there are two months of Adar)? Is the answer the same for the bar mitzva of a boy born in Adar of a regular year who turns thirteen in a leap year?

**Answer:** Although one would expect the same answer for both questions, the answers may differ for the following reason. Becoming a bar mitzva depends on the passage of thirteen years. Although this occurs on one's birthday, it is the passage of time, not the date per se, that is critical. For a yahrtzeit, the date is the factor. A related distinction is that one can become a bar mitzva only once (we refer to becoming obligated in mitzvot, not to the celebration). In contrast, it is possible to commemorate a yahrtzeit on two days, in some years.

The Rama<sup>1</sup> rules unequivocally that in the situation you describe, the boy becomes a bar mitzva in Adar Sheini.<sup>2</sup> Several sources support this claim. The Yerushalmi<sup>3</sup> and Tosafot<sup>4</sup> say that the extra month is Adar Rishon, whereas Adar Sheini corresponds to the regular month of Adar. Also, the Mahari Mintz<sup>5</sup> points out that when one rents a house for a year and there is a leap year in the interim, the renter always gets the extra month,<sup>6</sup> even if the rental period ends up being from Adar to the next Adar Sheini.

Regarding yahrtzeit, the situation is more complex. The poskim discuss the matter primarily in regard to the custom that some accept upon themselves to fast on the yahrtzeit. The Shulchan Aruch<sup>7</sup> says that here too, the yahrtzeit is in Adar Sheini. However, the Rama<sup>8</sup> says that here the preferred day is in Adar Rishon. Why the change?

Most seem to understand that Adar Rishon is also Adar, and the question is one of prioritization and precedence. Tana'im debate this question in Megila 6b. R. Eliezer says that we should perform the mitzvot of Adar (including those of Purim) in Adar Rishon because

we do not pass up the opportunity to do mitzvot. R. Shimon b. Gamliel, whose opinion we accept, says that we perform them in Adar Sheini because they should be done in proximity of the month of Nisan, which is related to Purim through the common theme of redemption. The Terumat HaDeshen<sup>9</sup> derives from this gemara that when a mitzva is not related to redemption, we do the mitzva at the first opportunity, namely, in Adar Rishon. The Rama prefers this opinion.<sup>10</sup> However, he mentions that there are those who are stringent and fast on both days. The Shach<sup>11</sup> seems to accept that stringency.

The simple understanding of the Rama's stringency is that we do not know which opinion is correct, and thus we cover our bases. However, the Magen Avraham<sup>12</sup> and the GR"A<sup>13</sup> believe that when there is no special reason to prefer one Adar to the other, we actually consider there to be two yahrtzeit days, one in each Adar. Although the Magen Avraham points out that one who voluntarily accepts the minhag of fasting can do so however he wants, it is advisable to keep both days. The Mishna

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<sup>1</sup>. *Orach Chayim* 55:10.

<sup>2</sup>. It is clear that the *Shulchan Aruch* agrees- see *Mishna Berura* ad loc.:45.

<sup>3</sup>. 1<sup>st</sup> perek of *Megilla*.

<sup>4</sup>. *Nedarim* 63b.

<sup>5</sup>. *Shut Mahari Mintz* 9.

<sup>6</sup>. *Bava Metzia* 102a.

<sup>7</sup>. *Orach Chayim* 568:7.

<sup>8</sup>. Ad loc.

<sup>9</sup>. 294.

<sup>10</sup>. See also *Yoreh Deah* 402:12.

<sup>11</sup>. *Ibid.* 11

<sup>12</sup>. 568:20.

<sup>13</sup>. To *Orach Chayim* 568:10.

Berura<sup>14</sup> seems to concur, as does the Igrot Moshe.<sup>15</sup> It appears that most Ashkenazim follow the minhag cited in the Rama's main ruling (Adar Rishon), whereas S'fardim follow the Shulchan Aruch (Adar Sheini). Those who want to keep both days or come from a place with that minhag should feel free to do so.

What about the other practices of yahrtzeit? The same basic opinions pertain, but one may decide to keep two days as far as visiting the grave, learning, and/or saying Kaddish are concerned, but perhaps not fast twice (for those who fast). We should note that even the Magen Avraham says that one has the right to say Kaddish only once. He refers to the times when only one person would recite a Mourner's Kaddish and a yahrtzeit would supersede a mourner during his year of mourning. This situation exists in relatively few shuls these days. However, the principle still precludes one from asking in both Adars to get an aliya or to be chazan to commemorate the yahrtzeit.



<sup>14</sup>. 568:42.

<sup>15</sup>. Yoreh Deah III:160.

## *From the Den of Rabbi Nachman HaKohen Kahana*

Yitro

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF MOUNT SINAI FOR THE CREATED WORLD**

Parshat Yitro relates the most dramatic and significant episode for the existence of Am Yisrael and the world at large - the receiving of HaShem's Torah. In fact the parasha can be characterized as "to be or not to be".

Midrash Rabba (parashat Vayeitzei) quotes the Amora Raish Lakish, that HaShem stipulated a fundamental provision underlying the entire spectrum of creation: if the Jewish nation will accept the Torah at Mount Sinai the universe (or universes) will continue to exist; however, if the Jews reject the Torah there would be no justification to maintain this material world and all matter would return to nothingness.

Another Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni parshat Yitro) states that HaShem uprooted Mount Sinai and held it over the heads of the Nation, declaring: "If you accept the Torah all will be well, but if you reject it then here will be your place of death."

The Jewish world-view is that the importance of Am Yisrael and our

observance of the "letter and spirit" for creation cannot be overstated.

We humans are born totally ignorant and it is our obligation and responsibility in the years HaShem allots us, is not to add stupidity to our ignorance. Unfortunately, the great majority of humanity falls into the trap of believing that they are learned and intelligent, when in fact, they are far from both.

Rabbi Shimon in the Midrash (B'reishit Rabba 8) teaches that when HaShem informed the heavenly angels of his intention to create a being half spiritual and half animal to be called Adam (human), the angels separated into two groups to voice their opinions about the "new kid on the block", with shared natures of good and bad.

The angel Chesed (compassion) agreed that it was worthwhile to make Man because he would be capable of acts of compassion. Emet (truth) opposed on the grounds that such a creature would always seek the path of least resistance and would live a life of falsehood. Tzedek (justice) agreed to making Man because he would be capable of acts of justice. The Angel of Peace disapproved on the grounds that man's animalistic instincts would overcome his angelic ones, and he would shed oceans of blood. HaShem, after hearing the pros and cons of His angel committee, "took truth and thrust it down to earth".

What does this mean?

HaShem rejected the opinion of the pro-mankind angels and agreed in principal with the opposition, as stated in B'reishit 8:2 - ...every inclination of the human heart is evil from birth.

As demonstrated from the first day of creation, when Adam and Chava were expelled from Gan Eden within the first three hours of their existence, also causing the ultimate death of every human being yet to be born. Kayin murdered his brother Hevel not long after. Ten generations down the line HaShem's Quality of Justice emerged and caused the destruction of all humanity save for one man - No'ach and his immediate family, and the innocent species of the animal world. Not long after, HaShem dispersed the "family of man" to the four corners of the earth, because they were plotting to make war on the Creator himself.

But HaShem had already decided to create Man, so He had to find a way of hope for His new and multi-complex species to survive for 6000 years. He would take His ultimate truth (Torah) and thrust it down on a particular people forcing them to be His agents in giving hope for mankind's and the physical world's survival - the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov; the Jewish nation, through the Torah way of life.

This is the background of our parashat Yitro, where HaShem held Mount Sinai over the heads of our ancestors and

declared that if they refuse to accept and keep the Torah, they would die there.

Over time, nations and empires successively rose and fell due to their arrogance, ignorance, and stupidity. They failed to learn from their predecessors that the life raft of survival in this world for gentiles depends on the degree to which they acknowledge, respect, uphold, defend, support, extol, glorify, aid and abet the Jews, both as the Creator's chosen nation and as individuals.

As long as a nation showed respect and fidelity to the Jews, that nation would be blessed; but each one turned its back and betrayed us. That was the point of no return for any nation that sealed its fate to descend from the stage of history and give way to another would-be "reich of a thousand years".

In descending historical order: The present United Nations. England used their League of Nation's mandate to prevent the establishment of an independent Jewish state, and closed the escape route for European Jewry during the Sho'ah. Germany, and Russia before them. The Ottoman Turks, Christian Spain; the Crusaders, Christian Byzantine, Rome, Greece, Persia, Babylon, Assyria etc. We met them all, and they are now or will soon be chapters in the history books that we write.

At this juncture in our return to Eretz Yisrael, we are witnessing the metamorphose of the western world democracies as they change their colors to blood red anti-Semitism; slowly but surely. In academia, and the work place, attacks on Jewish sites and institutions, degrading the State of Israel as being apartheid, and worst of all pointing out our dire sin of building a kindergarten in the land where the Jewish Bible was written. The kindergarten, which initiates a phone call from the State Department after being informed of its existence by the US Embassy in Yerushalayim, to take down this warmongering structure - Now!

Humanity is presently perched on a seam of history awaiting a meaningful event to unfurl. Nuclear war? Decimation of half the world's population through viral infection? Economic downturn, plunging all mankind into poverty? Racial and religious wars?

Who knows?

But one thing is certain. In all of these scenarios Medinat Yisrael will be a major player, and the Jews who comprise the Medina will reap the fruit planted by our ancestors beginning with Avraham Avienu, through Torah at Sinai, Eretz Yisrael, destruction, Exodus and redemption in our day.

The gentile world will either be on the right side of history and exist, or resist

its Godly flow and bow out of human history.



## The First Commandment

Though we use the phrase, "The Ten Commandments", the Decalogue is ten Words or Principles. The first says that there is One God and He brought us from bondage to freedom.

After proclaiming His existence, why does He speak of His deeds?

Because the crucial thing is not just that He is, but that He has a relationship with the people of Israel and He acts within history. His deeds prove His power and confirm His nature. They show what He is capable of doing and indicate why He does it.

Without this information, we might have found it hard to be certain of His existence. As the Torah says in Parashat Ki Tisa (Sh'mot 33:19-20), we cannot see Him, but we can see His deeds: He is not visible or tangible, but He is powerful.

## They Saw the Thunder

An array of noisy phenomena accompanied the Revelation on

Mount Sinai. There was thunder. There was lightning (Sh'mot 20:15). But strangely, the thunder was seen and the lightning was heard, the opposite of what normally happens.

In the Mechilta, the rabbis draw our attention to what took place. They say, "They saw what is normally heard, and heard what is normally seen". Both seeing and hearing are modes of sensory perception. The moment was so elevated that the experience transcended the usual way of the world.

If anyone had asked the Israelites to articulate what took place they would not have been able to give a straight answer. They would probably have said, "How did we know what occurred? We just knew!"

According to Ibn Ezra, their experience at the great moment was a miraculous combination of all their senses. **OZ**

*Ed. note: Synesthesia is a perceptual phenomenon in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway.*

# Meshech Chochma

## - Jacob Solomon

*Remember the day of Shabbat to sanctify it... for in six days G-d made the heavens and the earth... and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore G-d blessed the Shabbat day and made it holy (20:8-11).*

The Aseret HaDibrot in this parasha grounds the Shabbat in the Creation. Some 40 years later, Moshe repeated the Aseret HaDibrot and on that occasion, he grounded them in Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim:

*Safeguard the Sabbath day to sanctify it... You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that G-d took you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore G-d has commanded you to make the Shabbat day (D'varim 5:12-15).*

The Ramban explains that these are two distinct aspects of Shabbat: the Friday night Kiddush emphasizes how Shabbat simultaneously connects with both the Creation and the Exodus, two very different things. Both have the common theme of illustrating G-d's mastery over the universe. The Creation put the laws of nature into place. The Exodus, with the plagues and the events at the Red Sea, show His capacity to override the laws of nature at will. In

that way, they complement each other. Thus, as the Meshech Chochma emphasizes, Shabbat and its practices are to create the space for Am Yisrael to learn about the ways of G-d and connect with Him, to learn Torah without distraction from the worldly affairs of the other six days, and to be free to enjoy the food and drink of His Creation without having to worry about how to grow, produce, or pay for them.

On that basis, the Meshech Chochma explains the rather puzzling dictum that observing Shabbat along the lines that the Torah commands is for the Jewish people only. Not for the general population (Sanhedrin 58b). For the first element: where He created the universe and instituted the laws of nature, is for everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike. But the second element, inextricably combined with the first, is where he suspended the laws of nature in the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea. All that was directed exclusively at Am Yisrael, who were the sole witnesses and beneficiaries of His intervention. Thus, as the Ramban explains at the end of Parashat Bo, by experiencing how He can intervene in the rules of nature for Klal Yisrael, Klal Yisrael in turn can appreciate how not only miraculous Divine intervention, but also nature itself are both miracles; the

laws of nature are thus miracles that repeat themselves. In other words, experiencing the abnormal, casts new light on the normal. The Israelites experienced the abnormal, and were thus able to relate to the normal, the creation, on a much higher level and this is promoted through Shabbat. This also throws light on the Torah's constant urging to remember Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim, with which the twice-daily Sh'ma declaration concludes.

This helps to explain the Gemara where G-d has a special gift in his treasure house which he gave to the Jewish people: the gift of Shabbat (Beitza 16a). For it is only relevant to the Jewish people as they were those who experienced Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim, and thus it was a gift for them, not for the general public whose ancestors had not experienced those events at first hand. Perhaps it is for that reason that the Gemara is so harsh on non-Jews if they deliberately observe Shabbat in the manner required by Jews. In support, I'd like to suggest that Shabbat to Am Yisrael is a gift from G-d's treasure house, as is t'ruma to a kohen. A Jew who is not a kohen who eats t'ruma on purpose (during Temple times) has transgressed the law of m'ila, for which the penalty is death (Vayikra 22:9). That gift from G-d is for kohanim only, not for the general

Jewish community. Similarly, Shabbat is G-d's gift for the Kohen, the Levi, and the Yisrael; for all Klal Yisrael. Not for the general community. ☺

An MP is a member of the British Parliament  
Our MP is also originally from England -

**Menachem Persoff**

## Do we know what we hear?

In this day and age of the global village, Internet, Twitter, Tic-Tac, and other media outlets, it is not easy to keep a secret. However, as is well-known, "beauty" is in the eye of the beholder: Two people view the same event through different eyes, interpreting reality based on personal preferences and viewpoints. What they hear (and see) is both subjective and selective.

So, when the opening lines of our parsha declare that "Yitro, the Priest of Midyan and father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that Hashem did to Moshe and Israel, His people - that Hashem took Israel out of Egypt" - What did he hear and which "Yitro" processed what he heard?

Was it Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, or Jethro, the Midianite priest? And what precisely did he hear? Following opinions expressed in the Talmud, he heard about (1) the war with Amalek

(the account of which precedes our parsha) or (2) the Splitting of the Sea or (3) Matan Torah (cf. Zera'im 116a). For Rashi, the first two options triggered Yitro's conversion to Judaism.

The Maharal asks, wouldn't either of these events have been enough to spur Yitro to enter into the fold? Why does Rashi indicate both events?

It appears that when Yitro heard these matters, he was already disposed to see Hashem in all His various guises; no longer would he propose that there was a separate god for the sun and another for the earth.

For when Yitro heard of the Splitting of the Sea, he recognized Hashem's power over water, that primary source of life. Furthermore, he became aware of Hashem's supremacy over nature in the skies when Hashem stilled the sun towards the end-game of the battle with Amalek (Maharal). Both these exceptional happenings were executed by the "Hand of God", as opposed to the more localized plagues managed by the "Finger of God". As such, they had a devastating effect on all the surrounding peoples.

These were the lessons drawn by Yitro. Moreover, says the Maharal, the reverberating voice that spread

across the nations at Har Sinai would poignantly have prevailed upon Yitro as an encapsulating, higher-level universal experience that established for him, once and for all, Hashem's supremacy and dominion over the entire world. **MP**

## **The Daily Portion - Sivan Rahav Meir**

### **A 73-year-old's Bar Mitzva in an Australian blueberry patch**

*Translation by Yehoshua Siskin*

"Shalom Sivan, my name is Shoham Goldstein. I am an emissary in Australia for the Torah MiTzion movement. Several days ago all of the emissaries went on a trip in southern Australia. We wound up on a remote ranch where you pick your own blueberries and pay on your way out. All of a sudden the owner of the field, advanced in years, appeared. He said hello and asked us who we were. We told him we were from Israel and he said: 'My mother was once Jewish.'

We inquired further and learned that his mother fled Germany as a young child and due to the persecution and trauma suffered, she did not live a Jewish life in any respect. He was raised as a Christian. We asked him if he had ever heard about the concept

of a Bar Mitzva. He said he had, but had never celebrated one. One of the guys brought his t'filin from the car, and we held a spontaneous Bar Mitzva celebration for James (Ya'akov) Lillywhite, aged 73, albeit 60 years late.

He put on tefillin for the first time in his life, listened to us explain the meaning of the mitzva, and repeated every word of the blessings after us. Then we all danced in a circle around him, with much excitement on our part and his. We are here working with the Jewish community, but had not yet had the experience of revealing to someone that he's Jewish.

On Shabbat, we will read parashat Yitro, standing at Mount Sinai as we receive the Ten Commandments. It is said that the souls of all of us were there at the foot of the mountain. This week we met one of them."

## **Dvar Torah** by **Rabbi Chanoch Yeres**

to his community at

Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

*Graciously shared with PhiloTorah*

### **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 commandments 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. 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.

## **The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld**

*Yitro 5781*

In our religious parlance, it has become rather common to pepper our conversations with the expression of BARUCH HASHEM, "Blessed/Praised be Gd", when we feel grateful for some condition, event, or happening, as in: "Baruch HaShem, everyone is healthy"; "Baruch HaShem, I'm doing quite well"; "Baruch HaShem, the wedding plans are coming along nicely." Often, it is also said in response to the question, "How are you?"

In essence though, what are we actually professing when we utter such an expression?

As popular as this religious phrase is today, it is of vintage origin, harking back to Biblical times. It was first said by Eliezer, Avraham's loyal servant, upon realizing that Gd answered his request to find a suitable wife for Yitzchok (B'reishit 24:27). And in our parsha, Yitro also, upon hearing the miraculous event of the Splitting of the Sea and the victory over Amalek (Zevachim 116b), exclaims, BARUCH HASHEM, Who rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharoah ..." (18:10).

These sources raise not a few questions.

If we are to understand the phrase as an expression of gratitude, then the modifier - BARUCH, appears somewhat imprecise. TODA LAKEIL, "Thank you, HaShem", or the like, would seem to say it better. And if the word means exactly what it says, "Blessed is HaShem", Gd certainly does not require our blessings. Moreover, the Talmud (B'rachot 54a) derives from Yitro's BARUCH HASHEM, that one must recite a blessing upon seeing a place where a miracle occurred even if - much like Yitro - one was not present at that event. But if you did not witness the miracle, why say a blessing at all, much less BARUCH HASHEM?

An even greater question though emerges from this strange and disturbing Midrash (Sanhedrin 94a): "It is to the discredit of Moshe and the 600,000 [Jews who experienced the Exodus] that they did not say, BARUCH HASHEM, until Yitro came and said [these words], BARUCH HASHEM. But did not the Moshe and the People sing the AZ YASHIR in the aftermath of the Splitting of the Sea? Was this not a magnificent praise of the Almighty? Why fault them because they failed to utter BARUCH HASHEM?"

Of course, to this last question, a number of answers have been proffered. However, let us suggest a very different approach based upon a remarkable analysis by Rav Soloveitchik into the purpose and meaning of b'rachot in

general (D'rashot HaRav, pp. 1-37). In that essay, the Rav demonstrates that the phrase, BARUCH HASHEM means to praise Gd and not to bless Him. And as to the question of why should Gd need man's praises, the Rav responds: "Although it rings heretical to assert, man must provide "assistance", as it were, to the Master of the Universe. Man must "help" Gd to reveal His presence in the world." In other words, by exclaiming BARUCH ATA HASHEM, whenever we recite a blessing, we are testifying to the actual immediacy of HaShem's involvement in our lives. In the Rav's dramatic depiction: "When one recites a b'racha, he is in essence saying, 'Master of the Universe, You are hidden behind a cloud; no one sees You. Yet, as I drink this glass of water, I reveal Your presence. The very fact that I can eat, that my body absorbs food ... the creation of food itself, is testimony to Your presence.'" When we address Gd with the words, BARUCH ATA HASHEM, we are affirming Gd's very presence before us; as if to say, 'Where are You, Gd? You are right here with me! How do I know? Because Your presence is evident in this water that I am about to drink!'"

To praise Gd then, in the Rav's formulation, is to perceive and experience the reality of the Divine in the everyday, to feel His presence concealed in the ordinary, in the mundane. Not just at prayer or in the performance of a mitzva, but also to sense and

experience His closeness at work, in the market, at the dinner table, in the bedroom - to detect His presence everywhere! If so, we may submit that not only via the bracha recitation, but every time we exclaim **BARUCH HASHEM**, we are also acknowledging and recognizing the omnipresence of the Almighty in all that we do. In a word, to praise the Almighty by uttering **BARUCH HASHEM** is to genuinely believe that HaShem is right here by my side, on my shoulder, as it were, enveloping me in His bountiful love. And the more we utter that simple phrase, the more we become acutely conscious and aware of His manifestation in our lives. Indeed, we are revealing His greatness and glory in the here and now!

With this insight, we may address the questions we posed earlier. Eliezer says **BARUCH HASHEM** and in so doing confesses that HaShem was directly involved in the extraordinary events that enabled him to discover Rivka for Yitzchak. And insofar as the difficult Midrash is concerned, the explanation might be something like this: True, Moshe and the People sang and thanked HaShem for the supernatural and spectacular miracles that took place. But what about the day after; did they understand the message of the miraculous and take it forward into their everyday lives? The Torah's narrative subsequent to the Exodus and the Splitting of the Sea tell a different story. The People murmur and grumble. Rashi

brings the Midrash (Sh'mot Rabba 26:2) that explains why HaShem allowed Amalek to attack Israel. "I am always among you and ready for all your needs, and yet you say, 'Is HaShem in our midst or not?' I swear by your lives that [as a lesson] the dog [Amalek] will come and bite you."

Amazing though it sounds, the People, even after experiencing the Almighty shattering the laws of Nature on their behalf, failed to take to heart that these overt miraculous events were meant to educate and teach them to acknowledge the small and ever-present miracles that attest to HaShem's presence always and everywhere. In a word, they did not understand the importance of professing **BARUCH HASHEM** as a constant spiritual refrain in their lives. And Moshe, sadly, was unable to convince them to do so.

But Yitro got it! Although not a participant in the miracles, he understood its message. Just the mere report that wondrous and astonishing miracles took place would be enough to convince him that HaShem was involved in the affairs of man - every day and everywhere. And to accent and forever implant this spiritual reality in the hearts and souls of all, Yitro proclaimed, **BARUCH HASHEM!**

When we can live our lives with the firm belief that Gd is ever-present in all that we do, when we can declare that **SHIVITI HASHEM L'NEGDI TAMID**, "I have set

HaShem before me always..." (T'hilim 16:8), then we become enriched with a spiritual perspective that can transform everything - how we think and how we act. "When we feel the presence of the Holy One Blessed Be He, our thought processes become clearer, our emotions more finely attuned, our senses sharper, and our resolve more encompassing." (D'rashot HaRav, p. 11) Indeed, can any experience match that incomparable intimacy with the Divine?!

All it takes are two words to be said frequently - and with conviction and feeling: BARUCH HASHEM!

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **KAFA ALEIHEM HAR K'GIGIT**

In a shiur given by my husband a few years ago, he discussed this midrash about Gd lifting Mt. Sinai over the heads of the Jewish people like a barrel, basically 'forcing ' them to accept the Torah. He discussed the obvious problems associated with that statement: if the Jews said 'na'aseh v'nishma' {'we will do and we will listen'} before even hearing the commandments, how could we say Gd 'forced' them with 'har k'gigit'? And if there was force, how could the Jews be blamed for not keeping the Torah when they never really voluntarily accepted it? Many theories and explanations are offered

and my husband presented many of them.

In the course of the shiur, I found myself actually visualizing ma'amad Har Sinai with and without this 'har k'gigit'. But this visualization was so constant that it reappeared to me a number of times much later that evening. Maybe this happened because the scene was a very pleasant one to me, and I think that was because of one of the explanations which spoke to me because it was a positive one. It's the one that explains the occurrence simply as the Jews not having bechira - free choice - not because of force, but through reality - it was a "no-brainer". How or why would they not accept the Torah after all Gd had done for them, after seeing the revelation - as R' Yonatan ben Uziel put it "k'aspaklaria" - clear as glass? In addition, one of the explanations offered, actually said that this 'har k'gigit' was to shelter them from the intense heat of the midbar (desert).

The positive associations of 'har k'gigit' added a dimension to something in davening that always affected me. In the Shabbat morning davening, we include T'hilim 91 - Yosheiv b'seiter Elyon". Since on Shabbat I tend to have more kavana in davening than during the week because I take my time and focus more on what I'm actually saying, this mizmor usually moves me.

After expressing how one who lives in Gd's "shadow" can feel real bitachon in

Him, the mizmor paints this picture of HaShem as the loving care and protection of a mother bird for her young: "He will cover you with His pinions and you will take refuge under His wings, His truth is His shield and armor."

There are times when I can imagine and feel these "wings" actually holding me around comforting and assuring me. So, after hearing the shiur on 'har k'gigit', I thought that maybe this picture of His covering us with His wings could also be describing this mountain experience, especially because His 'truth' is His shield; His emet is Torah. In other words, the Torah, which Gd is giving us, is the protection - the shield and armor we need in life. As the Etz Yosef on t'fila says: He will cover and protect you... on condition that you will take cover under His wings. Whoever walks in the ways of His Torah, HaShem will be a shield and armor for him.}

[It's also interesting that this is one of the chapters of T'hilim that Moshe Rabbenu authored. Reading the Mt. Sinai experience into these words would not be such a stretch.]

## Insights into Halacha

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## The Halachic Adventures of the Potato

**Ed. note: Some footnotes are included in the PT version of the article; most are not. Some of those that are included have been edited and shortened. See the website for full footnotes and sources.**

Although nowadays we all take the potato for granted, it actually has a fascinating history: one which not only has impacted halacha, but due to its travels, enshrined its "discoverer", Sir Francis Drake, as one of the Chassidei Umos Ha'Olam (righteous gentiles of the world)!

*According to the Tiferes Yisrael (Avot 3:14, Boaz Beg. 1), this act of Sir Francis Drake's, of introducing potatoes to the European continent, merited him to be classified as one of the Chassidei Umos Ha'Olam, as over the centuries potatoes have saved countless lives from starvation. Others included in this exclusive list include Johannes Guttenberg, who invented the printing press and thus enabled the disseminating of Torah on a mass scale, Johann Reuchlin, who defended the Talmud from being burned in numerous debates against the apostate Pfefferkorn, and Edward Jenner, creator of the modern smallpox vaccine, saving "tens upon tens of thousands" of people. Thanks are due to Rabbi Elchanan Shoff for pointing out this fascinating source. (Salk and others, too.)*

In this article, we will explore the halachic impact the potato has made in several different areas.

Ever since first "making the scene" via the victorious Spaniards shipping them from the conquered Incas to their own colonies and armies throughout Europe

in the late 1500s, the ubiquitous potato has been a considerable mainstay on the world stage. From circumnavigating the globe with Sir Francis Drake, to famed French physician Antoine Parmentier waxing poetic about this nightshade's nutritional value, to Queen Marie Antoinette wearing a headdress of potato flowers at a fancy ball (obviously while she still had her head), by the 1770s the potato had become a staple crop throughout Europe.

What other vegetable has been credited with helping facilitate such diverse events as the Industrial Revolution, the Great Irish Famine of 1845 (due to their susceptibility to blight), Russia's proclivity for vodka, a U.S. vice president's public spelling debacle, and a themed toy version of itself so popular that it was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame? Yet, aside for the tuber's worldly presence, it also holds a unique place in the annals of halacha, and not just by its significance in latkes, cholent, Pesach cooking, and fresh hot potato kugel.

## **Bracha Brouhaha - Mind Your Ks & Ts**

If one were to take a poll as to the potato's proper bracha the vast majority would respond that since the potato is a vegetable and grows and gets its nourishment from the ground, its proper bracha is "Borei Pri Ha'adama." Yet, although this seems clear-cut, interestingly, there are those who make a different blessing: Shehakol, usually

reserved for food items not naturally grown.

The source of this remarkable ruling seems to be an enigmatic translation by the Aruch, Rav Nosson M'Romi (literally, of Rome; d. 1106), a contemporary of Rashi. When referring to the proper bracha of mushrooms and other food items that do not actually get their nourishment from the earth and consequentially their bracha being Shehakol, the Aruch translates them as "Tartuffel". Not familiar with the archaic word, the famed Yismach Moshe maintained that the Aruch must have been referring to "Kartuffel", colloquially known as the potato. He added that the great Rav Naftali of Ropshitz made a Shehakol on potatoes as well.

This rationale is also found in several other s'farim, and there are prominent authorities who therefore made a Shehakol bracha on potatoes. In fact, Sanz, Bobov (which is a branch of the Sanz dynasty), and Kamarna Chassidim among others, follow this custom to this day.

*An interesting upshot of this shita is that generally speaking, these Chassidim will use a vegetable other than potato for Karpas at the Pesach Seder as they hold it is not a Ha'adama vegetable. Thanks are due to Rabbi Nosson Wimer of Kiryat Sanz, Netanya for pointing this out.*

The Klausenberger Rebbe, the Tzehlemer Rav, and Rav Shraga Feivel Schneebalg staunchly defend the practice of making a Shehakol on

potatoes. The Klausenberger Rebbe adds a reason to do so: since one can make flour out of potatoes and potatoes satiate and are filling, it might be considered in the same category of rice, whose proper bracha is Mezonos.

*There is precedent for such rationale regarding “dochen” and other satiating foods from Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah and the Shiltei Hagiborim. Although there is some debate as whether our rice is the rice mentioned by the Gemara and what the proper bracha should be, Shulchan Aruch Harav, Derech HaChaim, and Hosafos HaKitzur Shulchan Aruch Dinei Birchos Ha’etz v’Ha’adama, Chayei Adam and Nishmas Adam; although he concludes like the Shlah over the Taz, that rice is truly Ha’adamah and not Shehakol, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, and Likutei Mahariach write that a Yirei Shamayim should only eat it as part of bread meal (and therefore not to have to make a bracha on it), and if not, should make a Shehakol, and the Kaf HaChayim concludes whatever minhag one follows is fine, nevertheless, the vast majority of Poskim rule that the proper bracha to make on our rice is indeed Mezonos (but its after-bracha is still Borei Nefashot as it is not one of the five grains).*

The rule is that if one is unsure what the proper bracha on a food item is, a Shehakol should be made. He therefore opines that potatoes should also be Shehakol.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the Steipler Gaon strongly disagreed with this reasoning, maintaining that the Gemara expressly singled out rice for this special halacha of making a bracha of Mezonot, and that it therefore

does not apply to any other foods, no matter how satiating they may be.

R’ Chaim Safrin, son of the Kamarna Rebbe of Yerushalayim, personally told this author a similar reasoning to the Klausenberger Rebbe’s of why Kamarna Chassidim make a Shehakol. He added that anyway if one makes a Shehakol on any food he is yotzei b’dieved, so kol shekein one may do so by a potato when many great Rabbanim have said to do so.

However, the facts do not seem to corroborate that potatoes should be classified in the same category of mushrooms, as potatoes not only grow and root in the ground, but they also get their nourishment from the ground, as opposed to mushrooms and their ilk. Several contemporary authorities point out that it is highly unlikely, if not outright impossible, for the Aruch, who lived in Europe in the eleventh century, to have been referring to “Kartuffel” (potatoes) as the proper translation for mushrooms, as tubers were unknown on that continent until almost five hundred years later!

Therefore, the vast majority of authorities rule that the proper blessing on the potato is indeed “Borei Pri Ha’adama”.

## **Kitniyot Conflict**

Another interesting issue related to the potato is its exclusion from the Ashkenazic prohibition of eating kitniyos (legumes; ostensibly based on its semi-literal translation: “little things”) on Pesach. It is well known that

the actual prohibition of chometz on Pesach pertains exclusively to leavened products produced from the five major grains: wheat, barley, oats, spelt, or rye. Yet, already in place from the times of the Rishonim, there was an Ashkenazic prohibition against eating kitniyot (legumes; ostensibly based on its semi-literal translation: “little things”) on Pesach, except in times of famine or grave need. Although several authorities opposed this prohibition, nonetheless it is binding on Ashkenazic Jewry in full force, even today.

*Rambam (Hilchos Chometz U'Matza 5:1) explicitly permitted kitniyos. See also Beis Yosef (beg. O.C. 453), quoting and Rabbeinu Yechiel and Rabbeinu Yerucham, who called the kitniyot prohibition a “minhag shtut, ridiculous custom.” The prohibition is also strongly rejected by the Tur, who writes that abstaining from rice and kitniyos on Pesach is a “chumra yeteira, v'lo nahagu kein.” The Yaavetz, quoting his father, the great Chacham Tzvi, famously declared that if he had the ability to cancel the kitniyot prohibition he would, as it mostly affects the poor... On the other hand, several authorities, including the Beis Meir, Shaarei Teshuva, and Maharsham counter his words, with the Maharsham emphatically declaring that “ein lanu ela minhageinu, v'chalila lishmo'a eilav.” He then cites the Maharil that anyone who transgresses the prohibition of kitniyot, “d'kol d'gazru Rabbanan ha'over alav chayav mita, v'over al lo tasur min hadavar asher yorucha.”*

Although referred to slightly differently by our great luminaries - e.g., the Kitzur

Shulchan Aruch references the kitniyot restriction as an “issur”, the Mishna Berura as a “chumra”, the Aruch Hashulchan as a “geder”, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank as a “g'zeira”, Rav Moshe Feinstein as a “minhag”, and the Klausenberger Rebbe as a “takana”, nonetheless, they all maintain that the kitniyos prohibition is compulsory on all Ashkenazic Jewry. In fact, the Aruch HaShulchan avers that “once our forefathers have accepted this prohibition upon themselves, it is considered a ‘geder midin Torah’ and one who is lenient is testifying about himself that he has no fear of Heaven.” He adds, echoing Shlomo HaMelech’s wise words in Kohelet regarding a “poretz geder”, that one who breaks this prohibition deserves to be bitten by a snake.

Several reasons are given for the actual prohibition including that kitniyot often grow in close proximity to grain; are commonly stored together with grain and actual chometz might end up mixed inside the kitniyot container; cooked dishes made from grain and kitniyot look similar; and that kitniyot can likewise be ground up into flour - a “bread” of sorts can actually be made from them. Since there are many who will not be able to differentiate between them and their Biblically forbidden chometz counterparts, kitniyot was likewise prohibited.

## **A Hot Potato?**

So how do our spuds measure up? It would seemingly be quite difficult for anyone to mix up potatoes with chometz grain, so that rationale to regard potatoes as kitniyot is out. But, potatoes can be and are made into potato flour and potato starch, and there are those who do bake potato “bread”! If so, why would potatoes not be considered kitniyot? According to this, shouldn’t they be forbidden for Ashkenazim to partake of on Pesach?

In fact, and not widely known, the Chayei Adam seemingly considered potatoes kitniyot, and the Pri Megadim mentioned that he knows of such a custom to prohibit potatoes on Pesach as a type of kitniyot.

*The Chayei Adam tells a Maaseh Shehaya that in the city of Fiyorda (Fürth), Germany in 5531-5532, due to starvation conditions, their Beis Din allowed them to eat potatoes on Pesach those years, although they normally forbid it due to potato flour being produced there; ... he avers that the biggest kitniyot issue is the potential for flour mix-up with grain flour. The Pri Megadim mentions that he knows of such a minhag, nevertheless the vast majority of Poskim, including the Pri Megadim himself rule that potatoes are not considered kitniyot. The vast majority of Poskim, including the Pri Megadim himself (O.C. 464, E.A. 1), rule that potatoes are not considered kitniyot.*

However, the vast majority of authorities rule that potatoes are not any form of kitniyos and are permissible

to all on Pesach.[26]

*Others who explicitly write that potatoes are not kitniyot include the Shu”t Sheilas Yaavetz, Shu”t Divrei Malkiel; he adds an additional reason to be lenient: potato flour doesn’t look like grain flour and has a different consistency, therefore mitigating potential mix-ups, Shu”t Yad Aharon, Aruch HaShulchan, Shu”t Levushei Mordechai, Kaf Hachayim, Shu”t Igros Moshe, Halichos Shlomo, Shu”t Vayaan Yosef, and Shu”t Chelkas Yaakov. It is widely quoted that the famed Divrei Chaim of Sanz questioned how the Chayei Adam could possibly have forbidden potatoes on Pesach when his sefer is titled “Chayei Adam”, literally “The Life of Man” and potatoes are one of the necessities of life.*

One of the main reasons for this is that at the time when the Ashkenazic Rishonim established the decree prohibiting kitniyot, potatoes were completely unknown! It is possible that had they been readily available they might have found themselves on the “forbidden list” as well! Yet, since they were never included, as well as since they do not fit most of the kitniyot criteria, contemporary authorities could not add “new types” to the list.

However, it must be noted that there are other important reasons as well why potatoes were excluded. Of the four criteria given for the Gezeira of kitniyot, potatoes only fit one, - that it can be made into flour and a “bread” of sorts can be baked from it. No one would mix

up a potato with a grain kernel!

As Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach noted, Klal Yisrael never accepted the kitniyot prohibition to include potatoes.

*Halichos Shlomo. However, Rav Shlomo Zalman personally was stringent with potato flour [starch]. It is known that the Badatz Eidah Hachareidis of Yerushalayim were also stringent until the renowned Minchas Yitzchak became the Ga'avad and ruled that there was no reason to be machmir, even with potato starch. Other Poskim who explicitly permit potato starch on Pesach include the Aryeh D'vei Ila'i, the Levushei Mordechai, and She'arim Metzuyanim B'Halacha See also Shu"t Maharshag who, as a side point to the main issue discussed, mentions as a davar pashut that there is no problem, even of Marit Ayin, regarding using potato flour on Pesach to bake. Thanks are due to R' Moshe Langer for pointing out this important source. On the other hand, although the Arugas Habosem (Shu"t vol. 2, O.C. 124) cites several s'varot lehakel, he nevertheless concludes that it is asur, based on the similarity of baking use of potato starch and chometz. Additionally, the Chayei Adam's stringent position on potatoes was based on the fact that "flour" can be made from it, and l'shitato, that is the biggest problem with kitniyot.*

## **Cooking Quarrel**

The potato was viewed quite differently by many, respective of the time and place. For example, as noted previously, it was prized by French nobility in the 1770s. Yet, by the mid-1800s, tubers were considered peasant fare in many

locales, including Ireland and Russia. This divergence of attitude actually has a halachic impact.

If a non-Jew cooks kosher food (from start to finish), it still might be prohibited for a Jew to consume it, based on the prohibition of Bishul Akum, literally, food cooked by a non-Jew.

*However, there is a practical distinction between Sefardic and Ashkenazic psak as to how much of the cooking process a Jew must perform in order to classify the food as Bishul Yisrael. Whereas the Rema maintains that it is sufficient if a Jew lit the fire or stoked the coals (concluding "v'chein nohagin"), on the other hand, the Shulchan Aruch rules that a Jew must take an active part in the cooking process, whether by placing the pot on the fire or stirring it on the stove. This is because he understands Bishul Yisrael's prerequisite to mean that a Jew's direct actions will cause the food to be cooked, at least to some degree. Rav Ovadiah Yosef, discussing what Sefardim should do regarding eating in a restaurant that relies on this ruling of the Rema, where the only "cooking" the Jew does is light the fire, maintains that they may be lenient and eat there, due to a sfek sfeika: Perhaps the halacha follows the Rema, and perhaps Bishul Akum does not apply to non-Jewish workers in a Jewish home or establishment [this is the minority opinion of Rabbeinu Avraham ben Rav Dovid, which although the practical halacha does not actually follow, nonetheless, the Rema still permits reliance on this shita b'dieved.] However, Rav Ovadiah concludes that it is*

*nonetheless preferable for Sefardim not to rely on this dispensation. Other contemporary Sefardic Poskim, including Rav Ben Tzion Abba-Shaul and Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, based on the Ben Ish Chai, are more stringent, contending that there is no basis for such consideration, and assert that it is forbidden for Sefardim to eat in a restaurant that does not follow the Shulchan Aruch's strict definition of Bishul Yisrael.*

**This is a Rabbinic decree, intended as a safeguard to combat the plague of assimilation and intermarriage.**

*There is an additional reason given for this restriction: that by eating even exclusively strictly kosher food cooked by a non-Jew, one may come to get too comfortable with non-Jews and their cooking and may come to eventually transgress eating Maachalot Assurot.*

**However, in order for food to be included in this prohibition, it must meet two requirements: be unable to be eaten raw, and it must be “Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim - Fit for a King's Table.”**

*This rule is based on a difference of interpretation between the great Yeshivot of Sura and Pumbedita on how they understood Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak's statement quoting Rav (Avodah Zarah 38a). The codified halacha follows both versions; see Tur and Shulchan Aruch.*

**Any kosher food cooked by a non-Jew that does not meet these requirements (obviously with no other kashrut**

**concerns) is permitted to be eaten.**

*There might also be an additional factor to take into account: When the Gemara teaches the requirements of Bishul Yisrael, after stating that any food that it is Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim is included, it adds “l'lafot bo et hapat, to be eaten along with, or together with bread.” There is a difference of understanding between the Rishonim whether the Gemara was simply stating a common method of serving or actually meant to qualify the rule, making a further stipulation in the halacha's application. When codifying the halacha, the Rambam (Hilchot Maachalot Assurot 17:15) and Rabbeinu Yerucham use the same language of the Gemara, leading several notable Acharonim to rule that even if a food item is considered Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim, nonetheless, if it is not commonly served to be eaten with bread, it is exempt from the requirement of Bishul Yisrael. However, this issue is debated, and many Acharonim follow the Rashba's understanding, ruling that even if the food is not served with bread, as long as it is Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim, mandates Bishul Yisrael. To further complicate matters, the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, though citing “l'lafot bo et hapat”, still add “parperet”, generally understood to be dessert, to the list of foods needing Bishul Yisrael. Several Acharonim view this important addition as proof that “l'lafot bo et hapat” was not meant to be a qualification in the halacha, as who eats dessert with bread? Others understand the issue differently and maintain that any food that satiates and is served as part of a seuda is considered “l'lafot bo et hapat”, even if said food item is not eaten with bread at all. There*

*are also several authorities, who maintain that for a food item to be considered Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim it must have sufficient inherent importance that one would "invite his friend over to serve said food product." It does not seem too common to invite someone over simply to share French fries or potato chips! Practically, there is no clear-cut consensus on the matter, although Rav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner and Rav Dovid Feinstein advise to ensure that both desserts and chashuv food not eaten with bread be Bishul Yisrael, (while allowing leniency b'shaat hadchak). On the other hand, and undoubtedly, following the lenient opinion would permit French fries without requiring Bishul Yisrael, as they are generally served as at most a side dish, and would certainly allow potato chips, which is merely a snack, and not any part of a seuda.*

A common concern is figuring out which foods are considered "Fit for a King's Table". The Chochmat Adam, Rav Avraham Danzig, who lived in Vilna (located in modern-day Lithuania) in the early 1800s, ruled that potatoes are considered an important food item, apropos for nobility. As such, they are "Fit for a King's Table" and any cooked potato dish must be cooked by a Jew or else will be prohibited as Bishul Akum.

However, the Aruch HaShulchan, Rav Yechiel Michel HaLevi Epstein, writing in the 1890s in Novardok (located in modern-day Belarus), vigorously disagreed, maintaining that potatoes are food for the common man, and nobles would only partake of them due

to the land's overabundance of them and not due to any inherent importance. Interestingly, and although written more than a century earlier, and in Germany, Rav Yaakov Emden similarly wrote that potatoes are exclusively "peasant fare."

The Aruch HaShulchan adds that it is entirely possible that in the time and place of the Chochmat Adam, a potato dish might have been considered important, but by his time, the potato's widespread popularity ensured that it no longer could have been rendered "Fit for a King's Table", and consequentially is excluded from the Bishul Akum prohibition. It is interesting to note that nowadays potato's relevance is once again a matter of dispute among contemporary authorities regarding this important halacha:

The Maharsham, Rav Shalom Mordechai Schwadron, maintained that in his time (1890s, Berezhn, modern-day Ukraine), a cooked potato was considered Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim, however, if it was roasted it was not, and would not fall under the issur of Bishul Akum.

The Debreciner Rav understands this to include potatoes roasting in oil (frying), and adds that nowadays any type of fried potato (French fries, anyone?) would definitely not be "Fit for a King's Table."

Other contemporary authorities are even more lenient, for example, Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin and Rav Ovadiah

Hedaya (the Yaskil Avdi) seems to accept the Aruch HaShulchan's position that standard potatoes are not Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim, even nowadays, and therefore can be cooked by a non-Jew.

On the other hand, Rav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner and Rav Moshe Sternbuch are machmir for the Chochmat Adam's opinion and maintain that nowadays potatoes can be considered Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim, and conclude that even concerning fried potatoes one should be machmir.

It should be noted that Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky and Rav Moshe Feinstein seem to rule that French fries and even potato chips are Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim, but for a different reason (they do seem to accept that nowadays potatoes are chashuv; Rav Moshe's talmid, Rav Aharon Felder, wrote that indeed Rav Moshe held that potatoes in modern times have the status of an important food and are subject to the strictures of Bishul Akum).

Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv is quoted as being machmir as well, but for an entirely novel reason.

Likewise, it is known that Rav Asher Zimmerman also deemed potato chips as requiring Bishul Yisrael.

However, Rav Yisroel Belsky and Rav Dovid Feinstein disagree with this assessment, asserting that fried and roasted potatoes are in no way nowadays considered Oleh Al Shulchan

M'lachim, and explain at length that what is commonly quoted in the names of Rav Moshe and Rav Yaakov is not precise, and maintain that they would certainly agree that potato chips are not considered Oleh Al Shulchan M'lachim.

Many other well-known Poskim expressly ruled leniently regarding potato chips. They include Rav Moshe Stern (the Debreciner Rav; as mentioned previously regarding fried potatoes), Rav Asher Weiss (the "Minchas Asher"), Rav Pesach Eliyahu Falk of Gateshead (the "Machazeh Eliyahu"), Rav Yisrael Pesach Feinhandler (the "Avnei Yashpei"), and Rav Yochanon Wosner of Montreal (the "Chayei Halevi").

In fact, the OU's Kashrut Manual on Bishul Akum states simply that French fries and potato chips "don't require Bishul Yisrael because they aren't olim al shulchan melachim." This assessment is shared by most other leading mainstream kashrut organizations, including the Star-K, OK, and COR (Toronto). Similarly, the Swiss IRGZ (Zürich) Koscherliste, known for not relying on leniencies, dedicates a full listing of acceptable commercially produced Pommes Chips (potato chips/crisps) throughout Switzerland.

Come what may, it is well known that the Badatz Eidah HaChareidis of Yerushalayim is stringent for the machmir opinion and makes sure that potato chips under their hashgacha are

strictly Bishul Yisrael, a much simpler proposition to ensure in Eretz Yisrael than in Chutz La'aretz.

## This Spud's for You!

It's amazing how not only our, but the entire world's eating habits, have been changed by this simple vegetable. Can anyone even imagine Shabbat without cholent or kugel, or Chanuka without latkes, or Pesach without the potato? The common potato certainly has an uncommon and fascinating history, especially when viewed through the lens of halacha.

**Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.**

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz's recent English halacha sefer, "Food: A Halachic Analysis" (Mosaica/Feldheim) containing over 500 pages featuring over 30 comprehensive chapters discussing the myriad halachic issues pertaining to food, is now available online and in bookstores everywhere."

## YITRO

See the whole GMS file for other GMs for this sedra. To make sure you find them all, do a search for the sedra name - you might find a GM under a different sedra that also includes this one.

**GM** In preparation to receive the Torah and enter into a mutual covenant with HaShem, one of the promises from G-d is contained in Sh'mot 19:6 -

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מִמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ

אַלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

*'You will be a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation to Me.' These are the words that you must relate to the Israelites.*

Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak went to the Akeida together and one of the p'sukim that we might suggest describes the behavior of our fathers, that earned us the honor, privilege, and merit to become HaShem's nation - as in the pasuk above. B'reishit 22:6 -

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיִּשֶׂם עָלָיו־צִנּוֹק בְּנֹו וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיֵּלֶכְו שְׁנֵיהֶם יוֹדָיו:

*Avraham took the offering wood and placed it on [the shoulders of] his son Yitzchak. He himself took the fire and the slaughter knife, and the two of them went together.*

The p'sukim are a GM at 4036.

What else is with 4036?

That year was in the middle of the period of the AMORA'IM (chachmei Ha-Gemara). Rav and Sh'muel had passed away years before; Rabi Yochanan was towards the end of his life.

Marcus Claudius Tacitus, Roman Emperor, died after a short 2-year reign.