



9 years of Points to Ponder on

Parashas Yisro

**וַיִּשְׁמַ֞ע יִתְר֨וֹ  Yisro heard (18:1) – Rashi** famously asks the question what Yisro heard that inspired him to come join Moshe and Bnei Yisrael? Rashi notes that he heard about the splitting of Yam Suf and the war with Amalek. But why did that make him “come”? **Rav Nissan Alpert ztl.** explains that Yisro took a valuable lesson from these 2 specific examples. In both of these examples, Bnei Yisrael were held responsible to do their part and he would do the rest. Even if a person thinks s/he is not worthy of doing, Hashem thinks s/he is, and each of us needs to rise to the occasion and do. Hence, Yisro did his part too – and he came.

**וַיִּשְׁמַ֞ע יִתְר֨וֹ** **Yisro’s advice (18:1)  – Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh** notes that the decision to have Yisro teach the lessons of setting up a government was to highlight to all future generations that among the nations of the world there are many who are Gedolim B’Havana. **Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** points out that the role of this message is to highlight to us that there is Chochma BaGoyim – there are facts that exist in the world but a Torah to teach law? Not until Matan Torah. (Rabbi  Sacks uses this principle to highlight why he doesn’t like the term Limmudei Chol as opposed to the preferred – Chochma).

**וַיִּשְׁמַ֞ע יִתְר֨וֹ  And Yisro heard everything (18:1) – Rashi**notes that he heard about the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek. Why does **Rashi** limit the impact. The Torah says “Kol” and Rashi says only 2 things? Why? And why these 2 things? The **Sar Shalom of Belz** explains that when the world heard about the splitting of the sea, Amalek ran 400 Parsa to try to curtail the Jewish influence. Had they slowed down and reflected, they would never have attacked the Jews.  Yisro ran at the same time, in order to thwart the attempt and side with the Jews. **Rav Yitzchak of Vorke** zt'l adds that when Yisro heard of the great miracles of Kriyas Yam Suf, he was tempted to become part of the Jewish nation. However, he recognized his low level and knew that he wouldn’t be able to serve Hashem perfectly. Therefore he assumed that he couldn’t join them. But then he also heard about the war against Amalek, which also represents the great war against the yetzer hara. He understood from Milchemes Amalek that Hashem desires primarily our battles and our fight against the Yetzer Hara. This is even more important than our successes. When Yisro heard this, he knew that he too can also join the Jewish nation, and he joined them in the desert.

**וַיִּשְׁמַ֞ע יִתְר֨וֹ  And Yisro heard (18:1)** – What did he hear? **Rashi** tells us that he heard about the Kriyas Yam Suf and the war with Amalek. The real question is what motivated Yisro to come when he heard. To that we ask, what DID motivate Yisro about the Kriyas Yam Suf and the war with Amalek? The **Nesivos Shalom** explains that a person like Yisro can achieve high heights in personal Emunah growth but to really enter a true stage of faith, he needs to be among the Jewish faith. This was most apparent after Kriyas Yam Suf where what the Shifcha saw Yechezkel did not see. However, it seemed that after Kriyas Yam Suf, the recognition of Hashem was obvious to everyone (Consider the reactions of the nations as described in the Shirah) but the battle with Amalek which seems to have been a direct assault on faith in Hashem, showed Yisro that the only way to come to truly be a Baal Emunah is to join up with the Jews – and so he came.

**וַיִּשְׁמַ֞ע יִתְר֨וֹ Yisro heard (18:1) - Rashi** explained that Yisro heard about Kriyas Yam Suf and the war against Amalek. Why were these 2 fundamental? And why the war of Amalek and not the win against Amalek? **Chasam Sofer** answered that both issues were about Bechira. The message was that if Hashem could change nature for Kriyas Yam Suf, then He could have also stopped the war with amalek. That there was a war was a message that man has Bechira and chooses to follow Hashem.

**אַחַ֖ר שִׁלּוּחֶֽיהָ After she was sent away (18:2)** – The **Mechilta** identifies that Tzipporah was either ent away with word or with actual divorce. Why would she return prior to Matan Torah? **Rav Shmuel Eliyahu Shlita** compares the situation to that of the Kohein Gadol on Yom Kippur who also needed to be married – in that the dual view – man and woman – is the best way to relate to Hashem. As Matan Torah was a revelation similar to the Yom Kippur experience, it would be most complete with Moshe married at the time.

**אֲשֶׁ֨ר שֵׁ֤ם הָֽאֶחָד֙ גֵּֽרְשֹׁ֔ם Whose first son’s name was Gershom (18:3)** - Why do we mention the names of the sons of Moshe now? **Rav Simcha Zissel Broide ztl.** explained that after the great miracles Moshe Rabbeinu did not forget the specific, personal miracles that happened to him.

**וְאֵ֖ת שְׁנֵ֣י בָנֶ֑יהָ אֲשֶׁ֨ר שֵׁ֤ם הָֽאֶחָד֙ The name of the first was Gershom (18:3-4)** – Why is it so important to know the names of Moshe’s children NOW? **Rav Simcha Zissel Broide ztl.** explains that Moshe was teaching us that after experiencing the great miracles – Yetzias Mitzrayim, Kriyas Yam Suf and the war with Amalek, Moshe didn’t forget the small miracles – that of the miracle of birth and the like. This is the intent of the phrase we say daily in davening – Al Neesecha Shb’Chol Yom Eemanu.

**וַיֵּצֵ֨א משֶׁ֜ה לִקְרַ֣את חֹֽתְנ֗וֹ And Moshe went out to greet his father in law (18:7) - Rabbi Berel Wein Shlita** asks why it was so important to the Torah to describe this particular interaction prior to Matan Torah? Why the stress on Yisro? Rabbi Wein answers that the Yisro episode teaches us the importance of Derech Eretz Kadma L’Torah – that basic civility is a bedrock upon which the Torah is given. We received the Torah because we had the Derech Eretz to deserve it. We need to preserve the Derech Eretz more so now as a result of having received it.

**וַיִּשְׁאֲל֥וּ אִֽישׁ־לְרֵעֵ֖הוּ לְשָׁל֑וֹם וַיָּבֹ֖אוּ הָאֹֽהֱלָה And they exchanged greetings to one another for peace  and they came into the tent (18:7)**  – **Rav Efraim Greenblatt ztl.** notes that the proper way to bring one closer to the tent of Torah is by beginning with Shalom – with greeting one another in good spirit and good meaning and at the same time, with Emunah in He whose name is Shalom. He also notes that this is fundamental even for those who are not “far” from the tent of Torah.

**וַיְסַפֵּ֤ר משֶׁה֙ לְחֹ֣תְנ֔ו**ֹ **And Moshe told his father in law all about what Hashem did (18:8) – Rashi** tells us that Moshe told all of this to Yisro in order to be Mikarev him to Torah. However, don’t we usually try to DISCOURAGE Geirim? Why would Moshe encourage Yisro when this is against the Halacha**? Rav Shteinman Shlita** suggests that the whole reason we try to discourage the Ger is because we suspect him of ulterior motives and a lack of sincerity in his Geirus. However, when the conversion candidate’s Mesirus Nefesh is so clear in that he places himself into Sakana to become a Ger, one need not shoo him away – in fact, one should offer the encouragement in the process – as Moshe did.

**וַיֹּ֘אמֶר֘ יִתְרוֹ֒ בָּר֣וּךְ** **And Yisro said Baruch Hashem (18:9)** The Gemara (Sanhedrin 94a) notes that it was an embarrassment that Yisro was the first to offer a Beracha. Why is the Shirah not counted? **Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi Shlita** explained that Shirah is a spontaneous response that is an outpouring at the experience of a miracle. Beracha is the same spontaneous outpouring but as a response to a recognition of Hakaras Hatov. Until this point no one was clear headed enough to recognize the Hakaras Hatov to spontaneously offer the necessary words Baruch Hashem.

**וַיֹּ֘אמֶר֘ יִתְרוֹ֒ בָּר֣וּךְ ה Yisro said Baruch Hashem (18:10) –** The gemara (Sanhedrin 94a) notes that it is a negative that none of the Bnei Yisrael said Baruch Hashem until Yisro came and said it. But did they not sing the Shirah and Hallel? Why is it so sad that they didn’t say Baruch Hashem? **Rav Nebenzahl Shlita** explained that singing Shirah is not included in Beracha and to this point no one said a Beracha in public. Praise is great but the recitation of BERACHA in public is essential.

**הֱיֵ֧ה אַתָּ֣ה לָעָ֗ם**  **You should be for the nation in front of Hashem (18:19) – Rav Sabato Shlita** points out that there was a fundamental misunderstanding between Yisro and Moshe about Torah leadership. Yisro assumed that Torah leaders need to be images, who do not dwell on the day to day activities of the people. Moshe understood that to be a good leader, one must be able to judge an honest judgment – whether the cost was a dollar or a million. According to Moshe, Judaism is about using the day to day operations of life for Jewish betterment. Judgment allows Tzedek to reign tall and proud and be Mikadeish Shem Shomayim.  It is no less important than prophesy whose goal, too, is to bring the people closer to Hashem.

**אַנְשֵׁי־חַ֜יִל  Men of valor (18:21)** – Who are men of Chayil (valor)? **Rav Baruch Dov Povarsky Shlita** noted that the situation is best found in interpreting 2 different description of Chayil in Mishlei – that of the Eishes Chayil versus the Rabos Banos ASU Chayil. While there are many who DO Chayil, there are not as many who ARE Chayil themselves. In the case of the Anshei Chayil we not only have respect for what they do, we are able to have trust and confidence in who they are and what they stand for.

**שׂ֣נְאֵי בָ֑צַע People who hate bribes (18:21)** – If they cannot take bribes, why must they HATE the bribe? **Rav Elchanan Wasserman ztl. HyD** explains that even if the person merely likes money – even if he stays away from it, the person will become swayed and his judgement tainted. Thus, hating bribes allows his mind to focus on that which is important – justice.

**וְהָיָ֞ה כָּל־הַדָּבָ֤ר הַגָּדֹל֙ יָבִ֣יאוּ אֵלֶ֔יךָ The big things will be brought to Moshe (18:22)** - What is the difference between a “big thing” and a “little thing”? **Rav Schachter Shlita** noted that it is not the amount of the issue but rather who the defendant is. The Gemara explains that when dealing with dinei nefashos of a kohen gadol or melech, you need Moshe or Sanhedrin of 71. How about in regard to the number of Dayanim needed for the animal who went on to Har Sinai? The Gemara Sanhedrin has a safek whether Shor Sinai required 23 like a Shor Haniskal. Rishonim are bothered why we care about what happened -- מאי דהוה הוה. That’s a waste of time. Ancient history. **Rambam** doesn’t even quote the din. **The Brisker Rav** inferredthat it needed 23 since he says stam that דיני נפשות של שור requires 23.

**וַיִּֽחַן־שָׁ֥ם יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל נֶ֥גֶד הָהָֽר And Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain [Sinai] (19:2) -  Rashi** points out that the Hebrew word for encamped is *vayichan*, he camped, rather than *vayachanu*, they camped because of the unity that they experienced at that moment. **Rav Dr. Abraham J. Twerski ztl.** explained that the Torah was given to each individual, and every person is required to fulfill the 613 mitzvot. It is obvious that technically this is impossible. There are some mitzvot whose performance is restricted to Kohanim (priests), which Yisrael cannot perform. A person whose first born child is a girl cannot fulfill the mitzvah of *pidyon haben* (redemption of the firstborn son). Mitzvot that apply to judges do not apply to lay people. How can any single person fulfill all 613 mitzvot?  Torah scholars have provided the answer. When a person puts on the tefillin (phylacteries) on his arm and head, it is not just the arm and head that have the mitzvah, but the whole person. Similarly, when people are united, they are as one, and a mitzvah performed by one person is shared by those with whom one is united. How tragic that we have allowed ourselves to be divisive. Fragmentation not only weakens our nation, but deprives a person of acquiring the merit of those mitzvot which he is unable to perform. Every human trait may have positive applications, even something as repulsive as selfishness. We should realize that eliminating the divisiveness that reigns among us is not merely altruistic. It is of inestimable personal benefit.

**וַיִּֽחַן־שָׁ֥ם יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל נֶ֥גֶד הָהָֽר: The Jewish nation camped (19:2) – Rashi** explains that they camped as one person with one heart. The gemara at the end of Nazir notes that non Jews cannot accept Nezirus since they don’t belong to a tzibur. The concept of Tzibur only applies to כלל ישראל. Rav Saadiah Gaon utilized this idea to convey the notion that אין אומתינו אומה אלא מפני התורה. **Rav Schachter Shlita mentioned in the name of Rav Soloveitchik**  that this is the reason why we hold Sefer Torah when engaging Mevorchin HaChodesh. It is the Torah that metzaref us a tzibur, enabling us to establish the time of the month, just like Beis Din used to do it on behalf of the כלל.

**וַיִּֽחַן־שָׁ֥ם יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל נֶ֥גֶד הָהָֽר: The Jewish nation camped (19:2) - Rashi** explains that they camped as one person with one heart. Why was it necessary to be both as one person AND with one heart? **Rav Gedaliah Schorr ztl.** explained that even within a single human being there are many different contradictions. Man is not necessarily united and at peace within himself. Thus, when coming to Har Sinai not only were the people together united but within each person there was a unity of commitment on life task that ended the internal conflict.

**כֹּ֤ה תֹאמַר֙ לְבֵ֣ית יַֽעֲקֹ֔ב וְתַגֵּ֖יד לִבְנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל: So you shall say to Beis Yaakov and speak to Bnei Yisrael (19:3)** – It is interesting that we find both words – Leimor and L’Haggid which appear here also in regard to teaching about Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim. *Chazal* explain that "*Lehagid*" refers to speaking in a stronger manner, whereas "*leimor*" has the connotation of a softer tone. Both terms are used because there are two messages that must be conveyed. The softer word "*leimor*" is used for the story. **Rav Zvi Sobolofsky Shlita** explained that the events of *yetzias Mitzrayim* which are the prelude to *kabbolas HaTorah* are told in a soft tone that is used for a story to draw the hearts of the listeners. However, merely being inspired by a moving tale is not significant. A commitment to the rigorous life of *mitzvah* observance symbolized by the stronger form of speech "*lehagid*" must follow the "*leimor*." Eventually, a life dedicated to the "*lehagid*" of *mitzvos* in turn inspires us and we internalize the stories we once heard. As our appreciation of *mitzvos* matures, we continue on a life long journey of "*leimor*" and "*lehagid*," as our *avodas* Hashem merges the soft words of a story with the rigorous commitment to *shemiras hamitzvos*.

**בִּמְשֹׁךְ֙ הַיֹּבֵ֔ל הֵ֖מָּה יַֽעֲל֥וּ בָהָֽר: These are the things that you should say to Bnei Yisrael(19:3)** - **Rashi** says Moshe was told to share these words and nothing more. Why? **Rav Aizik Sher ztl.** explained that this is a condition of doing Mitzvos -- that we are WORTHY of doing Mitzvos and standing in front of Hashem. It needs no further explanation.

**וִֽהְיִ֨יתֶם לִ֤י סְגֻלָּה֙ And you will be special to me (19:5)** – Segulos are often used as a means of healing. But what is the difference between a Segulah and a Refuah? **Or HaChaim** explains that Refuah can be explained medically or biochemically. A segulah cannot be explained by the normal knowledge of known science. **Rav Elimelech Biderman Shlita** adds that this is the intent of the Possuk here too. Hashem will love and cherish us even when it doesn’t make sense. Even if we sin, Hashem doesn’t merely depart us. He adds that Segulah comes from the word Segel – like the vowel Segol. Just as whatever position you rotate the Segol, it remains Segol, Hashem promises that no matter whether we are on the up and up or falling, we too, will always be precious to Hashem.

**וִֽהְיִ֨יתֶם לִ֤י סְגֻלָּה֙ And you will be unique to me from all nations (19:5)** – There are 2 unique statuses in this week’s Parsha. On the one hand, we learn of the Jews receipt of the Torah. At the same time we read of the choice of the Jewish nation as unique. Was one a cause for the other? **Rav Mordechai Greenberg Shlita** pointed out that based on the Beracha of Asher Bachar Banu, we were chosen first and irrespective of the Torah, we are Hashem’s beloved. (This idea is found in the Kuzari Maamar Sheni II:50). It is this concept that allows us to know that Yisrael Af Al Pi Sh’Chata Yisrael hu and leads us to appreciate even the members of our nation who are mistaken in their beliefs (See Chazon Ish Yoreh Deah 12:16).

**אֵ֚לֶּה הַדְּבָרִ֔ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר תְּדַבֵּ֖ר אֶל־בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל: These are the things that you should speak to Bnei Yisrael (19:6) – Rashi** comments that you shall not add or subtract from these words. The problem is that earlier Moshe is told to speak softly to the Beis Yaakov and more harshly to the men. How is one to deliver the same message in the same number of words and be softer in one message and harder in the other? **Rav Gedaliah Schorr ztl.** explained that the issue does not depend on the words spoken but how they will be heard. When one looks at the main request it will be seen as soft but when one considers the responsibilities of being a mamleches Kohanim V’Goy Kadosh , the person will see this as hard.

נ**ַֽעֲשֶׂ֑ה All that Hashem declared we will do (19:8)**  – There is a famous Midrash that discusses how Hashem offered the Torah to each one of the nations and when each asked what the Torah stated, was offered a description that made accepting the Torah undesirable to that nation. The Jewish nation responded simply—“Naaseh V’Nishma. **Rav Yitzchak Meir of Ger** asked why the Jews were not given a reason not to accept the Torah in the same way that the other nations were. He answers that each nation was challenged with the very idea or concept that they had at their core. The Torah was supposed to be able to tame that core. Jewish challenge is in its skepticism. By having the Jews accept fully, it was the ultimate challenge to our drive that stands in the way of our Torah observance and life success.

**הִנֵּ֨ה אָֽנֹכִ֜י בָּ֣א אֵלֶ֘יךָ֘ בְּעַ֣ב הֶֽעָנָן֒ Behold I am coming to you in the cover of the cloud so that the nation shall hear me when I speak (19:9)** - What is the connection between the thickness of the cloud and the nation listening? **Rav Ovadiah Yosef ztl.** explained that a person who worked in one sense, doesn’t usually become sensitive in other areas. When Bnei Yisrael saw things from a Heavenly perspective their other senses were dulled. Therefore the thickness of the cloud was provided so that the other senses could be restored so that the people would remain connected to Moshe forever.

**וַיַּגֵּ֥ד משֶׁ֛ה אֶת־דִּבְרֵ֥י הָעָ֖ם אֶל־ה And Moshe brought the words of the nation to Hashem (19:9)** – Which words?  **Rav Meir Shapiro ztl.**explains by citing a Machlokes in regard to Hashem’s arrival in the thickness of the cloud: **Abarbanel**explains that this was Hashem’s plan – to appear to the people in the Levush – the imagery of the cloud despite the people’s request to see Hashem. The **Baal Akaida** explains that it was Moshe who would be in the thickness of the cloud so that the nation could hear directly and without distraction. Assuming the Abarbanel’s approach, Moshe carried the message of the people’s desire to see Hashem. Assuming the Akaida’s – it was the fact that the people didn’t want the agent – they wanted to see and hear on their own (the difference is whether Hashem acquiesced or not).

**אִם־בְּהֵמָ֥ה אִם־אִ֖ישׁ לֹ֣א יִֽחְיֶ֑ה** **If it will be an animal or a man it shall not live (19:13)** – The Gemara in Sanhedrin notes that a Shor Sinai also gets the punishment of Skilah. The Gemara determines that it must be judged in the Beis Din of 23. The **Baalei HaTosafos** ask why we spend so much time on the issue if it is only a Horaas Shaah?  **Meiri**learns that Har Sinai has a continuity to the Beis Hamikdash today. An animal that goes onto Har Sinai today would get the death penalty today too. **Rav Schachter Shlita** told us that he thought this was a big Chiddush and not usually accepted.  He quoted from **Rav Yerucham Gorelick ztl.** that there is a single universal rule being taught here – do all rules regarding bovines require a Beis Din of 23 or are all of them treated as chattel. One thing follows – Divrei Torah have to have potential applicability today or spending time on things that were one time events  constitutes Bittul Torah.

**וַיִּתְיַצְּב֖וּ בְּתַחְתִּ֥ית הָהָֽר** **They stood at the base of the mountain (19:17)** – The Gemara (Shabbos 88) notes that this teaches us that Hashem lifted the mountain on top of the people and told them if they accept the Torah great but if not THERE they will be buried. The commentaries note that if the mountain was on top of them already, why did He not say, HERE you will be buried**? Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz ztl.** explained that there is a valuable lesson here – often in life people get busy. They work to delay their own spiritual growth until they “get around to it.” Hashem tells them if you do not change your priorities, waiting to get “There” will bury you. When it comes to spiritual growth we do not deal with eventualities…we deal with now.

**וַיִּתְיַצְּב֖וּ בְּתַחְתִּ֥ית הָהָֽר And they stood at the base of the mountain (19:17) -**  The Talmud (Shabbos 88) notes that the Jews seem almost coerced into accepting the Torah or else Hashem would drop the Mountain on top of them (Sham Tehe Kevurascheim). The question needs to be asked: Why is the word Sham used? Why not Poh? Moreover, the Gemara seems to contradict the response of Naaseh V’Nishma? How are we to explain? **Rav Aharon Soloveitchik  ztl**. explained that in regard to the people who were at the base of the mountain – who had endured the slavery and experienced the exodus, their desire to accept the Torah did not involve coercion. However, since the Torah also needed a guarantor (See Shir HaShirim Rabba) and Hashem accepted the future generations as those guarantors, it was more of a challenge and a coercion. The generations that choose not to accept Sham Tehe Kevuraschem – will bury themselves at that point.

**וַיִּתְיַצְּב֖וּ בְּתַחְתִּ֥ית הָהָֽר And they stood at the bottom of the mountain (19:17)** – The **Gemara (Shabbbos 88a)** reminds us that Hashem told the Jews that if they accept the Torah all will be good but if not, Sham – there will be their burial place. **Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz ztl.** asks why the word Sham – there – is used if the more correct term would have been “Here”? He answers that in life, if we accept things NOW then we tend to stick to them – but if not, we get buried under the “Round to it” syndrome – wherein we declare “when I get there, I’ll do it.” Hashem warned Moshe to tell the people that if they wait – they will not succeed.

**וַיִּתְיַצְּב֖וּ בְּתַחְתִּ֥ית הָהָֽר And they stood underneath the mountain (19:17)** – Rashi cites the Talmud’s famous comment that Hashem raised the mountain over the heads of the Bnei Yisroel and told them that if they accepted the Torah, great. If not, Sham Teheh Kevurashcheim – you will be buried there. The commentaries abound as to why the word “Sham” referring to there, was used and not “Poh” – right here? **Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz ztl.** used to note that people wait to undertake certain opportunities until they get “Sham” to a more distant place. The trick to recall is that the very declaration of Sham – is a burial to worthy opportunities that one should not wait to undertake.

**Aseres HaDibbros (20:1)-**What is the significance of the Aseres HaDibbros? **Rashi**quotes the Geonim that the Aseres HaDibbros are the basic categories of the Mitzvos. **Rav Schachter Shlita** explained that **Rashi**held that this was the learning process since the Jews had already been Migayer and they were already Mikabel Mitzvos.  **Ramban** argues that this was the referring of the Miktzas Mitzvos Kalos and Miktzas Chamuros. He saw this as a smattering of the mitzvos – not an organizing pattern. This Parsha is a Mitzva of V’Hodata L’Baneicha U’L’Bnei Baneicha. Rav Schachter Shlita saw this as a Chizzuk to the Emunah in Hashem.

**אֵ֛ת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֥ים הָאֵ֖לֶּה All of these things (20:1) – Or HaChaim** notes that all the Dibbros were given at once. At the same time we hear that the first 2 Dibbros were given by Hashem. How do we make sense of the contradiction? Or HaChaim answers that Hashem said all 10 at once but the people could not hear anything beyond the first Dibbros at which time their Nishamos left their bodies. **Rav Shlomo Amar Shlita** explained that this explains the Possuk in Tehillim Achat Diber Hashem Shtayim Zu Shamatee – we heard 2 dibbros even if one was being spoken at the time. The other 8 came out in fire and as soon as the people were revived they were able to see the other 8 present in front of them.

**אָֽנֹכִ֨י I am Hashem (20:2)** – The **Rambam** counts this as a Mitzva by itself. **Ramban** agrees but in his commentary he defends **the Behag** who does not include this commentary as one of the 613 Mitzvos as the Behag saw this as an introduction to all of the other Mitzvos. After all, if you do not believe in Hashem then you cannot do all of his laws. There would be no point. So why should it be its own Mitzva**? Rav Elchonon Wasserman ztl. HyD** noted that there are certain things that are in the forefront of our minds and others not as easily accessible. The Mitzva of Anochee Hashem is to have this idea in the forefront of our minds. **Rav Schachter Shlita** would often point out that this is the meaning of Vayaminu B’Hashem U’B’Moshe Avdo – that in the same way that you see Moshe in front of you and believe in him all of the time, that is the way we are to believe in Hashem.

**אָֽנֹכִ֨י I am Hashem your God who has taken you out of Mitzrayim**– A famous midrash replayed many times at Chumash plays throughout the Torah world reminds us that prior to the Jews receiving the Torah, Hashem went to each nation to see if they would accept the Torah. Edom refused because they couldn’t accept the prohibition against murder, Yishmael couldn’t accept the prohibition against stealing. What was the point if Hashem came to the Jews and didn’t challenge them? **Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski Shlita** quotes Rav Yitzchak Meir of Gur who noted that the commandments selected for each of the nations were directed to challenge their very natures – to see if the nation would be willing to subvert its very psychological drive in order to follow the word of Hashem. For Edomites, it is savagery, for Yishmaelim it is theft.  For Jews it is skepticism  -- hence their challenge came in the first declaration, Anochee Hashem.

**לֹ֣א יִֽהְיֶ֣ה־לְךָ֩ You shall have no other gods “on my Face”**  - **Rav Yitzchak Koppleman ztl. of Lucerene**noted that the use of the phrase “in front of my face “ is a reminder to us that man always stands in front of Hashem. Thus, when man sins, he sins “Lifaneicha” and it is precisely that lack of awareness that allows him/her to sin. We are required to recall Shivisee Hashem L’Negdee Tamid.

**שֵׁ֣שֶׁת יָמִ֣ים תַּֽעֲבֹד֘ Six days you shall work and do all your work (20:9) –** Why does the Torah talk about the days we SHOULD work? **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl**. explained that one needs to learn that even when engaging in material pursuits we are still doing so to fulfill the will of Hashem. Moreover, if we work to fulfill Hashem’s will then abstaining when we need to abstain, like for Shabbos, will be easier since it is also the will of Hashem.

**וְכֹ֖ל אֲשֶׁ֥ר לְרֵעֶֽךָ Do not covet everything that belongs to your neighbor(20:14) – The Givilei Eish** notes that when someone thinks of that which belongs to his neighbor he thinks that he is entitled to something that belongs to the other person. However, the problem is that when you want something that belongs to your neighbor, you get EVERYTHING – including that which you might not want. Better off to stick with what is yours.

**רֹאִ֨ים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹ֜ת The nation saw the sounds (20:15)** – How does one see sounds? Moreover, the Mechilta adds that they saw the sounds and heard the sights. How does that even make sense? See sights and hear sounds! **Rav Asher Weiss Shlita** noted the comments **of Rav Chaim of Volozhin** who explained that the most trusted of the human senses is the power of sight. We implicitly tend to trust what we see even more than what our other senses tell us. Rav Asher added that when the Jews received the Torah, their perspective changed. That which they had accepted on faith became as clear as sight and that which was in front of them – the value of material goods – became as distant as sound as a result of the correction of Matan Torah. Hence the idea of seeing sounds and hearing sights.

**וְכָל־הָעָם֩ רֹאִ֨ים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹ֜ת And the entire nation saw the voices (20:15)** - The **Rambam** notes that Moshe was unique among the Neviim insofar as he had a clear Nevuah and saw things without Mashal. Based on our Possuk, Bnei Yisrael had achieved the Nevuah level of Moshe Rabbeinu. How does this make sense if the Nevuah of Moshe was supposed to be unique? **Rav Dovid Soloveitchik ztl.** explained that Moshe’s Nevuah brought forth Torah as did Bilaam’s as opposed to all other Neviim. As far as Matan Torah was concerned, it was experienced by Bnei Yisrael as Torah only because of Moshe Rabbeinu.

**וַיַּ֤רְא הָעָם֙ וַיָּנֻ֔עוּ וַיַּֽעַמְד֖וּ מֵֽרָחֹֽק**: **And the nation saw and they were afraid and they stood from afar (20:15)** – The Midrash states that they moved back 12 mil and the Malachim sought to bring them back to where they were .Why did they move 12 mil specifically? **Rav Betzalel Rudinsky Shlita** explains that Matan Torah took place on Shabbos and the shiur of Techumin was 12 mil. That was as far as the Bnei Yisrael could move back. Rav Rudinsky added that Hashem was teaching an additional lesson by giving the Torah on Shabbos. In essence, lest a generation think that in the future the Torah will be non-applicable in a generation of wealth, the Torah was given on Shabbos. Just as Shabbos gives the power and the life to the rest of the week, Torah gives purpose to all other facets of life.

**וַיַּ֤רְא הָעָם֙ וַיָּנֻ֔עוּ וַיַּֽעַמְד֖וּ מֵֽרָחֹֽק And the nation saw and they trembled and they stood from afar (20:15) – Rav Binyamin Eisenberger Shlita** cited the **Sadigerer Rebbe ztl**. who explained that when it comes to Emunah in Hashem, needing to see is a challenge that has to be overcome. For the ideal Emunah, is an internal one that is automatic and unchallenged. That is the intention here --- that the people needed to react to the sound and light show at Matan Torah in order to recognize their connection to Hashem – Vaamdu Meirachok and they realized that they were still far away from their goals in Emunah. Rav Eisenberger added from **Rav Yisrael Salanter** that when one is used to receiving credit and is suddenly asked for  a collateral, it is a cause for question. However, when one considers that there is a limit to a line of credit – that there is a limit to good trust,  a collateral needs to be found. The **Alter of Kelm** added that this is what we call the limits of “good faith.” We need to remember that in regard to our relationship with Hashem where our “Good faith” is.

**דַּבֶּר־אַתָּ֥ה עִמָּ֖נוּ וְנִשְׁמָ֑עָה You speak to us and we will listen and Hashem shouldn’t speak to us lest we die (20:16)** – **Rav Yissochar Dov of Belz** was once asked if there is temporary death in light of the famous story of Rabba and Rav Zeira (Megillah 7b)? In other words, did Rav Zeira’s wife need to remarry him after he was brought back after the episode? The Rebbe answered that in light of the Gemara which suggests that Bnei Yisrael’s souls departed at the time of Matan Torah and yet we do not find them having to remarry. Ergo, a temporary death is likely not death in Halacha.

**וּבַֽעֲב֗וּר תִּֽהְיֶ֧ה יִרְאָת֛וֹ עַל־פְּנֵיכֶ֖ם לְבִלְתִּ֥י תֶֽחֱטָֽאוּ**: **In order that the fear will be on your faces so that you will not sin (20:17**) – The gemara identifies the Jewish people as Rachmanim Baishanim Gomlei Chassadim. The Gemara notes that one who does not have these middos might not be Jewish. Why? The Gemara explains that Maamad Har Sinai is the source for the Middah of Busha and the other middos must also come from there. **Rav Schachter Shlita** explained that this is why we say Eilu Kirvanu Lifnei Har Sinai V’Lo Nasan Lanu Es HaTorah Dayeinu. The Sinaitic revelation alone accomplished the experience of what being a Tzelem Elokim is and what we must do to be able to fulfill V’Halachta B’Drachav.

**וְלֹא־תַֽעֲלֶ֥ה בְמַֽעֲלֹ֖ת עַל־מִזְבְּחִ֑י And do not ascend my Mizbeiach via steps (20:23) – Rashi** explains that if you were to do so, you might come to demonstrate a belittling of the Mizbeiach as the laws of Tzniyus would be compromised. Yet, one needs to wonder how a Kohein or a Kohein Gadol ascending the Mizbeiach AT A TIME OF AVODA would behave in a manner that could even appear to be belittling? **Rav Yaakov Moshe Lessin ztl** explained that even when we are totally focused on the mission of Hashem, we need to be careful not to let anything else disturb our mission. At these special moments, even the slightest change as the ability to set us off on the wrong course.

**Haftara:**

**שְׂרָפִ֨ים עֹֽמְדִ֚ים מִמַּ֙עַל֙ ל֔וֹ  The Serafim were above him (Yeshayahu 6:2) – Rav Mordechai Breuer** notes that there is a strong comparison between the Nevuah of Yeshayahu here and that of Michyahu Ben Yimla (Melachim I: 22). In both prophesies, Hashem is described as sitting on a heavenly throne with His angels standing above at the ready to serve Him. However, in the current Haftara, Yeshayahu is ultimately invited to join in with the angels in their service of Hashem. Rav Breuer adds that when one is capable of declaring and making Hashem sovereign over him, then he too, is granted the opportunity to join in with the angels in praising and serving Hashem.

**מְלֹ֥א כָל־הָאָ֖רֶץ כְּבוֹדֽוֹ The whole world is filled with his Honor (Yeshayahu 6:3 ) – The Dubno Maggid** notes that when we think of a human being, the human is named and is known by his name. Later as time goes on, the person develops a deeper clarification of the name – perhaps based on his actions or his educational or financial pursuits. For instance, Dovid was first Dovid then he was Dovid the shepherd, Dovid the musician, Dovid the warrior and ultimately Dovid the king. But we recognize him as Dovid first. When it comes to Hashem, our only ability to relate to Him is through the accomplishments – the whole world is a pale description but it contributes to the Kavod of who He is.

**כִּ֣י אִ֚ישׁ טְמֵֽא־שְׂפָתַ֙יִם֙ אָנֹ֔כִי Woe onto me as I am a man with tainted lips (Yeshayahu 6:5)** – Why does Yeshayahu’s declaration and lack of belief in the people become the appropriate Haftorah for Parshas Yisro? Wouldn’t it be a better choice for  Parshas Shemos where Moshe too, speaks badly of the Jewish people. Why Parsha Yisro? **Rav Gideon Weitzman Shlita** suggests that the message of Har Sinai was told to Moshe (See Shemos 3:12) – success in taking the people out of Mitzrayim would be achieved when the served Hashem there. The proper response to the challenge of Moshe (in Shemos) and Yeshayahu here is found in this week’s Parsha --- because the people ultimately served Hashem here. No need for any more questions as to their commitment.

**כִּ֣י אִ֚ישׁ טְמֵֽא־שְׂפָתַ֙יִם֙ אָנֹ֔כִי And I said woe onto me for I was silent since I have lips that are Tamai (Yeshaya 6:5)** – The Targum says he told himself that he was woeful for he needed to rebuke the people and didn’t. **Rav Yaakov Kamenetzsky ztl**. asked why this made him one who had Tamai lips? He answered that the intent of the Novi here is to explain why he was not offering the rebuke – that he felt unworthy since he himself was not solid but rather had Tamai lips.

**כִּ֣י אִ֚ישׁ טְמֵֽא־שְׂפָתַ֙יִם֙ אָנֹ֔כִי Woe onto me for I have been impure and I have impure lips (Yeshiyahu 6:5) – Rav Avraham Rivlin Shlita** asks what the tale of woe was about and why would the Malach’s use of coal on Yeshiyahu’s lips heal him? He answers that Yeshiyahu was punished for speaking badly about Am Yisroel. He was cleansed through a Ritzpa because unlike other coals, a Ritzpa continues to glow on the inside long after the outside of the coal has burned out. Lashon HaRa too, continues to burn long after the outside act has been done.

**: אֶת־מִֽי־אֶשְׁלַ֖ח וּמִ֣י יֵֽלֶךְ־לָ֑נוּ וָֽאֹמַ֖ר הִֽנְנִ֥י שְׁלָחֵֽנִי Whom will I send..and I said Heneni send me (Yeshayahu 6:8)** - In his first Nevuah for the people Yeshayahu accepts the call to serve enthusiastically. **Rav Schwab ztl.** added that he was rewarded for accepting the call in spite of the people’s rejection of the word of Hashem and those who brought it to the people, by being the Novi who received most of the Nevuah of Nechama -- some of them doubled --- because Hashem appreciated his enthusiasm on behalf of the role to be the bridge between Hashem and his people.