
THE WEISS EDITION

יתרו

Yisro



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Light points

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ON THE
WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

Lightpoints

לזכרון ולעילוי נשמת

הרה"ח הרה"ת הרה"ג ישעיהו זושא

ב"ר אברהם דוד ע"ה ווילהעלם

נלב"ע ביום ד' שבט התשפ"ב

תנצב"ה

יִתְרוֹ
Yisro

יט:יז | 19:17

וַיִּתְּיָצְבוּ בְּתַהֲתִיבֵי הָהָר

And they stood at the bottom of the mountain.

Who Wouldn't Want the Torah?

The Talmud interprets the words “And they stood at the bottom of the mountain” to mean that at the giving of the Torah, G-d raised Mt. Sinai over the Jewish people and said: “If you accept the Torah, good; if not, you will be summarily buried beneath this mountain.” “This,” concludes the Talmud, “furnished a strong disclaimer against the acceptance of the Torah,” until the Jews willingly reaccepted it after the Purim miracle, almost 1,000 years later.¹

Why was this coercion necessary? When Moshe told them that they would be given the Torah, had Bnei Yisrael not will-

1. Shabbos 88a.

ingly committed themselves to its complete observance, proclaiming, “We will fulfill and we will listen?”²

The Talmud’s assertion must therefore be understood to mean not that Bnei Yisrael were coerced into accepting the Torah *against* their will, but that their *willing* acceptance *itself* was coerced.

A person who recognizes and understands that a life of Torah observance is the ultimate blessing, and that the opposite is true of a life devoid of Torah, would find it virtually impossible to refuse to accept the Torah. Bnei Yisrael, however, having left Egypt a mere 50 days earlier, could not have independently undergone such an extreme paradigm shift—from the influence of Egypt, “the shame of the earth,”³ to an appreciation of the Torah’s holy ideals. Thus, their willful and unconditional affirmation to live by the Torah was the result of *being shown* from Above that a life without Torah is no life at all; it was not an ideal that they had come to appreciate on their own yet.

When the G-dly revelation at Sinai ended, Bnei Yisrael faced their prior commitment, but without the level of appreciation for the Torah that they had been exposed to when they made that commitment. Observing the Torah now, without that inspiration, was thus much more difficult than it had been at the moment of their original acceptance. “This,” says the Talmud, “furnished a strong disclaimer against the acceptance of the Torah,” until they reaccepted it later on their own initiative.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 26, p. 424*

2. Shemos 24:7.

3. Bereishis 42:9.

 20:1 | א:כ

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹקִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאִמֹּר

G-d spoke all these words, to say.

Ten for Ten

When the Torah uses the phrase וַיְדַבֵּר ... לְאִמֹּר—“He spoke... to say,” it usually means that the person being addressed should repeat what he is being told to a third party. For example, when G-d instructs Moshe regarding a particular mitzvah, the Torah writes, “G-d spoke to Moshe, to say,” meaning that Moshe should relay the command to Bnei Yisrael.

In light of that, the verse “G-d spoke all these words, to say,” which precedes the Aseres Hadibros, the Ten Commandments, demands explanation. Wasn’t the entire nation present when G-d spoke the Aseres Hadibros? In fact, according to the Midrash, the souls of *all* Jewish people—past, present and future—were present at Sinai!⁴ If everyone to whom the Ten Commandments were directed was present when G-d stated them, to whom must they be repeated?

The Maggid of Mezeritch explains, homiletically, that here the word לְאִמֹּר—“to say”—alludes to the Asarah Ma’amaros, the “Ten Utterances”⁵ with which G-d created the world (e.g., “G-d *said*, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light,”⁶ “G-d *said*, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation,’”⁷ etc.). Accordingly, the verse וַיְדַבֵּר ... לְאִמֹּר that precedes the Aseres Hadibros is to be under-

4. Shemos Rabbah 28:6.

5. See Avos 5:1.

6. Bereishis 1:3.

7. Ibid. 1:11.

stood as a directive to draw גִּידְבָר—the Torah contained in the Aseres Hadibros—into לְאִמֵר—the world that G-d created with the Asarah Ma'amaros.

Practically speaking, the Maggid's explanation teaches us that we should not compartmentalize our lives, separating the Torah and holy aspects from the mundane. Our interactions with the "Asarah Ma'amaros," i.e., the day-to-day of our physical lives, must be permeated with a Torah attitude and framed by a Torah lifestyle. Even our mundane activities must be guided not by the attitudes of the secular world, but by an outlook that reflects our attachment to the Aseres Hadibros, the eternal Torah.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 1, pp. 148-149*

 כ:א | 20:1

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאָמֹר

G-d spoke all these words, to say.

The Correct Response

The Midrash explains that the word לְאָמֹר—“to say”—in the verse that introduces the Ten Commandments is not an instruction to repeat what is being said, as לְאָמֹר generally indicates. Rather, in this instance, לְאָמֹר means, “to respond,” meaning that Bnei Yisrael responded to G-d after each of the Ten Commandments. The subject of their response, however, is a matter of debate. According to Rabbi Akiva, they responded “Yes!” to both the positive commandments and the prohibitions, indicating their willingness to comply with whatever G-d demanded. Rabbi Yishmael disagrees and says that they responded “Yes!” to the positive mitzvos, indicating their willingness to *fulfill* those commandments, and “No!” to the prohibitions, indicating that they would *refrain* from what is forbidden.⁸

This debate is, in essence, a commentary on the nature of the mitzvos and what our primary focus in their fulfillment must be. Should our emphasis in the observance of a mitzvah be on experiencing its unique message and effect on our lives and on the world, or on the common theme shared by all the mitzvos—simply, that their observance fulfills the will of G-d?

Rabbi Yishmael believes that the ultimate purpose of a mitzvah’s observance is the refinement of the individual (and

8. Mechilta, Shemos 20:1.

the world) that each mitzvah causes. He therefore asserts that as the Jewish people heard each commandment, they sensed its unique purpose and effect. In line with their experience, their responses alternated between “Yes!”, expressing their excitement to implement the positive mitzvos in their lives, and “No!”, voicing their aversion to the wrongness of the prohibitions.

Rabbi Akiva, in contrast, maintains that the highest form of worship is the *transcendence* that can be experienced through mitzvos. This is found equally in refraining from transgression as it is in fulfilling the positive commands—they are all opportunities to *surrender* ourselves to G-d and His will. Rabbi Akiva therefore asserts that the Jewish people at Sinai experienced this transcendent nature of mitzvos, and appropriately responded a uniform, affirmative “Yes!” to all ten commandments.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 6, pp. 124–125*

 20:2 | כ:ב

אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

I am Hashem, your G-d,

Who took you out of the land of Egypt.

The Egyptian Me

Our Sages teach that the Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai represent the sum total of the entire Torah: all 613 mitzvos are incorporated within these ten.⁹ In fact, the Tanya explains that all mitzvos are, in effect, a means of fulfilling the first two commandments.¹⁰ Taking this a step further, the Zohar states that the entire Torah is contained within the very first word, אֲנֹכִי—“I,” with which G-d introduced Himself simply as “I,” making known His unfathomable essence that transcends any name.

Astonishingly, according to the Midrash, the word אֲנֹכִי is actually Egyptian!¹¹ According to this Midrash, the *most important word* in G-d’s communication to mankind was spoken in Egyptian—the parlance of the most debased society of its time, “the shame of the earth.”¹²

By using an Egyptian word here, G-d communicated the purpose for which the entire Torah was given: not merely to give depth to our spiritual lives, but to draw G-dly purpose and holiness into the lowest and most mundane aspects of

9. See Azharos of Rav Saadiah Gaon.

10. See Tanya, beginning of chapter 20.

11. Tanchuma, Yisro. The more common Hebrew word for “I” in the Torah is אֲנִי.

12. Bereishis 42:9.

life as well. The opening word of the Ten Commandments is therefore not in Hebrew, the holy tongue, but in a language utterly removed from holiness, Egyptian.

Similarly, the Talmud relates that Moshe refuted the angels' claims to the Torah by asking them, "Did you descend into Egypt?"¹³ Moshe emphasized this detail because the descent into lowly "Egypt," and the struggle to refine the mundane parts of our lives, is the entire purpose for which the Torah was given. It is this "descent into Egypt," our endeavors to reveal G-dliness even in places that are not yet environments of holiness, that connects us with אֱלֹהֵינוּ—G-d's very essence that was revealed at the giving of the Torah.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 3, pp. 892–895*

13. Shabbos 88b.



לזכות

הת' שלמה זלמן שי'

לרגל הכנסו לעול המצוות בשעתו"מ
ביום כ"ב שבט ה'תשפ"ו
יה"ר שיגדל להיות חסיד, ירא שמים ולמדן
לנח"ר הוריו וכל משפחתו שיחיו

נדפס ע"י הוריו הרה"ת שעי' וזוגתו מרת חוה שיחיו ברודשנדל

לעילוי נשמת

הרה"ת בענדא שלמה ב"ר דוד ע"ה

לייקין

נלב"ע ביום כ"א שבט ה'תשע"ד
תנצב"ה

נדפס ע"י חתנו ובתו הרה"ת אייל וזוגתו מרת גאלדא שיחיו בן-ציון

לעילוי נשמת

הרה"ת הירש ב"ר אשר הכהן ע"ה

העכט

נלב"ע ביום כ' שבט ה'תשע"ד
תנצב"ה

נדפס ע"י בנו הרה"ת אשר הכהן וזוגתו מרת רבקה שיחיו

העכט



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