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PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

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PARASHAT YITRO

“And Yisro heard...all that Hashem did for Moshe, and for his People, Yisrael. (18:1)

Yisro must have been a very unique individual. After all, how many parshios in the Torah are named for a specific person? Certainly, he must have had some particular virtue to warrant such an honor. Let us go back to Yisro's arrival in the wilderness to be with the Jewish People. Why would someone abandon the comforts of home to join a nation "in formation," a people that had, until recently, been subjected to hundreds of years of harsh slavery? Chazal teach us that Yisro had heard of two events: Krias Yam Suf, the Splitting of the Red Sea, and the war with Amalek. These miracles motivated Yisro join the Jews.

Now, Yisro was not the only person that had heard of these events. In fact, the entire world had heard about them. It was not every day that the Red Sea was split. Amalek was a huge nation, proficient in warfare. Their defeat at the hands of the Jews was a military phenomenon. Each event on its own merit should have spurred thousands to join the Jewish People. Yet, only one person made the move. Why? Why was the entire world so insensitive to what had occurred? They had all heard; they were all aware; yet, only one person took positive action.

Horav Chaim Scheinberg, Shlita, suggests that the answer is to be found in Rashi's commentary concerning Yisro's arrival in the wilderness. The pasuk relates his arrival, "And Yisro...came to...the wilderness where he (Moshe) was encamped by the Mountain of G-d" (ibid 18:5). The mention of the wilderness is enigmatic. Where else could this have occurred? We already know that Klal Yisrael was in the wilderness subsequent to the exodus from Egypt. Is it necessary to repeat this bit of geography? Rashi explains: "The Torah mentions it [the wilderness] in order to laud Yisro. For even though he basked in worldly honor, nadvo libo, his generous heart (guided) him to go out to the wilderness, a desolate place, to hear the words of Torah." When the time came for Yisro to hear the truth, luxury and honor did not prevent him from coming to hear the word of Hashem in the wilderness. His distinction was nadvo libo, a generous heart. He saw beyond himself. His benevolent, self-effacing, noble heart was unstinting and considerate enough to surrender it all, to ignore what he had and what he might still amass, just to learn the verities that Torah and Judaism had to offer.

Rashi is teaching us a profound lesson. We usually refer to generosity as a form of kindness, a benevolence in which we share our wealth of time with others in need of our favor. We are now being taught that it was Yisro's generosity, his nobility of heart that motivated his sudden move from a life of comfort to join the Jews in the wilderness. This nobility of heart empowered Yisro to leave it all behind. This is a type of generosity which we ourselves can bestow, so to speak, on Hashem. When we make our own considerations and petty desires secondary in order to act on behalf of the Almighty, we demonstrate the highest degree of generosity.

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Judaism is a life predicated upon the ability to sacrifice. To truly believe is to be willing to sacrifice for one's convictions. Sacrifice requires the virtue of generosity. We all have it within ourselves. It depends on whether or not we are prepared to use that ability. David HaMelech says in Tehillim 47:10, "Nedivei amim ne'esafu am Elokai Avraham, "The nobles of the nations gathered; the nation of the G-d of Avraham." The expression nedivei amim, nobles of the nations, explains Rav Scheinberg, is a reference to those individuals who have hearts that are catalyzed by noble, selfless motivations. These actions are not self-serving. They are responding to a higher - nobler - ideal. Rashi explains that the nobles that this pasuk refers to are "those who offered themselves to be slaughtered and killed for the Holy Name." The preeminent form of nobility is to return one's life, generously and wholeheartedly, to the One Who gave it.

The title of nediv-lev is given to Avraham Avinu, because, as Rashi comments, "He was the first with a generous heart, the vanguard for converts." He was the pioneer, the pacesetter for others to emulate. He taught the world the meaning of generosity. He showed them that the highest form of benevolence is to bestow on G-d - as he did. He was even prepared to sacrifice even himself for his beliefs. He was ready to return his pure and noble heart, if necessary, to his Creator for the sake of sanctifying His Name. All succeeding converts took their inspiration and example from Avraham Avinu - the father of the Jewish People.

Yisro was like that. He had a "large" heart, a benevolent heart, a heart that permitted him to follow magnanimously in Avraham's footsteps. Thus, when the news of Hashem's miracles reached him, he was ready to move. He was sensitive to the truth, and this spurred him to convert and join the Jewish People in the wilderness. He was awakened, while the rest of the world continued on in pathetic slumber. Yisro saw through the maze and understood the significance of all of the miracles and the lessons that they imparted. The rest of the world continued to sleep. Yisro listened with his heart. The miracles conveyed to him a personal message: "Come and join the Jewish People." He knew that the only way he could understand the depth of the miracles in order to penetrate the hidden truth of their lesson was to convert. Yisro's recognition of the truth was not inspired by his incisive mind. Rather, his sensitive heart infused him with conviction. Our heart is aware of much more than we can imagine. Yisro's heart directed him to acknowledge Hashem and join His People. In the merit of his outstanding heart, Yisro warranted that a parsha bear his name. Other wise men lived during Yisro's time - and after. Many wise men throughout the generations have seen or heard of the miracles which accompanied the Jewish People throughout the millennia. Yet, it did not influence them. Why? They did not have open, generous hearts that would motivate them to acknowledge the truth. They were wrapped up in themselves, allowing no room for anyone or anything else to penetrate their self-centered lifestyle. This is the definition of an idolater: An apathetic, unmoved, uninspired individual who lives for himself. He serves the god of his choice by convenience - not out of a sense of truth. Indeed, this may apply to he who determines his own individual mode of observance based upon what is most self-serving. It is all in the heart - not the mind.

Now heed my voice, I shall advise you, and may G-d be with you.

You be a representative to G-d. (18:19)

In this pasuk, Yisro is advising Moshe Rabbeinu concerning how to adjudicate the law and how to serve as an intermediary between the nation and Hashem. The Sifrei Kabbalah teach us that Moshe was to be mesakein, repair, the neshamah of Noach. A righteous man, Noach's virtue did not extend

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beyond himself. Thus, when Hashem shared the decree to wipe out humanity with him, Noach did not intercede; he did not complain; he followed orders and entered the Ark to save himself, while the rest of the generation perished in the Flood. Moshe's function was to pray for the people of his generation that were not worthy of salvation, to intervene on their behalf. Horav Yaakov Y. Twersky, zl, the Milwaukee Rebbe, interprets this idea into Yisro's advice to Moshe. "I shall advise you, and may G-d be with you." I will counsel you what to do in order to fulfill your mission of correcting Noach's soul. When Klal Yisrael sins with the Golden Calf, and Hashem tells you that He will destroy the Jewish People and recreate the nation from you, at that point stand *mul Elokim*, opposite Hashem, and intercede on behalf of the Jews. It is your function to offer yourself in their place. By exhibiting such self-sacrifice, you will save the nation and affect the *tikun*, restoration, for Noach's *neshamah*.

And now, if you hearken well to Me and observe My covenant. (19:5)

Targum Onkelos defines *im shamo'a tishmeu*, "if you will hearken/listen well," as, *u'ch'aan im kabala tikablun*, "if you will accept upon yourselves." This translation is supported by Rashi, who cites the *Mechilta* with a parallel definition. This implies, explains Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl, that *Kabbalas ha'Torah*, accepting the Torah, is the principle upon which one is *zocheh*, merits, to acquire Torah. I have always had a difficult time defining "Kabbolas" *ha'Torah*. What does it mean to accept/receive the Torah? In searching for the correct synonym I came upon the word, *welcome*. To be *mekabel* the Torah means to receive it with open arms, to welcome it into our midst, to make it a part of our lives, to acquiesce to its every demand. That is the meaning of acceptance.

Rashi adds, "If you will accept the Torah, *ye'erav lachem*, it will become sweet for you, from now on, because all beginnings are difficult." This intimates that starting out on the Torah path, beginning to study Torah, may be difficult, but it is not a difficulty which is intrinsic specifically to Torah. It is like all other *haschalos*, beginnings, new undertakings; it is challenging. There is one distinction, however. Once one begins, it becomes sweet; it is no longer difficult. If one still experiences difficulty, it is because he has not yet been *mekabel*, accepted, upon himself the yoke of Torah. In other words, *Kabbalas ha'Torah* catalyzes *areivus*, sweetness, which undermines the difficulty one might encounter.

The Rosh Yeshivah wonders why Rashi uses the concept of sweetness to contrast difficulty. He should have said that at first it is hard/difficult, and then it becomes easier. Why does he interject with sweetness? He explains that the difficulty of accepting the Torah happens only to one who has not tasted its sweetness. Anyone who has ever tasted Torah's sweetness does not experience any difficulty in welcoming the Torah into his life.

Indeed, one who has encountered the appeal of Torah can never sever himself from it. In his commentary to Parashah *Ki Savo* (Devarim 26:11), the *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* writes, "You shall be glad with all of the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given you." There is no "good" other than Torah. If one were to taste the sweetness of the good of the Torah, he would go out of his mind in its pursuit. All of the gold and silver in the world would be meaningless to him in comparison to Torah.

There is another, deeper lesson to be derived herein. Those who have studied Torah, who have plumbed its depths and nevertheless have resorted to forsaking it, truly have never experienced its sweetness. They studied, they imbibed, but they did not accept it. It was not a "welcome" experience. It was something they either had to do - or did- but it was not something that they wanted to do. Perhaps

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this is the litmus test for all of us. Do we experience Torah's areivus? Did we welcome the Torah into our lives? If we cannot respond in the affirmative, we have not really learned Torah.

Torah is the lifeblood of the Jewish People. Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, was an individual who exemplified love of Torah. He would often reminisce about others, but he was simultaneously expressing his personal feelings. He could not forget the little boy in Baranovitch, sitting on the steps of the cheder reviewing his Chumash, long after classes had ended for the day. Horav Nochum Partzowitz, zl, Rosh Yeshivah of Mir, Yerushalayim, could not wait to go to cheder in the morning, so great was his desire to learn Torah. He would go barefoot, because it took him too long to put on his shoes.

When Rav Mendel would conclude a shiur, he would ask the students, "Nu, do you hear the music of Rashi?" He once remarked, "When someone learns a lot, he develops an appetite for Torah as one does for food. When Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, would return home after spending a day fundraising for his many Torah related endeavors, he would sit down to learn like a hungry man. Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, would expend such energy toiling in Torah that he barely had any strength left for anything else. Indeed, if someone tried to discuss any topic other than Torah, his eyes would droop and he would fall asleep from exhaustion." He would often quote from his rebbe, the saintly Horav Elchonon Wasserman, zl, "Learning is very hard but, without learning, living is very hard."

He would compare Torah study to the pursuit of commerce. He once needed a part for an old fixture in his house. He went to a hardware supply store and showed the owner the part. The owner immediately climbed a ladder, removed an old, dusty box and presented the part, commenting, "You know, Rabbi, I have not been asked for this part in over thirty years!" Rav Mendel asked him how many parts he had in his warehouse. "Over thirty thousand," he replied. Upon relating the incident, Rav Mendel quipped, "Do you think that he has such a brilliant mind that allows him to remember every part that he sells? No! It is his business. If it is your business, your livelihood, you remember. You do not have to possess a brilliant mind like Rav Chaim Ozer (Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl) to know where everything is to be found in Shas. Torah just has to be your business, and you will know...Just like a businessman prays to Hashem for Divine assistance (Mevarech HaShanim), so, too, does a ben Torah pray to Hashem (Ahavah Rabbah) for assistance in Torah. He added that Hashem helps those who display a sincere desire for Torah advancement. When one learns even during times that are difficult, he receives Divine assistance. "If a person hurries back from breakfast to start learning, the angels wait at the door to bring him help from Heaven. If, however, he takes his time in returning to the bais ha'medrash, stopping along the way to shmooze, have a chat, before he begins to learn, the angels return to Heaven."

Space does not allow for the many anecdotes and lessons concerning Torah study upon which Rav Mendel would expound. There is one concerning the value of time that leaves an indelible impression. He said, "Every minute is precious. There is a building in Chicago, the Wrigley Building, which was built with the profits from selling millions of pieces of chewing gum at a penny each. From this we see that every small thing is precious." What a powerful lesson!

There was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain. (19:16)

It is an accepted axiom that Hashem does not perform miracles for no apparent reason. Every miracle has its purpose, its function and its specific time. The Giving of the Torah was a spectacular

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experience, beyond anyone's wildest dreams. It was an unparalleled display of miracles and wonders, unlike anything ever before experienced. Clearly, everything that took place was Divinely ordained and determined in accordance with Hashem's infinite understanding of what was necessary. All of this was needed to imbue the nascent Jewish nation with emunah, faith, in Hashem. We wonder why the trust that the Jewish People had in Moshe Rabbeinu was not sufficient to carry them. Furthermore, it is not as if these people had not been privy to miracles. The exodus from Egypt was replete with miracles. Those miracles were followed by the Splitting of the Red Sea, the Manna, the Pillars of Cloud and Fire. Surely, there was no dearth of supernatural events to inspire Klal Yisrael.

We must say that while those experiences sufficed for that generation, it was the future generations that would sustain the persecutions and miseries, the doros ha'shmad, the generations that would be subject to forced conversions, to spiritual adversity with every step and in every aspect of their lives. It was those generations that required that added mysterium tremendum, unprecedented event, experienced by 600,000 men over the age of twenty who would transmit it in all its glory to the next generation. Indeed, in his famous Iggeres Teiman, the Rambam writes that the whole purpose of the spectacular event that was Maamad Har Sinai was to provide us with a specific, unique experience that would strengthen our faith and resolve in Hashem, especially during those periods of travail and adversity.

Hashem offered the Torah to the other nations prior to our acceptance of it. He went to the descendants of Eisav and offered them the Torah. They asked, "What is in it?" to which Hashem replied, "Do not commit adultery." They immediately responded that adultery and immorality were too much a part of their lives. Their DNA included a proclivity towards immorality at its nadir. How could they accept a Torah that would restrict their lifestyle and national pasttime? Hashem's offer to Yishmael's descendants ended with a similar response once He told them that they would not be able to murder. Can you imagine Bnei Yishmael without license to kill? When Hashem offered the Torah to Klal Yisrael their response was immediate: Naaseh v'nishmah, "We will do and (then) We will listen." Total and unequivocal acceptance. The Chasam Sofer asks a compelling question. The Jews accepted the Torah. So what?! Was there any legitimate reason not to accept it? Was there anything about the Torah that for them would be difficult to uphold? Was there anything about the Torah that went against their character, personality, or disposition?

Indeed, why did Hashem divulge to the nations of the world those mitzvos with which they could not possibly live? It is almost as if they were set up, as if Hashem really had no plans to give them the Torah. The Torah, on the other hand, was made for the Jews. Why should they receive such credit for accepting it? They had no reason to reject it.

The Chasam Sofer explains that accepting the Torah was, indeed, a difficult undertaking for the Jewish People. By nature, Jews are a cogent, analytical people. We do not accept anything at face value. Questioning and challenging are part of our psyche. This disposition is the result of our prodigious intellect. Wisdom is part of our national character, and learning is for us a way of life. Thus, to make a statement such as, "We will do and we will listen," goes against our natural inclination. We transcended our intuition and accepted the Torah. It was not easy, but we believed and trusted in Hashem.

Faith and trust in the Almighty constituted our inheritance from our Patriarchs. When we demonstrated our incredible faith in Hashem, He rewarded us by opening up the Heavens and giving us a glimpse of the real world - the world in which we believed. The Heavenly support of miracles and wonders was catalyzed by our willingness to accept the Torah without demanding any substantiation of its veracity.

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Now I know that Hashem is greater than all gods, for in the very matter in which (the Egyptians) had conspired against them!" (18:11)

Rashi explains that Yisro was intimating that he had experimented with other religions. After experiencing every form of idolatry, he was now thoroughly convinced that Hashem was superior to any other form of deity. He derived proof of Hashem's Omnipotence from the fact that when He had punished the Egyptians, He had punished them measure for measure, for what they had conspired to do to the Jews. Pharaoh had planned to drown the young Jewish males in the Nile River. Hashem arranged for Pharaoh's final punishment to be executed by the Red Sea. Hashem punishes and rewards in accordance with the rule of middah k'neged middah, measure for measure. We do not always perceive this, but upon careful introspection, we will notice that this principle is always in effect.

There is an important lesson to be derived from this pasuk. Horav Aizik Ausband, Shlita, notes that Hashem performs miracles; He alters the course of nature, just to teach man a lesson. After all, the splitting of the Red Sea was no ordinary miracle. Hashem made a condition with Maas'e Bereishis, the Creation of the World, that one day He would change the course of nature and split the Red Sea. If the sole purpose was to kill the Egyptians, He certainly could have employed other methods. It is not as if Hashem had never before punished a large segment of people. He slew the Egyptian firstborn; he destroyed Sancheiriv's army. He did not have to drown the Egyptians through a miraculous effort on His part.

Hashem acts only for a reason, to carry out a purpose. Here, it was to teach them and the world, a lesson: measure for measure. You attempted to destroy the Jewish People using the medium of water. You will perish through the medium of water. A punishment is necessary. Understanding why and for what one is being punished are equally significant.

People must be imbued with the awareness that Divine Providence governs the world. The greatest manifestation of Hashgachah, Providence, is through the principle of measure for measure. If one does not clearly see that retribution parallels one's actions, both in a negative and positive sense, he can always err and say, "It just happened," without realizing that nothing "just happens" by coincidence.

In other words, the entire miracle of Krias Yam Suf, the splitting of the Red Sea, was to impart one lesson: middah k'neged middah. Rav Ausband cites his rebbe, Horav Asher Kalmen Baron, zl, rosh yeshivah in Ponevez in Europe, who expressed a similar idea, supporting it from a statement of Chazal in the Talmud Shavuot 20b. Chazal teach us that Hashem said the words "Shamor, guard, and zachor, remember, the Shabbos to keep it holy," at the same time, in one utterance. This is a reference to the two times that the commandment to observe Shabbos is mentioned in the Aseres HaDibros, Ten Commandments. Once, the Torah writes "Zachor es yom haShabbos", and, in the other instance, it says "Shamor es yom haShabbos." Hashem articulated both commandments simultaneously. We derive an important halachah from this. Zachor and shamor are compared to each other concerning all aspects of Shabbos. Thus, a woman, who normally is not obligated in time-bound mitzvos, would never-the-less have to observe the positive mitzvos related to Shabbos, such as Kiddush.

Whoever is commanded to observe the prohibitive mitzvos must, likewise, observe the positive mitzvos. This halachah is derived from the fact that Hashem vocalized both shamor and zachor simultaneously. He altered nature, so that Klal Yisrael would derive an important halachah. This gives us but a glimpse into the overwhelming significance of each and every halachah. If Hashem is prepared to change nature for a halachah, we should certainly be obligated to observe it.

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Now I know that Hashem is greater than all Gods, for in the very matter in which (the Egyptians) had conspired against them. (18:11)

Yisro had "known" Hashem prior to the miracles at the Red Sea. The splitting of the Red Sea gave him new insight into the manner in which Hashem directs the world. The Egyptians conspired against the Jews with water when they drowned the Jewish baby boys. Hashem paid them back measure for measure, when they themselves drowned in the Red Sea. Yisro recognized this, and the situation brought his awareness of the Almighty to a deeper and more acute understanding. Yisro was a great man. After all, the Torah names a parsha after him. What distinguished him to the extent that he became Moshe Rabbeinu's confidante and advisor? What gave him such distinction that Moshe and all the Zekeinim, Elders, paid such great homage to him?

Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, asserts that Yisro's ability to put "two and two" together - to reflect upon the fact that there was a clear corollary between the punishment the Egyptians' received and their malevolent intentions to harm the Jewish People -distinguished him from everyone else. Everybody saw and everybody knew; it was Yisro, however, who assimilated this cognizance and realization into his mind and went one step further: he acted upon it. Yisro's entire metzius, essence, changed as a result of his newly-discovered consciousness. The way an individual views and analyzes a situation catalyzes a deeper perspective within himself, elevating him into a new being. Yisro's entire perception of Hashem changed after he understood the concept of middah k'neged middah, measure for measure.

This is the difference between a simple person and a great person. An individual's eminence is not always measured by how much he knows, but rather by how much of what he has learned he is willing and able to integrate into his consciousness, character, and daily behavior. Depth of understanding is a great gift, but the individual's failure to apply his cognitive perceptions to his own life wastes this unique gift. Yisro valued his lesson; thus, it elevated him.

If you do this thing, and G-d shall command you - then you will be able to endure. (18:23)

Yisro gave Moshe Rabbeinu advice concerning how to circumvent the fatigue that would overcome him if he maintained his demanding schedule of personally judging the people. Fatigue can be manifest in different forms. It can be physical or it can be emotional. Physical fatigue is the result of overwork or work without rest. Likewise, emotional fatigue is the result of having to endure constant incursions against our emotions, each intrusion breaking down our defenses until we ultimately capitulate and lose hope. How does one avoid falling prey to emotional aggression, to the constant attacks that we, as a nation who value our spiritual dimension, succeed in avoiding the pitfalls which we must confront on a regular basis in today's base society?

It is important that we retain focus on: who we are, from whom we have descended; what we represent; and our future legacy. We must constantly infuse in our minds and in the minds of our children that - yes - we are better. We have a glorious past. True, we have suffered persecution and misery, but we are still here. Our persecutors are not. They have been replaced with our present tormentors, but that is all a part of Hashem's Divine Plan. When we connect with our past, we are filled with pride in being the bearers of Hashem's doctrine for mankind. Those of us who have forgotten - or who, unfortunately, have never been aware of - our past have a difficult time enduring the challenges

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and obstacles which confront us on an almost constant basis.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, relates a powerful incident which left a lasting impression, teaching him a powerful lesson about how one can endure even under the most vexing situations. The episode took place in a Siberian slave labor camp where Rav Galinsky and so many of our brethren suffered unbearable and inhuman pain and misery. The Russians did not single out Jews as the only enemies of the state. Whoever had the misfortune of falling into their clutches was imprisoned and relegated to performing backbreaking labor under the most brutal conditions. After a full day's work, the men would trudge back to their barracks to lay down on their wooden bunks and attempt to fall into a painfully fitful sleep.

Every night at approximately 2:00AM, one of the Polish prisoners would arise from his "bed" and remove a bag that was hidden beneath his bed. He would quickly remove what appeared to be some kind of a uniform, put it on, view himself in the mirror, quickly remove the suit, return it to the bag and go back to sleep. This went on every night. While Rav Galinsky was used to strange things occurring in prison, this man's actions were very puzzling. Sleep was very important to the prisoner's well-being. To force oneself to arise in the middle of the night just to put on a suit seemed irrational. There had to be an explanation that would shed light on this man's strange behavior.

One day, when they were alone, Rav Galinsky asked the man to explain his behavior, "Why do you arise in the middle of the night to put on your suit and view yourself in the mirror? Do you not value your sleep?"

"Yes, Rabbi, my sleep is very important to me, but so are my sanity and dignity. Let me explain. Prior to being taken captive by our Russian tormentors, I was a distinguished general in the Polish army. I had the respect of thousands of soldiers. Suddenly, our army was vanquished and I became a prisoner. The degradation and depravation to which they subject us is, in my opinion, a greater danger than the physical blows which they rain down on us on an almost constant basis. At all costs, I had to prevent them from getting into my mind and destroying it. Therefore, every night when everybody is fast asleep, I risk removing my general's uniform which I was able to retain in my possession. I don the uniform and look in the mirror. For two minutes, I see before my eyes my true self - my position and my status. I do not see a broken down, frail prisoner. I see a general in the Polish army! This is how I am able to maintain my sanity."

This idea applies equally to us. We are the descendants of a noble lineage with a compelling legacy for the future. If we visualize ourselves in our true uniforms, a uniform which exemplifies the Jewish essence and spirit, we will be able to transcend the society in which we live.

The following episode from the life of Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, has previously been featured in these pages. I repeat the story because of its impact and lesson. Rav Schwab served as rav in a small town in Germany. On Shushan Purim, 1936, he became the focus of a libelous accusation. The Nazis, who were becoming more powerful, claimed that in one of his sermons, he had publicly slandered Hitler, yemach shemo. The Gestapo picked him up and demanded an explanation. He looked the Gestapo official straight in the face and flatly denied having said anything disparaging about the German chancellor. Apparently, when he was addressing the sin of the Golden Calf, he made use of the word "vermittler," which in German means intermediary. The government spy who was in the audience thought he had heard the name Hitler instead. Rav Schwab was told that the case would be discussed and reviewed and that they would advise him of the result. In the meantime, he was remanded to his home.

It goes without saying that Rav Schwab feared for his life. It took two months for the matter to

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be settled in his favor. He later related that during this entire time, he did not change into his bedclothes when he retired at night. The reason he gave for this behavior demonstrates to us the quality of pride and dignity with which we should be infused. It seems that it was common for the Nazis to break down a person's door in the middle of the night and take the person out to a makeshift gallows erected in the middle of the town to execute them. Rav Schwab feared for his life, knowing that until his case was resolved, his life hung in the balance. Therefore, he feared that if the Germans found him guilty, it was important that he, the rav of the community, not hang there in his bedclothes. This would denigrate the position of the rav and everything that he represented. Therefore, for two months, Rav Schwab went to bed every night in his clothes. He maintained his dignity under the greatest duress, because he understood who he was, from whom he had descended, and whom he represented. What a powerful lesson for us all.

Honor your father and your mother. (20:12)

A cornerstone of our belief in the entire Torah, the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim, honoring one's father and mother, affirms our belief in and commitment to the Mesorah, chain of transmission of Torah from Har Sinai. As with all other mitzvos, we do not seek rationale to justify or explain the mitzvah. It is Hashem's command, an edict from the Almighty, which is our most compelling reason to observe the mitzvah. This idea is underscored in the following incident which is related by Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita.

An individual who played a leading role in a major crime spree which involved huge amounts of money was about to be sentenced to ten years in prison. He sent a letter to Rav Zilberstein stating that he had the opportunity to diminish his sentence if he could use the abuse he had sustained in the hands of his father as part of his defense. His lawyers felt that after the judge heard about the traumatic effect that this had on his childhood, he would reduce his sentence by five years. Rav Zilberstein responded that Torah law does not permit this. Even if it meant being incarcerated for an additional five years, he was not permitted to publicly humiliate his father. Word would get out, and the media would have a field day with the scandalous news.

A few hours went by, and Rav Zilberstein received another request from the defendant. He cited the Talmud Yerushalmi, which rationalizes Kibbud Av v'Eim as part of one's obligation to be makir tov, to acknowledge the benefits and favor one receives and to offer gratitude to his benefactor. Parents raise their children and provide them with sustenance, an education and love. Does this apply, however, to a parent who has clearly reneged on his responsibility? Indeed, in his case, it was not hakoras ha'tov, good; rather, it was hakoras ha'ra, acknowledging the evil, that his father wrought against him. Does he still owe him respect under such circumstances?

Rav Zilberstein responded in a number of ways, each answer affirming his earlier p'sak that prohibited him from saying anything negative about his father, regardless of the consequences. Among them was the following explanation. In the Talmud Kiddushin 31a, Chazal relate the story of Dama ben Nesina, a gentile in Ashkelon, who possessed jewels which were a perfect match for what was needed for the Eiphod, vestment worn by the Kohen Gadol. The Chachamim, Sages of Yerushalayim, came to Dama requesting to purchase the jewels. They were prepared to offer an exorbitant amount of money to procure these jewels. Alas, the key to Dama's safe deposit box was beneath the pillow upon which his father was sleeping. He was not prepared to wake his father, regardless of how much money he risked losing. The sages left reluctantly to search for another source for these jewels.

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One year later, Dama ben Nesina was rewarded for the respect he accorded his father, with the birth of a Parah Adumah, Red Heifer, in his herd of cattle. Indeed, Dama understood that this was a reward, for the time when the sages approached him to purchase the jewels. He said, "I know that if I would charge you an exorbitant price, you would agree to pay it. All I ask is the amount of money I lost last year when I had to forego the sale of the jewels out of respect for my father."

The commentators wonder why Hashem rewarded him with a Parah Adumah? Certainly, there must have been other ways to enrich this gentile who was so meticulous in observance of Kibbud Av v'Eim. They explain that Hashem sought to impart to us a critical lesson concerning the mitzvah of honoring one's parents. Just as Parah Adumah is one of those mitzvos that are under the scope of chukim, Divine decrees, mitzvos that seemingly have no human rationale; so, too, is Kibbud Av such a mitzvah. While it may seem to have its roots in the middah of hakoras hatov, it does not. We are to observe it for the same reason that we observe Parah Adumah - Divine imperative.

Rav Zilberstein concluded that the man was not permitted to disgrace his father, even if the result would be a reduction in his jail sentence. There is no negotiating with regard to mitzvos.

Yisro heard... all that Hashem did to Moshe and Yisrael, his nation. (18:1)

Yisro heard something special that evoked within him a desire to leave his roots and go forth into the wilderness to join the Jewish nation. Chazal ask, "What did Yisro hear that caused him to come?" This question seems superfluous. After all, the Torah writes that Yisro heard "all that Hashem did for Moshe and Yisrael." Obviously, the focus is not on what he heard, but, rather, on some aspect of what he heard that motivated him to come. It was not only Yisro who heard. All of the nations heard and trembled. They shook in fear and awe, but they still did not leave their homes to join the Jews. They heard, but they did not respond. Yisro heard and came. Apparently, it is not what one hears - it is how one hears. According to Rabbi Eliezer HaModai in the Talmud Zevachim 116a, Yisro came shortly after Matan Torah, the Giving of the Torah. We are taught that when Hashem gave Klal Yisrael the Torah, all of the nations of the world heard the powerful reverberation of Hashem's voice. It inspired great fear in their hearts. They all assembled at the home of the wisest pagan, Bilaam ha'rasha, the wicked. "What is this awesome sound that we hear? Is it possible that G-d is bringing another cataclysmic flood to the world?" they wondered. "No. G-d swore that He would never again destroy the world through a flood," Bilaam replied.

"Perhaps He meant that He would never again bring a deluge of water, but He would send a mabul, flood, of fire," they countered.

"No," Bilaam said, "He said that He would never again wipe out the world."

"If so, what is this loud sound that we hear?" they asked.

"G-d has a very special jewel in His Heavenly treasury that He is giving to His children. He is giving them His Torah." This revelation allayed their fears of any impending doom. Let us turn to analyze the dialogue that transpired between the pagan nations and Bilaam. They sought his counsel out of fear. Thinking that the world was coming to an end, they sought an explanation for the thunderous noise they heard. Was it a catastrophe, a flood of water, a flood of fire, a cataclysmic event that would signal an end to the world?

Bilaam calmed them down, "Do not worry. It is only Hashem giving His Torah to His People." The Torah, with its eternal verities, was about to be given to the eternal nation. The Shechinah would descend to This World, and the Creator would inform His People about their function and purpose on this earth and how they can achieve a portion in the World to Come. That is it!

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In relating this conversation, Horav Chaim Friedlander, zl, is filled with amazement at the utter foolishness and simplemindedness of these people. They had heard the noise. They understood that something unprecedented and awe-inspiring was occurring. When they heard that it was "only" Hashem descending to the world with the Torah, and that it would be given to Klal Yisrael, they no longer were in a frenzy. So what if Hashem was descending! So what if Hashem was giving the Torah! This had nothing to do with them. As long as there was to be no flood, they could care less what Hashem was doing with His Torah. They were prepared to return to their collective homes with the message - "false alarm, no catastrophe. It is only the Torah being given to the Jews. There is nothing for us to worry about."

This demonstrates how obtuse they really were. The Borei olam, Creator of the world, was revealing Himself and indicating what it is that He wants of His subjects - and this was nothing in their eyes. How utterly dense and irresponsible they were, because all they cared about was the assurance that there would be no catastrophe. In contrast, the thought of something positive - something edifying - taking place was not their concern.

When a catastrophe occurs, however, it will be too late for them. They did not bother listening to Hashem when He informed Klal Yisrael what it is that He expects from His creations, what it is that would prevent a catastrophe from occurring. They were too wrapped up in themselves. One person from among them did listen: Yisro. He understood the connection. He saw the pattern. He listened, and he responded accordingly.

*Moshe told his father-in-law everything that Hashem had done to
Pharaoh and Egypt for Yisrael's sake. (18:8)*

It seems somewhat superfluous for Moshe Rabbeinu to reiterate everything that Hashem had done for Klal Yisrael. After all, Yisro's prior awareness of these miracles had motivated him to leave the comfort of his home to join Moshe and the Jewish nation in the wilderness. Simply, we may say that Moshe was only relating the details of this experience. The Brisker Rav, zl, takes an alternative approach, positing that, exclusive of the obligation to praise and thank Hashem for his being spared from a traumatic experience, one also must relate Hashem's miracles and kindness to others. Thus, there is a chiyuv, obligation, of hodaah, gratitude, and sipur, relating this story.

The Brisker Rav supports this thesis with a number of pesukim in Sefer Tehillim in which David Hamelech invokes us to "speak of His wonders" (Tehillim 105:2). "Let them acknowledge to Hashem His kindness, and to the children of men His wonders" (Ibid 107:8). Moreover, in Tehillim 79:13, it is stated implicitly, "As for us, Your nation and the sheep of Your pasture, we shall thank you forever; for generation after generation, we shall relate Your praise."

Therefore, while there were many miracles and wonders for which Klal Yisrael were beholden to Hashem, the opportunity to relate these miracles to an outsider who had not experienced them had not arisen until now. With Yisro's arrival, Moshe now had the opportunity to fulfill the second component of the obligation: relating the miracles.

The Brisker Rav adds a third obligation: the chiyuv, obligation, to bless Hashem. This is a function that is exclusive of the obligation to offer gratitude. Indeed, one must bless Hashem even if his experience has been a negative one. As Chazal teach us, "As one must bless for something good, so

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too, must one bless when a bad occurrence has taken place."

It once happened on Shabbos following the sheva berachos of one of his sons, that before Minchah when everyone gathered in his apartment, the Brisker Rav noticed that his son was not there. He immediately sent someone to his apartment to call him. When knocking seemed to be of no avail, the man decided to break down the door. As soon as he entered the apartment, he was overwhelmed with an odor of gas. Apparently, there was a gas leak, and the young couple had fallen into a deep sleep as a result of the gas. The windows were opened and the couple was taken to the hospital. It took awhile, but they were revived. The doctor said that had it been just a little bit longer, they would have succumbed to the gas. That Shabbos, the Brisker Rav went around relating the story of his children's miraculous rescue to everyone that he met. He said that Moshe Rabbeinu had demonstrated this trait when he related Hashem's miracles to Yisro.

So shall you say to the House of Yaakov and relate to Bnei Yisrael. (19:3)

The message that was to be given was, "You shall be for Me a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation" (Shemos 19:6). Rashi tells us that the term Bais Yaakov, House of Yaakov, refers to the women, and Bnei Yisrael refers to the men. The Chasam Sofer offers a compelling interpretation of this pasuk: "So shall you say to the [women] House of Yaakov" (What should you say to them?) Tell them that they are to "relate to Bnei Yisrael." They should tell their husbands and their sons, "You shall be a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation."

In other words, Hashem is telling Moshe Rabbeinu that it is the women who are to motivate, inspire and encourage their husbands and sons to study Torah. The husband may be the "head" of the house, but the wife is viewed as the neck. The neck supports the head, and it determines which way the head will turn. A wife who takes her responsibility seriously determines the future of her family.

Chazal state this clearly when they ask, "In what merit do women receive Olam Habbah?" They respond that it is in the merit of encouraging their husbands and sons to study Torah. Olam Habbah is not an easy thing to acquire. It is an awesome privilege to which a woman can gain access by making sure that the men in her life apply themselves to Torah. This can occur only when a woman realizes the infinite value of Torah. When the wife and mother appreciates and values Torah, she will see to it that her husband maintains a strong focus on Torah study.

*You have seen what I did to Egypt... You shall be to Me a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation.
(19:4,6)*

Often, we become so involved in our daily endeavor that we lose sight of our true purpose in life. The Mesillas Yesharim commences his magnum opus with the words, "The foundation of piety - the root of perfect service - is that man should have a clear and truthful concept of his goal and purpose in life." Man must recognize and never lose sight of his purpose and responsibility in life. He was not created and placed in this world for no apparent reason. What is our purpose? What does Hashem expect of us?

Even before Hashem gave us the Torah, He prefaced it with an "introduction": "You have seen what I did to Egypt." It was done by design and for a purpose. We are to listen to His words and be His

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treasure from among the nations of the world. As Hashem says it so clearly, "You shall be a mamleches Kohanim, kingdom of Priests, and a goi kadosh, holy nation."

While everyone hears this, not everyone understands that it is a demand conveyed uniquely to each individual Jew. In his Aderes Eliyahu commentary to Devarim 29:18, the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna writes that every time the Torah speaks in lashon rabim, the plural, it speaks to each individual. When the Torah speaks in lashon yachid, the singular, it is speaking to the community as a single unit. Thus, the use of the word atem, you, in the plural, is a term used to speak to each individual Jew. Hashem is speaking directly to each and every one of us: "I expect something of you!"

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, explains that this is the foreword to Judaism: Hashem speaks to each individual - not only as a collective member of the Klal Yisrael - but as an individual. It is a personal relationship with the Almighty in which a covenant is made between the two. Hashem says, "Look what I did for you. The entire Egypt was afflicted with the plagues that I sent against them. But you were spared. Why? Because I went beyond the natural order, because I cared for you. The Egyptians hurt you, and I punished them in an unprecedented manner. "

Hashem's extraordinary action on behalf of the Jews is a clear indication of His overwhelming love for them. Compare this to a case in which someone sees a bully attacking his only child. He certainly goes out of his way to punish this bully. If it had been someone else's child, however, he might rescue the child, but the punishment would not be as severe. Rav Shimshon gives the following analogy to demonstrate how Hashem cares for each one of us. Imagine that a man has ten children. One is unfortunately ill, and the father spends every spare minute caring for him and seeing to his every need. If someone were to ask the father, "Why are you so devoted to this one child? After all, you have nine others," the reply would be; "This is not simply 'another' child. This is my Shloimele, and I have only one Shloimele."

Now, let us take this analogy one step further. The father comes to visit Shloimele's yeshivah one day. "Have you seen my Shloimele?" he asks one of the students. "He is probably at the pizza shop," is the quick reply.

"What could he be doing at the pizza shop at 11:00 in the morning?" the father asks, somewhat agitated.

"He was probably hungry," answered the student. "What is the difference? There are still another one hundred bachurim, students, studying in the bais hamedrash."

We understand that this reply is meaningless to the father. He is concerned with his son. Where is he? He is not impressed with the one hundred students that are studying Torah. His Shloimele is not there, and that is what is uppermost on his mind. Likewise, Hashem comes to the bais hamedrash in the morning during Shacharis and sees that His Shloimele is not in attendance. He goes to the bais hamedrash a few hours later, and He sees that His Davidel is not studying there. Neither is His Berel. The fact that there are hundreds of others does not change the fact that His son - a reference to each and every Jew - is not there.

The first word in establishing our relationship with Hashem is - Atem - you. He speaks to us individually. What an incredible privilege! What an awesome responsibility!

And they stood at the bottom of the mountain. (19:17)

In the Talmud Shabbos 88a, Chazal relate that Hashem raised Har Sinai over their heads like an upturned vat (which enveloped them completely from all sides) and told them, "If you will accept the

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Torah - good - and if not, there will be your graves." Klal Yisrael immediately responded with the famous words of Naase v'Nishma, "We will do, and we will listen." One naturally wonders why Hashem found it necessary to compel Klal Yisrael to accept the Torah. Could there not have been a "gentler" way of presenting the Torah?

In his Gur Aryeh commentary, the Maharal m'Prague explains that Hashem presented the Torah to us in this manner to teach us that the Torah is compulsory and that we must accept it or else we cannot exist. Therefore, Hashem surrounded us completely, like an upturned vat. There was no escape, nowhere to run. This conveyed to us the de rigueur nature of the Torah. As Rav Saadya Gaon writes, "Our nation is not a nation without the Torah." The Torah is not just simply a way of life for us - it is life.

Horav Simchah Wasserman, zl, explains Chazal's comparison of Torah to water in this manner. When we think about it, a human being is almost totally comprised of water. If he were to become dehydrated, he would take ill and eventually die. Water is not just something that he needs to live - water is life! He is made up of water. Likewise, the Torah comprises the essence of a Jew. Without the Torah, he becomes spiritually dehydrated.

Rav Simchah would often cite the Rambam in his Igeres Teiman, where he emphasizes this point. To explain this idea, he would compare man to a robot. A person who does not possess Torah may give the appearance of being alive, but, actually, what we are seeing is nothing more than a robot. A foolish person might not be able to distinguish between the living, breathing person and the robot, who goes through the external motions of appearing alive. The wise man is acutely aware of the distinction between who lives and who appears to be alive. These words may come across as being uncompromising, but, then there is no alternative to life.

Honor your father and your mother. (20:12)

Honoring parents is one of the underpinnings of our belief. It maintains the tradition which is based on the transmission of Torah from generation to generation. Furthermore, it is one of those mitzvos that train us to develop a sense of appreciation and gratitude to those who benefit us. There is a deeper significance to the mitzvah of honoring one's parents: Attitude. It is not what we do for them; it is how we do it. The attitude which we manifest when we honor our parents determines the essence of the mitzvah. Chazal teach us that it is not what we feed our parents; rather it is the manner in which we speak to them when we feed them. Do we make it appear as a bother, a pain that we have to sustain, or do we act with gladness of heart, excited to be repaying our parents for all that they did for us?

Horav Meir Chadash, zl, explains that the most important aspect of Kibbud Av v'Eim is establishing and maintaining their independence. When we say, "How can I help you?" we are intimating that they need help, and we are there to assist them. We forget that parents are givers. They have given to us relentlessly throughout their productive lives. Now, perhaps when they are older, they no longer have the capacity for giving that they once did. By offering them assistance, we are bringing this message home to them: You cannot do it anymore. You need our help. This message, while it is not meant to hurt, nonetheless, does hurt. We should rather say, "Come, let us do it together." Always make every effort to sustain that feeling of "giving," which parents are so accustomed to feeling. We are to honor our father and mother, but first we must make them feel like a father or mother, not like a burden.

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Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law, and he prostrated himself and kissed him, and each inquired about the welfare of his friend." (18:7)

Rashi, citing Chazal, makes it clear that it was Moshe Rabbeinu who bowed down to Yisro. Chazal substantiate this from the Torah's use of the word ish, man, as it says (literally translated) "and the man inquired about his friend." The only person referred to by the Torah as ish is Moshe, as it says in Bamidbar 12:3, "And the man Moshe." The Mechilta adds that not only did Moshe bow down to Yisro, he was also the one who kissed him. What is the significance of this kiss, and the fact that it was Moshe who did the kissing?

Initially, it was Yisro who asked Moshe to come out and greet him. Indeed, as Chazal see it, Yisro wanted Moshe, followed by the elders and all of Klal Yisrael, to come greet him. How does this all fit in - the kiss and Moshe, followed by his entourage, all coming to greet Yisro? Is this really what Yisro wanted, some form of blatant honor?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that Yisro's request of Moshe was certainly not for any honor. Instead, it was Yisro's request that Moshe lower himself sufficiently so that Yisro would be able to connect with him. Moshe lived on a level far above that of any other person; his essence was unknowable, and his deeds, qualities and virtues were concealed from humanity. Yisro felt incapable of relating to Moshe and, thus, unable to draw near to him spiritually. Could Moshe please lower himself for a while, long enough for Yisro to cleave to Moshe and be elevated with him when he would return to his usual level? Yisro's request that Moshe come out to meet him was metaphorical. He sought to meet him on his own spiritual level. Moshe obliged and came out to greet him. This indicated Moshe's lowering himself to facilitate, and bow down to, Yisro's request.

In addition to the prostration, Moshe Rabbeinu immediately followed with a kiss, an act which denotes a very close meeting of the parties concerned, at a spiritual, as well as a physical level. After Yisro and Moshe met and Moshe bowed to Yisro, they could now join on an equal plane. This was expressed by a kiss. Notably, it was Moshe who kissed Yisro, indicating that he drew his father-in-law close to him and elevated him to his exalted level.

Another example of this phenomenon may be found in the beginning of Sefer Rus, when Naomi instructed her daughters-in-law Rus and Orpah to return to their homes. Naomi blessed and kissed them. Once again, Naomi's kiss was, in effect, a way of bonding with them in a very profound manner, similar to Moshe and Yisro. She hoped that through her kiss she would draw Rus and Orpah to her, allowing her holy spirit to connect with their souls, elevating them spiritually. As we know, the reactions of the two women were different. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Rus clung to her. Basically, Orpah returned the kiss - thanks, but no thanks, the reactions of a spiritually flawed person who gravitated back to her old haunts. She did not want to be spiritually elevated by Naomi, so she kissed her and rejected her positive influence. Rus, on the other hand, was moved by Naomi's spirit and drawn to her.

With this principle in mind we can now better understand the ensuing Torah's description of the encounter between Moshe and Yisro. When Moshe kissed Yisro, Yisro immediately gravitated towards Moshe's elevated spirituality. Directly following their encounter, we note that each man "inquired after the welfare of his friend." The word rei'eihu, which means his friend, is a term to describe an individual who is rei'eihu b'mitzvos, one who is his friend in mitzvos, or, a Jew. How could this word be applied to Yisro, who, at that time, had still not converted? How could he be referred to as rei'eihu? This teaches us that Yisro's connection with Moshe was so exalted, that it elevated him to the level of

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rei'eihu, even though he had not yet formally converted to Judaism.

A similar phenomenon occurred with Rus, who, once she declared her intention to remain with Naomi, was considered her equal. Even prior to Rus' conversion, the kiss that Naomi bestowed on her elevated her spiritual standing so that they were considered as equals.

In Shir Hashirim Rabbah, Chazal analogize the words that Hashem spoke to Klal Yisrael at Har Sinai, to parallel kisses. Moshe's ability to receive the Torah directly from Hashem is questioned by Chazal in the Talmud Yevamos 105b. Ostensibly, it is reasonable to assume that the average Jew was less equipped for this experience. So, how did they do it? How were they able to accept the Torah directly from Hashem? We can now appreciate why the words of Hashem are compared to kisses - for, by "kissing" Klal Yisrael, Hashem elevated them to such an exalted position that they were now able, albeit temporarily, to receive the Holy Torah.

By extension, we derive from here the powerful experience and the incredible benefit to be derived from bonding with a tzaddik. Any opportunity that is availed to us to come in contact with an individual of exalted spirituality, we should grab. It could change our lives.

And they stood at the foot of the mountain. (19:17)

The legacy of Maamad Har Sinai, the Revelation at Sinai, is an event unparalleled in the history of mankind. This was an unprecedented cosmic event in which Hashem, in His infinite glory, revealed Himself to Klal Yisrael as He gave them His most precious gift. Since this event is of such prime importance to us as a nation, and to the world in general, Chazal attempt to recapture the feelings of our ancestors as they stood there in awe, prepared to accept the Torah.

Clearly, most of the sources depict Klal Yisrael favorably, as being willing to accept the Torah of their own free-will. They responded with a resounding Na'ase v'nishma, "We will do, and we will listen" (Shemos 24:7). In this parshah, however, there seems to be a bit of negative connotation alluded to by Chazal in regards to their acceptance.

"And they stood at the foot of the mountain," Chazal say this teaches us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, held the mountain over them as a cask, and said to them, "If you accept the Torah, fine, and if not, there will be your burial." The above statement does not come across as being very positive. In fact, it sounds as if Klal Yisrael were compelled to accept the Torah. How are we to reconcile the opposing statements of Chazal? Did they realize at the last minute what accepting the Torah really means? Were they concerned with the implication of being Jewish and the consequences of being the Chosen People and its ensuing responsibilities; or, perhaps, they rose to the occasion and exhibited their extraordinary character and greatness which was so quickly achieved because of their close proximity to Hashem? Was their "Naase v'nishma" real?

Moreover, upon perusing the words of Chazal we note an incongruity. Why does Hashem say to them, "there will be your burial!" If the mountain is being held above their heads, would it not have been more appropriate to say "here will be your burial?" Where is the "there"?

Horav Aharon Soloveitchik, zl, cites a Midrash in Shir Hashirim that sheds light on the anomalies surrounding the acceptance of the Torah. Chazal teach us that, prior to giving us the Torah, Hashem asked for guarantees that the Torah would be observed and that it would be the benchmark of our national existence. They first offered the Avos, Patriarchs, and then the Neviim, Prophets, as

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guarantors on their behalf. Hashem rejected both proposals. It was only after they said, "Our children will be our sureties", that He accepted their offer. Continuity was the key word that Hashem was waiting to hear. A commitment that future generations will uphold the Torah was needed. The Torah was too precious, too dear, to be given to only one generation. It had to be a legacy to be transmitted throughout the millennia, to every generation of Jews.

We now return to the paradoxical comments of Chazal. Veritably, Chazal's statements are congruous, because they refer to two disparate circumstances. Indeed, Klal Yisrael willingly accepted the Torah with a resounding Naase' v'nishma. Those who stood at the foot of Har Sinai needed no coercion. Their proximity to the Almighty motivated them so, that they felt adapted to the principles of the Torah to the point that they accepted it eagerly and enthusiastically. This was in regard to the ones who stood at Revelation. They felt, however, that they could not speak for the millions of unborn Jews, the future generations who did not have the privilege of standing at the foot of the mountain and experiencing the incredible Revelation. How could they, the people who experienced the miracles of Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea, pledge that future generations who did not share in these experiences and who would be confronted with yet stronger temptations, would keep Hashem's dictates? This is when Hashem, so to speak, coerced Klal Yisrael. He forced the Jewish People standing at Sinai to commit that the future generations would also be devoted to upholding the Torah.

We now understand the underlying meaning of Chazal's usage of the phrase "there will be your burial." It is indeed a most accurate and suitable term, for Hashem was alluding that whenever and wherever Jewish People throughout the millennia would reject the Torah's teachings, there they would meet their tragic end as Jews.

How true is this statement. It is only the Torah that has sustained us throughout the generations. Those Jews who have acculturated and assimilated have done so because they lacked a bond to their past, a link in the chain that stretches back to Har Sinai. I recently attended a wedding where the chosson was the only member of his family to have seen the light and returned to his heritage. After the wedding, which had traditional lebedikeit, liveliness and festive joy that only a simchah shel mitzvah, Torah-oriented occasion, has, the chosson's brother, who was intermarried, asked his parents, "Why did you not provide me the opportunity to experience the vibrancy of Judaism? I never knew that such a life, or such people, ever existed! Is it any wonder that I turned to something else?"

This tragedy regrettably repeats itself constantly, and, truthfully, I am not convinced that the parents who were themselves probably innocent bystanders did not know any better. The ones that should be blamed are the "spiritual" leadership, who, for personal gain and power, mislead the unknowing and unassuming. If our acculturated brethren would be provided with meaningful opportunities for experiencing Torah Judaism, quite possibly they would not turn to the shallow and insipid way of life they lead. It is easy to lay blame. The question that should challenge us is: what are we going to do about it?

Honor your father and your mother. (20:12)

Kibud Av v'Eim, honoring parents, is an all-important mitzvah, one that many people accept as a code of humanity. Parents raise us and we reciprocate with respect. The Torah's concept goes much deeper. We respect our parents because Hashem commands us to do so. They are shutfim, partners, with Hashem in our creation. We thus owe them respect. I would like to divert from the usual and focus

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on another form of respect, one which I feel is lacking in our society: respect for children. We are all busy. Whether it is a wedding, Bar-Mitzvah, or organizational function; a chavrusa, shiur, or lecture, we make time for every mitzvah and chesed, but what about our children? If we do not find the time for them - they will find someone else who will, and I am quite certain that the alternative will not be acceptable. Our children are craving for one thing: us.

This idea is poignantly demonstrated by Rabbi Pesach Krohn in Echos of the Maggid. It is a story about a troubled young woman who had been seeing a prominent psychologist for help with her personal problems. After a number of sessions, the therapist noticed a pattern: She hardly ever spoke about her parents. This was unusual. One day, when the woman made an indirect comment about her father, the doctor grabbed the opportunity, and commented, "You know, you have not said much about your father in our discussions."

The woman lowered her head to the floor and was silent. After a few moments, she began to cry softly. The doctor waited as she slowly composed herself and began to speak. "I just remembered a painful incident that occurred in my youth. It happened many years ago when I was a child. We were sitting at the Pesach Seder table and I had taken the Afikoman. My father was fully aware that I had it, and after the meal he turned to me and asked, "What do you want in return for the Afikoman?"

The young woman waited a moment as she gathered up her resolve to continue. "I remember looking straight into my father's eyes and responding, "I want a conversation with you."

This is what our children crave, parents with whom they can talk, parents who will listen, parents who will empathize. The toys, gifts and trips with which some of us try to bribe our children, are meaningless. All they really want is our attention, and recognition.

There is one more thing that I may add. As Torah Jews we seek every opportunity to study Torah, attend a shiur, pair up with a chavrusa, but do we also find the time to learn with our children? Indeed, there are many programs that provide the opportunity for once a week learning, but is this sufficient? Our children need us. It is an investment that will ultimately pay out in dividends that are inestimable.

And when you will make an Altar of stones for Me, do not build them hewn, for you will have raised your sword over it and desecrated it. (20:22)

Rashi quotes Chazal's statement regarding the word im, if. Every example of the word im in the Torah is a reference to an optional endeavor, except for three times when the word means, "when". One of those instances is the above pasuk. In other words, when the pasuk says, "And if you will make an Altar of stones," it actually means, when you will make an Altar of stones, for indeed, it is incumbent upon us to erect an altar of stones. The question is clear: if the Torah meant "when", why did it use a word that implies "if"? Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, responds with a practical explanation based upon the nature of the Altar to which the Torah is referring.

When one erects an altar, it may not be made of one stone. Rather, it must be composed of many stones. An altar composed of one stone is a monolith, something that Hashem dislikes. Rav Moshe explains the reason for this distinction. A monolith is an edifice that is complete; it is finite and nothing can be added to it. It represents static existence, a life of no spiritual growth whatsoever. This type of existence goes against everything Hashem desires for us. He demands that we constantly grow and

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achieve greater heights in our spiritual ascension. This concept is represented by the altar of many stones. Such an altar can always have stones added to it, making it larger.

It is in reference to this idea that the Torah uses the word *im*. Growth is not something that can be engendered through the use of positive or negative precepts. Rather, it is a lesson that must be comprehended and digested by the person so that he seeks spiritual growth on a daily basis, both in his knowledge and understanding of Torah, as well as the quality and quantity of his *maasim tovim*, good deeds. This is alluded to by the double meaning of the word *im*. For while one will certainly erect an altar to Hashem, but will he heed the lesson of the Altar of stones? This lesson is in the hand of the individual.

The *pasuk* continues with the prohibition against using hewn stones for the Altar. Chazal explain the rationale behind this law. The Altar is there to lengthen and strengthen the life of a person; the steel blade, which cuts the stone, was created to shorten life. Hence, it is inappropriate to use an object whose function is to cut, to shorten life, over something whose primary goal is to lengthen life.

This law, however, never applied to a monolith. Indeed, prior to giving of the Torah, this type of altar was permissible and the use of a steel blade in its preparation was also allowed. The reason for this is simple: the Altar of many stones with its lesson of continual growth, has the capacity for prolonging life. The monolith's lesson of static growth is deadly. Status quo is a danger for a Jew. The lesson conveyed by the altar concept is incongruous with the lesson derived from the monolith. Why should Hashem prolong the life of he who is not using his G-d-given gift of life for the purpose that it was given: to grow spiritually?

And Yisro heard all that Hashem did to Moshe and to Yisrael, his people. (18:1)

Yisro was not the only one who heard about the miracles which Hashem wrought for His people. All the nations of the world heard. Yet, the Torah writes that only Yisro heard. Was his ability to hear different from that of the others? The commentators explain that everyone heard, but only Yisro applied what he heard.

To paraphrase Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, "Yisro did not simply hear; rather, he *derhered*, a Yiddish expression which denotes a specific quality of listening. We suggest another idea. More often than not, we attend a lecture, an ethical discourse, and are impressed with the message that has been expounded. We listened - we heard - we even accepted the idea, but, as far as we are concerned, it is a great idea - for someone else! It has nothing to do with us. There is no personal message. Yisro heard and understood the personal aspect of the miracles which Hashem had wrought.

And Yisro heard all that Hashem did to Moshe and to Yisrael, his people. (18:1)

Rashi explains that Yisro heard two reports that had such a great effect on him that he left the comfort of his home and sought out Klal Yisrael in the wilderness. He heard about Krias Yam Suf, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the war with Amalek. The Torah seems to imply that in addition to impacting Yisro, these miracles are also interrelated with one another. We must endeavor to understand their significance, as well as their relationship.

In his *sefer Simchas HaTorah*, Horav Simcha Hakohen Shepps, zl, explains that with their

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victory over Amalek, Klal Yisrael's incredible power was revealed to the world. The question now arises: If Klal Yisrael was so powerful, why did they not simply battle the Egyptians also? Why was it necessary to split the Red Sea? They could have emerged triumphant from Egypt - not driven out as slaves.

Apparently, the Jews could not wage war with the Egyptians because they still maintained a spark of hakoras hatov, gratitude, to them for opening up their country to them many years earlier when Yosef was viceroy. Egypt had been their home away from home for many years. By right, they could not battle with them, because war is the antithesis of hakoras hatov. This is what inspired Yisro: the war with Amalek and the splitting of the Red Sea. The fact that they could vanquish Amalek, but they would not fight the Egyptians, precipitating the need for Krias Yam Suf, demonstrated the extraordinary character of this nation. This nation represented the ideal, a people whose character should serve as the exemplar of what a human being should strive to be. They were the people whom Yisro understood he should join.

And you shall make known to them the path in which they should go. (18:20)

In the Talmud Bava Metzia 30b, Chazal interpret the words, "the path," as a reference to performing acts of loving-kindness. In his Shaarei Teshuvah 3:13, Rabbeinu Yonah asserts that tzedakah, charity, is performed with one's money, while gemillus chasadim, acts of loving-kindness, are performed both with one's possessions and with one's body. A person should see to it that he provides assistance to his fellow man, regardless of his own personal financial standing. A smile, a nice word, a personal visit, serve this objective; it is not the monumental deeds that make the difference. Simple acts of caring can change a person's life. Chesed begins when we take notice of those around us in order to respond to their needs.

I recently read about a project initiated by a professor in clinical psychology. He encouraged his students to get involved in helping people. They asked, "What is there to do?" That is a typical question of those who are looking for a way to avoid responding to the needs of others. The professor took one of his students, whom we will call Joe, and brought him to a senior citizens center, so that he could do something for others. The following is what happened as a result of Joe's visit.

When Joe first came to the home, he noticed that there were a large number of elderly patients just lying around in bed wearing their old cotton gowns, doing nothing but staring up at the ceiling. These people were acting like they had become victims of senility, but this was not the case. Senility is not necessarily a natural consequence of old age. It often occurs when people do not feel loved or useful.

At first, Joe did not know what to do. Indeed, this was the first time he had been in such a home. The professor suggested that he approach a certain elderly woman and begin a conversation with her. Joe went over to the patient, and they began to talk. It was more of a monologue than a dialogue. Nobody had listened to the woman for so long that she had a lot to share. She talked about her life, the ups and downs, the successes and failures, the happy times and the sad ones. She even spoke about her impending death. She had made peace with the fact that she would not live forever. She had so much to say, but no one had cared to listen!

Joe was thoroughly moved by the experience. Therefore, he returned the following week. Soon he began to spend the day visiting many of the patients. It became known as Joe's Day. He would come

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to the home, and all the patients would gather to speak and even to listen. Someone cared.

No longer did they sit around in their worn-out gowns, staring at the ceiling or at the clock on the wall. Some asked their children to bring them new clothes. They had their hair done; they wanted to look nice, because someone finally cared. Joe realized that kindness can be expressed through the little things we do. Look around, and you will find a lonely person who needs company, a hassled worker whom no one remembers to thank, a young student whose parents have seemingly forgotten about in the maelstrom of life, a spouse who needs a smile, a child who needs an encouraging word. It is the little things that we do - or do not do - that make the difference. That is what chesed is all about.

One more story: Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, was a giant in Torah scholarship. He was also a giant in chesed. He did not merely delegate others to perform acts of chesed; even at his advanced age, he personally went out of his way to help those in need. He exhibited a sense of caring for others that was unparalleled. An observant psychologist who lives in Yerushalayim related the following story. When he walked into shul on Erev Pesach, he was greeted by a number of mispallelim, worshippers, "You must have done something special to have merited a visit from Rav Shach."

"Who? What are you talking about?" he asked them.

"Rav Shach was walking around your courtyard last night for about an hour," they said.

"Impossible. You must be mistaken. Why would Rav Shach visit my courtyard?" the psychologist asked incredulously.

After awhile, it became clear to the psychologist that, indeed, Rav Shach had been at his house. He now became chagrined, exclaiming, "Woe is me. It is my fault. I told the Rosh Hayeshivah not to come up to the house. It is because of me that the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of our generation, waited outside for an hour."

The worshippers looked at him, without a clue as to what he was talking about. The psychologist was miserable. On Chol Hamoed, one of the Intermediate Days of Pesach, he traveled to Bnei Brak to ask mechilah, beg forgiveness, from Rav Shach. The Rosh Hayeshivah joyfully welcomed him to his home, saying, "I should ask you for mechilah!"

Afterwards, Rav Shach explained what had occurred and what had precipitated his trip to Yerushalayim. On the night before Pesach, when everyone was occupied with Bedikas Chametz, searching their homes for chametz, a bachur, young man, came to speak to Rav Shach. The Rosh Hayeshivah perceived that something was clearly wrong emotionally with this bachur. He then telephoned the psychologist to ask if he would spend some time speaking with the young man. The psychologist was prepared to travel to Bnei Brak if that was what Rav Shach desired. Rav Shach told him that he would send the bachur over to him. Little did the psychologist know that Rav Shach, feeling that the bachur should not travel alone, would go along and wait outside for the duration of the visit.

Upon being asked why he did not send someone else with the bachur, Rav Shach responded, "I am an old man and, thus, have very little to do to prepare for the Yom Tov of Pesach. Why should I bother someone else who is busy? Furthermore, I had the opportunity to take a stroll and partake of the refreshing air of Yerushalayim while I thought of divrei Torah. What greater pleasure is there?" This story speaks for itself.

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So shall you say to the house of Yaakov and relate to Bnei Yisrael. (19:3)

When was the last time someone got up and attributed his success in Torah study to his mother? It is certainly not a common scenario. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, is quoted as saying, "It is well worth it to work a lifetime, establishing seminaries for thousands of young women, in order that the result will be one good mother!" He substantiated this when he added, "Look at what one mother accomplished! Rashi's mother raised a son that illuminated the world. What would the Torah have been without Rashi? No Rashi on Chumash - no Rashi on Navi - no Rashi on Talmud. Torah would never have been the same. All because of one mother."

Each in his own manner, the commentators, explain why Moshe Rabbeinu was instructed to convey the Torah first to Bais Yaakov, the women, and then to Bnei Yisrael, the men. The Midrash attributes it to the women's alacrity in mitzvah performance. Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer explains that men usually accede to their wife's advice. The Moshav Zekeinim al HaTorah from the Baalei Tosfos cites Rabbeinu Moshe M'Narvona, zl, who says that it was in Leah Imeinu's merit. She had a tablet made of gold, upon which was engraved the words, "Torah tzivah lanu Moshe," the Torah was commanded by Moshe. She would gaze at this tablet all day to the point that her eyes became tender as a result of the reflection from the gold. Therefore, her descendants/daughters, merited to hear the Torah first.

Rabbeinu Bachya asserts that women preceded men in hearing the Torah because the success of a man's Torah study is based upon the women in his life. A mother sets the tone for a child's attitude toward Torah study. She inculcates a love for Torah in her child, a love that will continue to endure as he develops and matures. The koach ha'chinuch, power of education, that rests upon the mother is compelling. When the Chafetz Chaim, zl, would hold his mother's old, tattered Sefer Tehillim in his hands, he would become very emotional and say, "Do you have any idea how many tears my mother shed over this Tehillim, as she entreated Hashem to grant her that her son should be a Yehudi kasheir, proper Jew?"

The Chafetz Chaim's daughter once related the following story concerning her grandmother. She said, "My grandmother was not a miracle worker. I do remember that at the end of her life, after her son, my father, had become renown throughout the Torah world as the saintly Chafetz Chaim, a number of close friends approached her with the obvious question: How did you merit to have a son that illuminated the eyes of the world? What was your recipe for success?"

She replied that she could not remember anything that she had done that would have catalyzed such success. After they pestered her some more, she added that there was one small thing that came to mind. Prior to her wedding, her mother had asked to speak to her. These were her words: "My daughter, listen to what I have to say. We are commanded to raise our sons to study Torah and have yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. Therefore, I ask of you that every free moment that you have, take your Siddur in hand and pray to Hashem that you merit to raise your children to be G-d-fearing and observant Jews who will devote themselves to Torah study. Do not forget to shed tears when you pray." She gave her daughter a Siddur in which Sefer Tehillim was included.

The Chafetz Chaim's mother continued, "That is all I did. Whenever I had a free moment, I would take out the Siddur and recite Tehillim, crying out my heart to Hashem that my Yisrael'ke would develop into a talmud chacham, Torah scholar, and a yarei Shomayim."

Upon relating this story, Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl, would add, "Rashi's rebbe was Rabbeinu Gershom Me'or Ha'boleh. He was greater than Rashi. Yet, Rashi merited to become the Rabbon Shel

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Kol Yisrael, quintessential Torah teacher of the Jewish people. Why? Because of his mother, the tzadekes, who was the sister of Rabbeinu Shimon Hazekein m'Magence and because of his saintly father."

It is related that Rashi's father possessed a valuable, precious stone that the priests needed for their idol. He, of course, was not about to grant them access to this stone. They surreptitiously convinced him to travel with them on a boat, with the intention of forcibly taking the stone from him. When Rashi's father realized what they were about to do, he threw the stone into the water, thereby forfeiting his own life. In return for this extraordinary act of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, a Bas Kol, Voice from Heaven, came forth to announce that he would merit a son that would illuminate the world.

The Gaon m'Vilna said about Horav Zalman, zl, m'Volozhin, brother of Horav Chaim, zl, m'Volozhin, that he was above the human dimension. He was like a Malach Elokim, a Heavenly angel. This is attributed to his mother who, when she was in labor and about to give birth to him, refrained from expressing any moaning whatsoever, because her husband was studying together with the Shaagas Arye. In her desire not to disturb these two giants of Torah, she contained her expression of pain until the final moment of birth. In this merit, the Shaagas Arye blessed her that her newly born son would be able to vanquish his yetzer hora, evil-inclination, and become similar to a Heavenly angel. This all demonstrates that when parents value Torah education, so do their children.

Children learn to respect what they see respected at home. When they are exposed to a double standard or hypocrisy, they react in kind. In concluding the impact that Jewish mothers have had on their children, we cite the mother of the Rosh Hayeshivah of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin and founder of the Daf Hayomi, folio a day, Horav Meir Shapiro, zl. Rav Meir Shapiro would always relate two thoughts that his mother had shared with him as a young child. These ideas inspired him and, in turn, became the source of inspiration to so many others. His mother would say to him, "Meir'l, my child, see that you study well and learn Torah, because every day that goes by with no Torah learned is something precious lost that can never be retrieved. Who knows what the next day may bring?" She would also emphasize the greatness of Torah when she said, "Work harder and sacrifice more. For such a great and mighty Torah, this is too small a sacrifice."

When a child grows up hearing these two maxims as part of his daily lessons, it is no wonder that he achieved such distinction. Indeed, all of us are beneficiaries of her legacy.

You shall not covet your fellow's wife...nor anything that belongs to your fellow. (20:14)

It seems that if one is not to covet anything that belongs to his friend, "anything" would include his house and his wife, etc. Why does the Torah make a point to emphasize certain possessions and then use the collective "anything" at the end of the pasuk? Horav Shmuel Walkin, zl, makes a practical suggestion. He says that the Torah is advising us how to not fall into the trap of envy and desire for what does not belong to us. When we see that our friend possesses an item of exceptional beauty or value, something for which we envy him, we should think about everything else our friend has. This can be viewed from contrasting positions. On the one hand, our friend might have accumulated much "baggage": problems; challenging situations; major physical or financial losses. These might have catalyzed compensation for him in the form of his beautiful home. Alternatively, we should look at his many achievements, the wonderful acts of chesed that he has performed. The beautiful possessions which he now has might be his remuneration. When we look at our friend's possessions, we should

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view them in the context of "everything" that he has. It might change our mind regarding coveting what belongs to someone else.

And you shall make known to them the path in which they should go. (18:20)

In the Talmud Bava Kama 100 A, Chazal indicate that the word bah, "in which," is a reference to kevurah, burial of the dead. Gedolei Yisrael were extremely meticulous in attending to the needs of the deceased. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, writes about Horav Chaim Sofer, zl, one of the preeminent Torah leaders in Hungary, who made it a point to involve himself with those deceased who either did not have a minyan, quorum, by their bedside when they passed from this world or did not have anyone to recite Kaddish for them.

In the preface to his sefer, Kol Sofer, on Mishnayos, Rav Chaim writes that at first he attempted to join the ranks of those who washed and prepared the body of the deceased for burial, but his delicate nature did not allow him to participate in this task. He then decided to care for the needs of those individuals who had no family, or were incarcerated in government prisons. He arranged to be with them during those last fearful moments when all they request and need is: not to be alone. He also accepted upon himself that, immediately following the brachah Ha'machzir neshamos li'figarim meisim, "He Who returns souls to dead bodies," he would study Mishnayos and recite Kaddish D'Rabbanan for those souls.

Rav Chaim would conclude his study with the following poignant entreaty; "Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of all creatures, Creator of all souls: Gaze down from Heaven and see how I, a simple creature of flesh and blood, have acted compassionately on behalf of the soul of a person whom I neither knew nor sensed his pain. Yet, I cared about him. Hashem, Who is so infinitely great and merciful, take pity upon the holy and pure soul of the deceased which You created and You fashioned. You are well aware of, and understand, the terrible pain which he underwent. Take pity upon him and forgive his sins and indiscretions. In the merit of each letter and word of Mishnayos that I recite and think about, may all of those neshamos for whom I study find eternal repose in Your Presence."

*And you shall discern from among the entire people, men of accomplishment,
G-d fearing people. (18:21)*

Ibn Ezra explains that those who genuinely fear Hashem do not fear people. A judge who is subject to Divine authority is swayed by neither bribery nor threats. He responds to a Higher Authority. This implies that a person's fear of man diminishes commensurate with his increasing fear of Hashem. With this in mind, Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, notes that one who feels that he has achieved yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, should ask himself how much of earthly/human concerns he fears.

Rav Schwadron substantiates Ibn Ezra's thesis with a famous incident from Navi. Yonah Ha'Navi was fleeing Tarshish. While he was on board the ship, Hashem cast a mighty wind across the sea, causing the vessel to become so shaken up that it hung at the precipice of destruction. The sailors became frightened and cried out, each to his own god. They cast the ship's wares overboard to lighten its load. Nonetheless, the ship was about to sink.

During all this time of crises, Yonah had decided to descend to the ship's hold and lay down to

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sleep.

The captain approached him, asking, "How can you sleep at such a dangerous time? Call out to your G-d. Perhaps He will listen." The sailors then cast lots to determine on whose account this calamity was being summoned against them. The lot fell on Yonah.

They turned to Yonah and demanded of him, "Tell us, now: in regard to whom has this calamity befallen us? What is your role? And from where do you come? What is your land, and of what people are you?"

The text of the last question seems a bit incongruous. They did not simply ask him, "Who is your nation?" They asked, "And of what people are you?" They seemed to be focusing more on the characteristics of the nation than on him. They were more concerned with the nation than with him as an individual. Why?

Rav Schwadron explains that Yonah appeared before them as an enigma. The storm was raging; the ship was about to capsize - and Yonah went to sleep. Is this a rational reaction to such a situation? Everybody was beating his chest, crying out to his god, yet Yonah went to bed, as if he did not have a care in the world. Not only did he go to bed - he even was able to fall asleep. Not a care in the world - or so it seemed.

When they saw this sight, a man sleeping during a storm that was threatening the ship, they asked, "From what type of nation do you originate?" That is when Yonah responded, "I fear the G-d of Heaven and earth." In other words, everything originates from Hashem Who rules the Heaven and earth and everything in between. Wherever one is standing it is all the same. There is no reason to fear the ominous threat of the weather, because it is all the same - Heaven and earth. One who fears Hashem has nothing else to fear. Everything else is merely an illusion.

Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it. (20:8)

The Torah introduces the institution of Shabbos in the Fourth Commandment of the Aseres Ha'Dibros, the Ten Commandments. The first three commandments focus on our acceptance of Hashem as supreme Ruler and Creator, forbid us from worshipping other deities, and forbid us from showing Hashem disrespect by taking His Name lightly. Shabbos attests to Hashem being the Creator of the world, for it is a constant reminder that He created for six days and rested on the Seventh Day. When we observe Shabbos, we bear testimony to this fact. Therefore, the commandment of Shabbos should follow in the natural progression after the first three.

There is another aspect of Shabbos that we often overlook, although it is equally significant. The Lecha Dodi hymn, recited Friday night as we welcome the Shabbos, portrays Shabbos as Klal Yisrael's bride. Indeed, Chazal relate that when Hashem first introduced the Shabbos day into Creation, Shabbos complained bitterly to Hashem, "To every other day of the week You have given a mate: the creation of the First Day was completed and sustained by the creation of the Second Day; the creation of the Third Day by that of the Fourth Day; the creation of the Fifth Day by that of the Sixth Day. But me, the Seventh Day, You have given no companion." Thereupon, Hashem replied, "I still have one more work of Creation to bring forth: Klal Yisrael; they will be your betrothed. "Yisrael yehai ben zugach."

Thus, when Hashem gave His Torah to Klal Yisrael at Har Sinai, he stated, "Behold, the

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Shabbos stands here alone and forgotten; remember her and hallow her unto yourselves as a chassan, bridegroom, cherishes and sanctifies his kallah, bride, on the wedding day." Ever since that august moment, Klal Yisrael has kept the Shabbos day. It has celebrated its eternal betrothal to the Shabbos, as a faithful husband protects, sustains and treasures his beloved wife. This is the manner in which Shabbos should be observed: as a husband cherishes his wife.

Shabbos is Klal Yisrael's companion for eternity. Without the Jewish People to keep it, Shabbos would have disappeared from mankind. Likewise, were it not for the Shabbos, we would have succumbed to the many miseries and afflictions that have accompanied us throughout our tumultuous history. A wife and companion for life: what more meaningful terms can we use as an analogy for our relationship to Shabbos?

Our observance of Shabbos should be paradigmatic of the harmonious relationship between husband and wife. If this is the case, we may be so bold as to wonder whether those who reject the sanctity of Shabbos, negate its overriding significance to the Jewish People, are reflecting their own misperception of the institution of marriage. Do they understand the meaning of fidelity? We may suggest that the laws regarding the observance and hallowing of Shabbos should serve as a primer for the relationship between husband and wife. After all, the union of Klal Yisrael and Shabbos was the first marriage, since we are Shabbos' eternal companion. Examining Chazal's terminology regarding Shabbos and its relationship vis-?-vis Klal Yisrael serves as a powerful tool for understanding the manner in which a husband should view his wife.

Let us go back to the beautiful hymn of Lecha Dodi, which refers to Shabbos as mekor ha'brachah, a source of blessing. When Hashem first instituted Shabbos as a memorial to His Creation, He blessed it with a special message, a unique power. By means of the truth that it symbolizes and communicates to Klal Yisrael, Shabbos is able to train man for his spiritual and moral destiny, as well as to ennoble him, so that he can fulfill that destiny. Shabbos is all that in its being a source of blessing.

A wife can and should be the home's source of blessing. Quite often, her contribution to the home is not recognized - because it is not appreciated. This provides thought as a parallel to Shabbos. The value and significance of Shabbos can be realized only when one appreciates it. This can only occur when one observes the Shabbos - properly - according to halachah. By delving into the Shabbos, we will raise our level of appreciation, so that it can have a greater effect on our lives. This applies equally to marriage. Sometimes we have to sit back and think: What would life be like under different circumstances? Are we acting properly? Do we appreciate our mate? Do we display our appreciation? Let us each learn from Shabbos how to honor the "other" kallah in our life.

Honor your father and your mother. (20:12)

The Fifth Commandment, honoring one's parents, is a bedrock of our faith. Our tradition is based on the chain of transmission from Avraham Avinu to his descendants who received the Torah at Har Sinai and handed it down in its entirety from generation to generation. This chain links parents with children who later transmit the "Torah" to their own children. Thus, the Fifth Commandment enables the observance of the preceding four commandments.

The mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Eim carries with it some profound emotional fulfillment. For the most part, people have a difficult time feeling a sense of indebtedness to others. By his very nature, man thrives on independence. Thus, he finds the need to appreciate and offer gratitude extremely

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constraining. Therefore, children should be taught the importance of honoring parents. Indeed, it should be demanded and deserved. While demanding respect of a child will be effective for a period of time, in the long run, a person should earn the respect of his child both by the way he treats his child and by the respect that he personally projects.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains that one of the major factors that can contribute to engendering a climate within which children willingly choose to truly honor their parents is when parents themselves serve as role models, when they are individuals who are prepared to eschew their personal agendas in favor of others, be it spouse, peers or Hashem. In other words, respect breeds respect; it is more natural to respect a parent who demonstrates respect of others.

To paraphrase Rav Hirsch, "Why do parents have difficulty training their child to comply willingly with their expectations without having to force the issue? Is it possible that it is related to the fact that self-discipline is the one character trait that children raised in a non-observant environment do not witness in their parents? When we appear before them as military officers who issue orders, how can we expect them to learn to be disciplined?"

"Those who live by the Torah and joyfully carry out its dictates teach their children by their personal example the meaning of submitting to a Higher Will. In the eyes of the child, the Torah is like grandparents. Just as his parents willingly and joyfully submit to its call, in its most minute details, he, too, can learn from their example to joyfully and willingly submit to the will of his parents."

Moreover, as the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch writes: "A father who truly has mercy upon his children should study Torah, perform good deeds, and maintain a strong relationship with Hashem and with his fellow man. Thus, his children will consider it an honor to have such a parent."

One should not have to be worthy of his child's respect, but, regrettably, in today's society, children see through the transparency of parents who do not practice what they preach. This, in turn, influences the manner in which they fulfill the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim. A child should honor his parents because the Torah says to do so. This should be his only source of motivation. It does not always work this way. At times, a parent's hypocritical behavior can even catalyze his child's lack of mitzvah observance, as demonstrated by the following story:

Horav Moshe Blau, zl, once traveled abroad and was a guest in the home of a distinguished European lay leader. During a discussion with his host, the latter suddenly broke down and cried bitterly. His sons were not as committed to a Torah lifestyle as he would have liked them to be, and this caused him great anguish. On Friday night, Rav Blau was sitting in this man's house, when he saw one of his host's sons touch an object that was muktzah, set apart, not to be moved or picked up on Shabbos. The father told his son that the object was muktzah, and he should not touch it. After Shabbos was over, Rav Blau observed how the boy had taken out several gold pieces from their special display case and had begun playing with them. When the father saw this, he began to shout so loudly that the walls of the house seemed to shake. Seeing this, Rav Blau commented to the man, "I now understand why your children are lax in their observance. When it entails infractions involving yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, they notice that your rebuke is gentle, but when it comes to money, you begin to shout uncontrollably. You have thereby indicated to them your true values and priorities." The only thing to add to such a story is to be introspective and question ourselves as to the applicability of this narrative to our own personal lives.

I close on a positive note with an example of the extent of Kibbud Av v'Eim, manifest by one of our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders. Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl, distinguished himself not only in his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah, but also in his exemplary middos tovos, positive character

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traits. Indeed, he was a giant in both areas. His adherence to the mitzvah of Kibbud Av was legendary. To the very end of his life - and even beyond - he epitomized this "mitzvah." In his tzavaah, last will and testament, he wrote, "The monument on my grave should be a standard size. Certainly, it should not be higher than that of my dear parents." There are some people that "take" throughout their entire lives, and there are those unique few who are always "giving". Even when they leave this world, they make certain that the giving continues.

And Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain. (19:2)

The Torah presents the verb, "va'yichan," and they [Yisrael] camped, in the singular, in contrast to the previous pesukim in which it more appropriately uses the plural form of the verb. Citing Chazal, Rashi, indicates that they camped "k'ish echad b'lev echad," like one man with one heart. So strong was their unity, that they were like a single person. In order for Klal Yisrael to elevate themselves for Kabbolas ha'Torah, receiving the Torah, it was necessary that they be united in their goal of listening to Hashem's word.

Klal Yisrael demonstrated its merit and readiness to receive the Torah by approaching Har Sinai as one unit, like a single person with a single heart. Their common goal unified them. Hashem responded by instructing Moshe to tell the people not to ascend the mountain while the Shechinah was there, lest many people die. The Mechilta explains this enigmatic response. Hashem was indicating the significance of each Jew. Even if one single Jew were to die, it would be considered as if an entire multitude had perished. Horav Aharon Kotler, z.l., attributes this to the unity that bonded Klal Yisrael together as one. When all Jews are united as one, each Jew becomes even more precious. This teaches us the overriding responsibility each Jew has to alleviate the distress of his fellow Jew. Just as Hashem will not tolerate the loss of a single person, so must we be concerned with the spiritual and material needs of all Jews.

This is a compelling statement. Like many such statements, however, we accept it, we understand its importance; yet, we rarely do anything to address the issue. How many can say they are really troubled by the lack of observance of so many of our own brethren? We observe it, we are acutely aware of it, yet, we continue on with our lives as if business is as usual. While some individuals are involved in reaching out to the unaffiliated, what are we doing about those who are in significant financial jeopardy? If we are truly united, we must care. If our sensitivity does not extend beyond ourselves, our sense of unity is quite limited.

I have always had difficulty understanding the concept of k'ish echad b'lev echad, as one person with one heart. How are we to conceptualize this level of kinship and unity? I recently came across a short story that conveys this message. This story is about an American entertainer who was asked to be part of a show that would go to Europe to entertain the United States troops who were battling in World War II. He said that he was very busy and could only give them a few minutes. Since the entertainer was quite famous, to have him for even a few minutes was well worth it. He agreed to do one short monologue before continuing on to his next appointment. He went up to the stage, performed his act, but instead of leaving - he stayed. He went on to another monologue. As the applause continued, so did he. Soon, the five minutes stretched into fifteen minutes. After a half hour, he finally left the stage to roaring applause. The director of the show came over and thanked him profusely. He said, "I thought you had to leave after five minutes. What made you stay for half an hour?"

The entertainer responded, "I did have to go, but if you will follow me, I will show you what it

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was that compelled me to stay on." They went to a corner of the stage where they could see the front row. "You can see for yourself why I stayed, if you look at the front row," said the entertainer.

In the front row were two men, each of whom had lost an arm in the war. One had lost his right arm, the other had lost his left. Together, they were able to clap, and that is exactly what they were doing - clapping loudly and cheerfully, one arm of one soldier with the arm of his friend. This is the meaning of "ish echad" - two people realizing that alone they cannot function. They each need the second person, so that together they both become one person. Unity is the realization that without my friend, I am not complete.

*For on the third day Hashem shall descend in the sight of the entire people on Har Sinai.
(19:11)*

Many of the Taryag, 613, mitzvos are zeicher l'yetzias Mitzrayim, a commemoration of the Egyptian exodus. The Exodus served one primary purpose; it brought Klal Yisrael closer to Har Sinai and the ensuing Revelation and Kabbolas ha'Torah, receiving of the Torah. The Revelation was certainly a seminal event in the history of the Jewish People. Why is there no zeicher l'Kabbolas ha'Torah, commemoration of receiving the Torah? Horav Aharon Kotler, z.l., gave a definitive response to this question, which addresses the very essence of the manner in which we should study Torah. The Egyptian exodus was surely a monumental event, one that we recall daily. It is an event, however, that occurred in the past. It is something that we commemorate, that we talk about, but do not experience. It happened, and it is over.

The Revelation at Har Sinai was different. In Sefer Devarim 5:19 the Torah says that Hashem spoke to the People "kol gadol v'lo yasaf", with a great voice, never to be repeated. Targum Onkelos interprets the phrase, "v'lo yasaf," (commonly translated as "never to be repeated"), as "it did not cease." The Revelation which occurred at Har Sinai continues on to this very day. Indeed, as Rav Aharon explains, Hashem took that singular great voice of Kabbolas ha'Torah and placed it in the Torah itself. It is a vital component of Torah.

The Torah is revealed to us constantly. We open up a Gemora, Talmud, and we are standing at Har Sinai about to experience the Revelation. There is no need for a mitzvah to commemorate the Revelation, because it is an event that is still unfolding. I feel that this concept is the underlying reason that some people study Torah, with love, enthusiasm and awe. They sense the repeated Revelation when they study the Torah. They feel it - they experience it. Is it any wonder that this emotion permeates their surroundings so that others around them are equally inspired? To succeed in Torah study one must love the endeavor, becoming excited and awed by the experience. He is in the presence of the Almighty at Har Sinai.

Love for Torah, has been the hallmark of many a great Torah leader. Indeed, it is something we have come to expect. How often do we hear or read an episode concerning a "regular" Jew, a simple, devout Jew, not a Rosh Yeshivah, whose love for Torah is overwhelming? I would like to take this opportunity to share with the reader a few brief narratives about such "regular" Jews. After World War II, those Jews who were fortunate enough to survive the Holocaust were placed in DP (Displaced Persons) camps. Soldiers from the United States army were there to attend to the basic necessities of these survivors. Rabbi Goldman was an observant Jewish chaplain who went out of his way to provide for the needs of his brethren. One of his functions as chaplain was to determine each survivor's most

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urgent needs. He would mount an army truck and with the help of a megaphone, instruct the people to line up. The survivors would then file past the truck and tell Rabbi Goldman what they required.

One of those who stood on line was a Mr. Schwartz, a frail, battered survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp. When his turn came, he looked up at the chaplain and said, "I need a Gemora Bava Kama."

Rabbi Goldman did not believe what he was hearing. He looked at Mr. Schwartz and said in a kind, soothing voice, "I am here to try to get you clothing, medical supplies - whatever you need to become healthy again. So, now how can I help you?"

Mr. Schwartz looked up and responded, "Let me explain my immediate needs to you. Five and a half years ago, I was studying Meseches Bava Kama. Then the Nazis came and destroyed Jewish life as we knew it, sending me away to the camps. I have not seen a Gemora since that day. Now, Baruch Hashem, with the help of the Almighty, I am free to study Torah again. I want to resume my learning. Trust me, what I need most is a Gemora. Please help me to obtain it."

Rabbi Goldman could not believe his ears. Five and a half years in the Nazi purgatory, and all this man wanted was a Gemora. He would do whatever he could to find a Gemora for Mr. Schwartz. He succeeded in locating an old Meseches Bava Kama among the contents of a Hebrew library dumped by the Nazis. Words cannot describe how Mr. Schwartz's eyes lit up, as five and a half years of misery, torment and longing - for freedom to learn Torah, to live as a Jew should live - all came to a climax when Rabbi Goldman handed him the Gemora.

For the next story I return to the present, to my dear friend, Baruch Berger. I wrote about Baruch a few months ago, depicting his incredible love of Torah, and his burning desire to share this love with other Jews. Unfortunately, Baruch is very ill with a disease that invaded his body years ago. Today, he has little or no movement in his body. He is in constant pain, and his eyesight is severely impaired, but he still loves Torah with all his heart and all his soul. It is very difficult sitting in a wheelchair all day, wracked with pain, and attempt to concentrate on Torah learning. This becomes even more challenging when one takes into consideration that reading the words is almost impossible because of their size.

This circumstance would surely impede the Torah study of most people. Baruch, however, is not a member of the "most people" group. He is in a class to himself. Baruch phoned me recently with wonderful and exciting news. Due to Baruch's condition, speaking is most difficult and extremely painful. It takes some time to articulate the words that he wants to say. What was Baruch's "news"? He had begun learning Mishnayos baal peh, by heart, on his computer. Baruch's computer is his life line to the outside world. Except for the very special bachurim, yeshivah students, of Yeshivas Emek HaTalmud, who pick up Baruch every day and take him to Minchah, he really does not interact with many people. Baruch was able to obtain the Mishnayos on a CD Rom. By enlarging every letter of every word he is able to learn the Mishnayos! He studies the Mishnah - letter by letter - word by word, and then he memorizes it. He has completed the first three perakim of Meseches Brachos! If that does not redefine love of Torah, then I do not know what does! I told Baruch that when he is mesayem, completes the Meseches, I will I.Y.H. come to the Siyum. In fact, I will write about it, and we should all go. This is Kiddush Shem Shomayim at its zenith!

And they stood at the bottom of the mountain. (19:17)

Chazal tell us that they stood beneath the mountain, since Hashem raised the mountain over

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their heads and declared, "If you accept the Torah - good. If you do not, here will be your graves." This seems to indicate that, in a sense, Klal Yisrael's acceptance of the Torah was not willful. The commentators discuss at length the explanation and significance of raising "the mountain over Klal Yisrael's heads" and the manner of the Torah's acceptance. They explain that the people readily accepted the Torah Shebiksav, Written Law. However, they needed some extra prodding in order to accept the Oral Law. They later accepted the Oral Law willingly on Purim. The Chasam Sofer wonders why, after the people willingly accepted the Written Law they had to have the mountain held over their heads to induce them to respond positively to accepting the Oral Law. He gives a penetrating response which conveys a profound and timeless message. When Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, they decided to humble themselves and accept the Torah from Hashem. But, when they were given the Oral Law with its implication that they would now have to submit themselves to the talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars, who are also made of the same flesh and blood as they, they reneged.

They were not prepared to humble themselves before the Torah leaders, who were also human beings. Hashem lifted the mountain over their heads and said, "If you do not submit yourself to the leadership of the gedolei Torah of each generation, then you will be buried here. If you do not humble yourself and listen to their adjudication of the law, it is considered as if you were dead and buried. For such people, even the Written Torah is not a Torah, if they will not submit themselves to the gedolei Yisrael. They will be buried beneath the mountain. How terrifying! How do the halachic renderings of a gadol become transformed into a permanent part of the Torah? Horav Yehudah Ades explains that this is part of the dictum, "Lo baShomayim hee" "The Torah is not in Heaven." Once it has been handed down to man, the rulings rendered by the gedolei Torah become a permanent part of Torah itself. Indeed, even in Heaven the rulings follow those rendered by the gedolei ha'Torah. How is this to be understood? The Alter, z.l., m' Kelm explains that since we are commanded to toil over Torah learning, to the point that we are "meimis atzmo b'oholah shel Torah," "kill ourselves in the tent of Torah," we are compelled to become totally detached from any personal interests. After all, we are "killing ourselves" in the study of Torah. We are, thus, transformed into nekiyei ha'daas, uncontaminated by any outside interests or any subjective intentions. As a result, our knowledge descends to us directly from Heaven. This, according to Rashi, is defined as Ruach Hakodesh, Divine Inspiration. This is how the rulings of the talmidei chachamim become the ruling of the Torah itself - because it is Divinely inspired.

We now understand the depth of Daas Torah, the knowledge expounded by our Torah leaders, or the wisdom of Torah. Perhaps if more of us would understand the true hidden source of Daas Torah, we would more readily accept it. Hopefully, we will not need a mountain over our heads to drive home this message.

Yisro...heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Yisrael, His people. (18:1)

Yisro heard about two events: the miracles at the sea, when the Egyptians were punished for their treachery; and the war against Amalek, when Klal Yisrael triumphed over their archenemy. Yisro was not the only one who "heard." Many heard; he, however, internalized it and acted positively in response. Why did Yisro need two incidents to impress upon him the greatness of Hashem and His People? Was not the splitting of the Red Sea a sufficient miracle to influence his way of thinking? Indeed, the war with Amalek could have been misconstrued as a victory effected by Klal Yisrael's military genius. The splitting of the Red Sea, however, was a miracle of the highest order. No one could question it. Why, then, was it necessary for Yisro hear also about the war with Amalek before he

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decided to join Klal Yisrael?

Horav Shlomo Gestetner, Shlita, explains that while Krias Yam Suf was an incredible miracle that had no equal, one might err and think that Hashem produced this miracle in order to save Klal Yisrael whose lives were in grave danger. Indeed, if another nation had been pursued by Egypt, Hashem would likely also have saved them from their oppressors. In other words, Krias Yam Suf does not demonstrate a clear indication that Hashem sought to save Klal Yisrael specifically because they would soon receive the Torah and mitzvos. Only after Yisro saw that they were rescued from Amalek, whose sole desire was to destroy them spiritually, was he convinced that Klal Yisrael's spiritual destiny was what mattered to Hashem. Their spiritual ascendancy gave the Jewish People preeminence over the other nations. This motivated Yisro to leave Midyan and join the Jews.

The name of one was Gershom, for he had said, "I was a sojourner in a strange land." (18:3)

Horav Shlomo Margolis, Shlita, notes that Yosef Hatzadik named his first son Menashe because "G-d has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household" (Bereishis 41:51). Upon naming their sons, Moshe Rabbeinu and Yosef recognized the significance of remembering the past. There are people who attempt to erase the past, to eradicate the memories of the previous generation, its culture and way of life. Some are even ashamed of the past, considering it to be obsolete and antiquated. Not so the Torah-oriented Jew. He remembers the past; he venerates the past; he lives the present and builds toward the future based upon the foundation of the past. This is the reason that when they name their children, who symbolize the future of our people, they use names that recall the past. Even Yosef, the viceroy of Egypt, eternalized the past when he named Menashe. He was not embarrassed; he was proud.

Only by connecting to the past, are we assured of a promising future. Why? Why is the past so important? What crucial role should it play in our lives? One who does not acquaint himself with the past cannot pretend to grasp the present. Anti-Semitism, for instance, cannot be fully understood without an examination of its roots in history; its development over time and the myths about Jews and Judaism that it has catalyzed. The concept of geulah, redemption, is better understood when one has a more profound understanding of galus, exile. Through the prism of history, galus takes on a new perspective. One strengthens his Jewish identity and heightens his Jewish pride when he becomes acutely aware of the many significant achievements of his ancestors throughout history. One who becomes acquainted with his Jewish past will identify and take pride in it, as he integrates this knowledge into his own life. Lastly, he will see how many of today's issues, problems and challenges have been confronted in the past. One who ignores his past is destined to relive it.

Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge; whoever touches the mountain shall surely die. (19:12)

Rabbi Paysach Krohn cites the Kotzker Rebbe's homiletic interpretation of this pasuk. This was to be the basis of a speech that Rabbi Moshe Sherer, zl, was to deliver at Agudath Israel's 76th Annual Dinner. Regrettably, Rabbi Sherer, who served as Agudah's president for over thirty years, passed away that morning. The following is the Rebbe's exegesis and Rabbi Sherer's supplemental note.

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There are instances when one undertakes a project with the desire to make a significant contribution via his work. All too often, as happens with many of us, we do not achieve our planned goals. Yet, this does not phase us. We become complacent and satisfied with what we have done because after all, it is still more than had been previously accomplished. The Kotzker says this is wrong. He interprets this idea into the pasuk: Beware if you are trying to "climb a mountain" with the stated goals of accomplishing something great. You succeed, however, in reaching only part of your goal. Do not be satisfied, for if you have merely "touched the mountain" and not succeeded in conquering it, that is not life. Rather it constitutes a form of death.

Rabbi Sherer added what probably defined his own essence, as well as the prevalent perspective of so many of Klal Yisrael's gedolim, Torah giants: "If you have merited to climb the mountain, do not be like those who are satisfied with a little, but instead endeavor to climb higher and higher!" This is the way a Jew should live. It is only through such an outlook on life that one can achieve gadlus, greatness, and true success.

Too many of us are "mistapek be'muat," satisfied with a little, acquiescing to whatever we achieve, even if it falls dismally short of our intended goals. Horav Yissacher Frand, Shlita, focuses upon our lack of going "all the way," our sense of complacency with whatever we achieve, our satisfaction with our level of observance. In the parsha of Vidui Maasros, the confession one recites upon bringing his tithes to Yerushalayim, the individual says, "I have removed the holy things from the house, and I have also given to the Levi, to the ger, convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to whatever commandment You have commanded me." Concealed in this recitation, say the commentators, is the letter "chof" of the word "k'chol," which underscores the confession. We do not say that we have given precisely as we have been commanded, but rather, "k'chol," like, all that we were commanded. We gave, but perhaps not enough, not in accordance with our full ability. We waited to give at the last possible moment, rather than at the appropriate time each year.

When we evaluate our lives and our observances, we will see that everything revolves around the "k'chol," "like." We do - we observe - but it is lacking in content, lacking in feeling, lacking in attitude. Our Shabbos is cold, our davening is at best lukewarm, our minyan attendance leaves much to be desired. We are, however, frum! Yaakov Avinu said, "I lived with Lavan, but I did not learn from his actions." One of the commentators interprets this to mean, "I did not learn from him to do good as he does evil." Lavan's approach to evil was whole-hearted and passionate. We have yet to learn from that.

We must ask ourselves: do we maximize our potential? Adam Harishon was judged by Hashem. He was asked one word - "Ayeca," "Where are you?" Chazal teach us that this question encompassed much more than it seems to. It critiqued Adam for failing to realize his remarkable potential. "Yesterday you reached up to the Heavens," encompassing the entire world from one end to the other. You were My handiwork, My special creation. And where are you today? Hiding among the trees of the garden." This was Hashem's mussar, rebuke. Adam Harishon's tragic failure to realize his incredible potential frequently repeats itself in our lives. We must never become complacent, thinking either that we have reached the top of the mountain or that wherever we have been is "good enough." It is not.

We are all created by the Almighty with a purpose, with goals to achieve, with objectives to realize. Something happens along the way which precludes us from fulfilling our mission in life. We say in the Mussaf Shemoneh Esrei of Rosh Hashanah, that each person is judged in accordance with "maaseh ish u'fekudaso," everyone's deed and mission. What is the meaning of deed and mission? A person should be judged according to what he does or does not do. What is the meaning of one's mission? Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl, explained that a man has a G-d-given purpose in life. We are judged not only by the quality of our deeds, but also by the extent to which we fulfill our personal

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purpose in life.

Interestingly, when Reb Shraga Feivel made this statement, he added, "How does one know whether he has fulfilled his mission in life?" He immediately began to cry. Here was a person who catalyzed much of the Torah environment that the post World War II Americans enjoy. Yet, he felt insecure regarding his achievements. Perhaps this is why he was so eminently successful. He never felt that he had made it. This is what Rabbi Sherer was alluding to. The individuals that feel they have made it have only begun to ascend the mountain. We can never become complacent. The process of trying to reach our potential is a never-ending quest for achievement. To paraphrase Horav Frand, "Not only is each one of us brought into this world with a unique combination of strengths, but each one of us is brought into the world at a particular time when those powers are needed for the fulfillment of some part of the Divine Plan." We have a responsibility to ourselves, our People, and the Almighty Who put us here at this specific time and place for a purpose. There are people who go through life doing little more than searching for that purpose. Others search less and do more. They are ascending the mountain.

Honor your father and your mother. (20:12)

To what extent must one honor his parents? Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, focuses on the degree of kavod, honor, one must accord to a parent who, due to illness or advanced age, has a deteriorated mental capacity. The question becomes stronger in situations when the illness has advanced to the point that there are serious issues of extreme hardship for the children, both as sons or daughters to their parents and as husbands or wives to their respective mates. How much does one have to sacrifice for a parent? How much hardship, and - at times - abuse must one endure from a parent who is ill and whose mind does not function properly?

Horav Zilberstein writes that when he posed this question before one of the preeminent poskim, halachic arbiters, of the generation, the answer he received was: a son or daughter must do for their parents to the same degree that their parents will do for them. In other words, parents sacrifice their lives for their children, should we not at least do the same for them? Hashem commands us to honor our parents out of a sense of hakoras hatov, gratitude and appreciation. We owe them. While at times fulfilling our obligation might be extremely difficult, and even crushing, it is our obligation. Perhaps, when the situation becomes difficult, we should ask ourselves: what would our parents do for us if the situation had been reversed? No one has ever said that life was going to be easy. Regrettably, some of us would rather take than give.

Horav Y. Eliyashiv, Shlita, feels that a child's obligation goes beyond what a parent would do for a child. There is no comparison. He cites the Rambam who says that the chiyuv, obligation, is "ad shekocho shel ha'ben magia," as much as the son can physically endure. We might be so bold to add that emotional endurance on the part of the child might also be taken into account. It is noteworthy that the famous gaon, Horav Chaim Pelagi, zl, merited to live to a ripe old age. He was revered by all. The Turkish government accorded him the honor due to royalty. When asked by one of his students to what he attributed his exceptional longevity, he wrote down ten acts that merit longevity. One of them is attending to one's parents, despite their mental infirmity.

There is no doubt that caring for an elderly parent can, at times, be an overwhelming burden. The response to "How much can I take?" is an individual one. People react differently to this burden,

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and they must acknowledge when they are responding inappropriately.

In the Talmud Kiddushin, Chazal describe a situation in which a son feeds his father the finest delicacies, yet loses his reward in Olam Habah. The son places the food before his father. His father asks him from where he obtained the money for such delicacies. The response is a terse, "What difference is it to you? Eat." Horav Reuven Feinstein, Shlita, questions how such a paradoxical attitude could exist within a human being. On the one hand, the son seeks to provide his father with the finest delicacies. On the other hand, the manner in which he offers the food bespeaks of cruelty and disdain. He explains that quite possibly, the son has spent more than he could afford for the food. His obligation to provide the very best for his father has guided him. Now that he must come to terms with the cost of the food, he resents his father for placing him in such a position.

Regrettably, such an amalgam of obligation and resentment, love and hate, joy and bitterness, coexist to one degree or another, when the situation becomes overwhelming. We have to consult with a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, and decide whether our inability to cope is overriding our ability to love.

We have to remember that what goes around comes around, and the respect we accord our parents is, in effect, the type of respect we might receive one day from our children. They are watching us. We must provide them with the proper models for Kibbud Av v'Eim - ourselves. While we might forget how we have acted towards our parents, our children remind us.

Yisro heard ...everything that G-d did to Moshe and to Yisrael His people, that Hashem had taken Yisrael out of Egypt. (18:1) Rashi asks, and responds to his own question, "What did Yisro hear that motivated him to come? It was the splitting of the Red Sea and the battle with Amalek." Interestingly, the pasuk cites only one of two reasons: the fact that Hashem took Klal Yisrael out of Egypt. Furthermore, was Yisro the only person that heard of these events? After all, such incredible occurrences are world events which were obviously "heard" by an entire world. Why is Yisro singled out? Simply, Rashi is asking: what was there that catalyzed Yisro to come? What occurred that caused only him to come? Many people heard, but how many acted on what they had heard?

Nachlas Tzvi cites Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, who explains that to "hear" means to do something in response to what one hears. For instance, imagine someone taking a stroll on a busy highway, filled with speeding cars. As the cars speed by, narrowly missing him, they all sound their horns and scream to him to get off the highway. To everyone, he responds, "I hear! I hear!" Is this considered hearing? As long as he remains on that highway, foolishly risking his life, we cannot say that he is hearing. Although everybody had heard of Hashem's miracles on behalf of Klal Yisrael, only one person, Yisro, understood their meaning and message. He heard! He integrated what he had heard and acted on it.

Similarly, we may better understand Rashi's comment regarding the eved nirtza, Jewish slave who has his ear pierced in order to continue his servitude. In Shemos 21:6, Rashi cites Chazal who explain why the ear has been selected for piercing, rather than the other organs of the body: Even though his ear "heard" "Do not steal" at Har Sinai, the individual proceeded to steal. Consequently, the ear should be pierced. This is enigmatic. Was it the ear that stole? It was the hands, the legs, and the rest of the body that perpetrated this act. Why should the ear be singled out? Horav Moshe Rosenstein, zl, explains that the ear is being punished for not hearing properly. For, had the ear heard Hashem's command of "Lo tignov" "Do not steal," then the other organs of the body would also have heard. To hear and not listen - is not to hear.

Why was Yisro the only one that truly heard? What happened to the rest of the world? Why did

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they ignore what they had heard? Nachlas Tzvi contends that one must know how to listen. Yisro sought the truth. He was searching for the right religion. He heard because he wanted to hear. His ears were acutely attuned to hearing. Everybody heard what they wanted to hear. Amalek heard; Egypt heard; the various pagan nations heard what they wanted to hear. Yisro heard the truth, because this is what he wanted to hear.

Horav Yosef Leib Nendik, zl, remarks that this is, in fact, human nature. People hear what they want to hear. Imagine, a group of people hear that an individual became very wealthy. His friends will obviously rejoice in his good fortune. Businessmen will be happy to hear this, because now they will seek his business. Fundraisers will be happy to hear they have someone new to ask for money. Thieves will also be happy; they now have a new house to break into. When Egypt drowned in the Red Sea, people responded in various ways; "People heard - they were agitated; terror gripped the dwellers of Phillistia. Then the chieftains of Edom were confounded; trembling gripped the powers of Moav, all the dwellers of Canaan dissolved." (Shemos, 15:14, 15) Amalek was also disturbed, but he reacted aggressively. Yisro heard - he came to join the nation whose G-d was shaking up the world.

Hearing is an art. We must attune our ears to listen to the accurate message that is being conveyed to us. Listening actively and attentively to a simple statement can leave a profound impression upon us. Nachlas Tzvi tells how a simple abstract statement directed to Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, the father of the yeshivah world, prompted him to ponder in a manner which eventually catalyzed the yeshivah movement. Rav Chaim related that when he was a young man, shortly after his wedding, he turned to the business world in order to support his family. Once, as he was on his way to the annual market, he met an old friend who was also in business, whom he had not seen in a long time. Seeing Rav Chaim, the friend asked, "Why are you here? What are you doing here?" At the time, Rav Chaim responded that he had come to do business. While the question was a simple salutation, it started Rav Chaim thinking. "Why are you here; What are you doing here?" are questions that have deep and penetrating meaning. Why was Rav Chaim at the market when he should have been learning Torah? Why was he selling wares when he could have been selling Torah to students? Why was he "osaik," involving himself in chaye shaah, temporary matters, and ignoring chaye olam, matters of eternity?

Yisro heard...everything that G-d did to Moshe and Yisrael, His People. (18:1)

Parashas Yisro's significance is not really its namesake. While Yisro does have an important role in this parsha, the main event is Kabollas HaTorah, Klal Yisrael's receiving of the Torah in the form of the Aseres HaDibros, Ten Commandments. Why is the parsha not named after this monumental event? They certainly have greater distinction than Yisro's conversion and visit with Klal Yisrael. Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, cites the Talmud in Berachos 12 in which Chazal sought to establish the recitation of the parsha of Aseres Hadibros daily in the shuls. They did not do so, for fear of what the heretics might say. Rashi explains that the heretics may tell the amei ha'aretz, illiterate Jews, that the rest of the Torah is not true. They would substantiate their foolishness with the notion that every day we say only the Aseres Hadibros - not the rest of the Torah.

Regrettably, this is something that the uneducated might believe. Thus, this decree was not made. Likewise, if this parsha had been named after the Aseres Hadibros, some individuals might attribute it precedence over other areas of the Torah. Every letter of the Torah has equal significance.

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Yisro said, "Blessed is Hashem, who rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh. (18:10)

In the Talmud Sanhedrin 94A, Chazal say that it is a shame for Moshe Rabbeinu and all of the Klal Yisrael that until Yisro declared, "Baruch Hashem," no one else had done so. In other words, Chazal attribute to Yisro the first public praise of Hashem. Is this true? Are we to ignore the Shirah, song, that Moshe led Klal Yisrael in singing after Hashem split the Red Sea for them? Is their praise any less significant than that of Yisro?

Horav Sholom Mi'Radomsk, zl, distinguishes between Yisro's praise and Moshe's praise. Moshe and Klal Yisrael were both deeply moved by Hashem's deliverance of them from their enemies. Their overwhelming sense of gratitude inspired them to sing His praise. They thanked and lauded Hashem for what He did for them. In contrast, Yisro gave gratitude in a yet uncharted area - "Who rescued You" - He thanked Hashem for saving Klal Yisrael. Yisro was the first to appreciate the benefit that others had received, to give thanks to the Almighty for His actions on behalf of others.

There was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain...and the entire people that were in the camp shuddered...all of Har Sinai was smoking because Hashem had descended upon it in the fire. (19:16)

The Giving of the Torah was the monumental experience for which Klal Yisrael had prepared. It was the moment that would change their lives forever. Accepting the Torah transformed them into a "kingdom of Priests and a holy nation." Evidently, the manner in which the Torah was to be given was designed to impact them. It was to be given in such a manner as to define the essence of Torah, whose "ways are ways of pleasantness."

"When we try to impress people with the Torah, we speak of its beauty, its gentle and caring nature, its ability to address the needs of all people, to soothe and give hope, to encourage and sustain the nation that devotes itself to its precepts. We would hardly expect the Torah to be given under circumstances that would intimidate and frighten those who had prepared to accept it.

Responding to this question, Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, first addresses the beginning of the parsha that related Yisro's reasons for joining Klal Yisrael. Yisro had heard all that Hashem had done for His People. What exactly did he hear that prompted him to leave his home for the wilderness with Klal Yisrael? Chazal suggest that the splitting of the Red Sea and the battle with Amalek had inspired him. When Moshe finally met his father-in-law, he proceeded to relate to him "everything that Hashem did to Pharaoh and Egypt on behalf of Klal Yisrael," as well as the subsequent events, such as Krias Yam Suf and Milchemes Amalek. Yisro was acutely aware of these occurrences. That is why he came! Why did Moshe repeat everything?

Moshe added one detail that might have escaped Yisro's attention. He related to him, "All the travail that had befallen them on the way." It is not always rosy. There are not always miracles and wonders. Being a Jew means that one accepts the good with the bad, the persecution with the joy, the misery and affliction with the ecstasy and exhilaration. Yisro must realize that prior to these miracles Klal Yisrael had been subjected to hundreds of years of persecution and suffering. After the Exodus, the travail was not over; they needed to navigate a different trek through the wilderness. "Yisro, the reality

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is not what it appears to be. It is travail mitigated by miracles. You cannot accept one without the other."

This idea applies similarly to the Torah. Had the Torah been given in a beautiful garden, surrounded by sweet smelling flowers, calm and serene, at peace, amid happiness and joy, we might think that that is the way Torah always interacts with the world. It is not. We accepted the Torah amid fire and smoke, trembling and fear - because that is also a part of life. We do not escape the trial and travail of being G-d's People in a hostile world, a single sheep among seventy hungry wolves. The Torah is certainly pleasant and it engenders peace and joy. To accept it only under such conditions, however, would be wrong and insincere. Only one who is willing to accept the Torah under all conditions is truly willing to accept the whole package which accompanies Torah in this world.

Honor your father and your mother (20:12)

The Aseres Hadibros, Ten Commandments, are inscribed on two tablets, with five commandments on each tablet. The first tablet contains those laws that focus upon man's relationship with the Almighty, while the second tablet addresses relationships between people. Interestingly, the mitzvah to honor one's parents is inscribed on the first tablet. What aspect of honoring one's parents warrants placing it among those commandments that deal with man's relationship with Hashem? Simply, one should honor his parents out of a sense of gratitude for all they have done for him. This would render Kibud Av v'Eim a "people oriented" mitzvah.

In explaining the mitzvah of Kibud Av, Sefer HaChinuch states that one should recognize, appreciate and act appropriately towards one from whom he has benefited. He should not be a "naval", an abominable person, who fails to acknowledge the good he received. He should realize he is presently in this world because of his parents. He will eventually realize that it is Hashem Who is the "cause of all causes," the real reason he is in this world. Hashem is the source of his parents and grandparent's existence throughout all the generations. He will, therefore, understand the significance of serving Him.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, notes from the Sefer HaChinuch that hakoras hatov, appreciation and paying gratitude, is not merely the reason for Kibud Av. Rather, it is also its greatest result. Honoring parents changes one's character. The Sefer HaChinuch explains that we are adjured to serve Hashem because of the hakoras hatov we derive from honoring parents. This would explain why this mitzvah is on the tablet that focuses upon man's relationship with Hashem.

We must still address why, if the underlying motif of Kibud Av is hakoras hatov, kavod is the medium for realizing it. Furthermore, what is the connection between the mitzvah of "morah," fear/reverence of parents -- which forbids any act that would offend or detract from the esteem in which they are held -- and hakoras hatov?

Indeed, the Rambam says that the mitzvah of morah demands that we revere our parents to the point of fear. Why is the Torah so demanding concerning this mitzvah? Horav Solomon cites Sforno's commentary to Vayikra 20:9, where the Torah metes out capitol punishment to one who curses his parents. He attributes this to the fact that this son is not predisposed to that which is written in Mishlei 1:8, "My son, hear the instruction of your father." A man like this will not keep Hashem's statutes and ordinances, for he will utterly refuse to accept them from his father and mother. Sforno posits that there is a corollary between the fear one manifests for his father and his observance of Torah and mitzvos!

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Torah is transmitted through the generations via parents. If the mitzvah of morah is not upheld, then the mesorah, tradition, will not endure. One who honors and reveres his parents is not merely doing a good deed towards them: he is also deriving an incredible fringe benefit in that when he serves them, he is able to learn from them how to act.

Our relationship with our parents avails us the opportunity for personal development and growth. Parents should realize the important obligation they have to educate their children in the mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Eim. Children learn from their parents. If parents respect each other - children see and emulate. The esteem that children manifest for their parents is connected with the esteem parents demonstrate for one another. Kavod is the vehicle through which the mesorah -- transmission of Torah's inspiration, influence and character development from generation to generation -- reaches fruition. The essence of the mitzvah of kavod is appreciation. By appreciating our parents we are able to learn from them, catalyzing our own self-development and enabling the mesoras ha'avos -- transmission of our parents' legacy -- to continue. One of the benefits of this mitzvah is a refinement of our middah of hakoras hatov, which accompanies the mesorah. In other words, the purpose of Kibud Av v'Eim is to establish a relationship that is tempered by hakoras hatov to reflect a transmission of the Torah tradition from father to son.

The entire people responded together and said, "Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do." (19:8)

Chazal praise Klal Yisrael's affirmative response, their ability to accept the challenge of performing Hashem's command without demanding a rationale. "Naase v'nishma," - "We will do and we will listen," was the clarion cry of our ancestors as they accepted the Torah. Chazal cite the awesome reward that Klal Yisrael received for declaring "naase", we will do, before "nishma," we will listen. Indeed, Hashem queried, "Who revealed this secret to My children, a phrase that only the ministering angels use?" Ultimately, we have to ask ourselves: What difference does it really make? In the end, they accepted both aspects- to do and to listen. Does the sequence really make a difference? What is the special secret that is contingent upon declaring naase before nishma?

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, comments that "listening" means more than just being attuned, more than simply hearing what is being said. The whole world heard what happened to the Egyptians: How they were vanquished by Hashem; how the Jews were miraculously saved. Only regarding Yisro, however, did the Torah state "Vayishma Yisro," "And Yisro heard." Hearing changed his life. How was his shmia, hearing, different than everyone else's?

An individual's response depends upon his attitude before he hears or experiences a miraculous occurrence. A unique experience will affect a person only if he is prepared to change - if he has already decided that "the time has come" for a transformation. This explains why two people can respond so differently to a single miraculous occurrence. One individual will be moved to change, while the other one remains immovable, a product of indifference, a victim of complacency. Yisro was a seeker; he sought the truth. When the truth became apparent, he seized the moment. This is the "secret" of "naase v'nishma." If Klal Yisrael are inclined to "listen," to open up their minds to accept the dvar Hashem, word of the Almighty, they must adjust their lives to be open to communications of emes, truth. The Angels of Heaven are first and foremost angels waiting to hear Hashem's command, to do His bidding. Klal Yisrael exclaimed "Naase v'nishma" with zeal and fervor. Hashem, we are ready - prepared to perform Your will. Had they not been "bnei shmia," actively attuned to listening, they would never

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have gone so far as to fulfill the "naase," to act in the appropriate manner.

Hashem said to Moshe, "Go to the people and sanctify them...and they shall wash their clothing...You shall set boundaries for the people roundabout... (19:10,12)

The Torah is enjoining people to prepare for the moment of Revelation when they will receive the Torah. They are to wash their clothes and fix limits around the mountain, so that no human or animal would be able to come closer. We may note the distinction of these two mitzvos - washing clothes and cordoning off the periphery of the mountain. What is the significance for these two forms of preparation for Kabbolas HaTorah?

Horav Y.A. Hirshovitz, zl, suggests that these two mitzvos serve not only as preparatory agents for Klal Yisrael's ascent to religious nationhood, they underscore the kedushas ha'Torah, the sanctity of Torah. They remind us how distant we were then from the Torah's ideal.

Every religion is the product of the generation in which it was introduced. Thus, all religions are subject to the influence of the place, time and culture from which it emerged. Certainly, the people who initiated it as a creed affected the formation of the religious dogma, codes, and form of service. A religion which the people initiated will ostensibly have passed the critique of the people. This applies to all religions - except the one religion that was given by the Almighty to His Chosen People. Judaism is not a figment of human imagination. It is, therefore, not subject to the influence of the time and place from which it originated. It is not bound by a specific culture. It does not revolve around the social climate of a given era. It transcends time and space.

Man must bring himself closer to the religion, because it stands on a sublime plane, above everything and everyone. It is a beacon of perfection -- shining through clouds of ambiguity and weakness -- which inspires each of us to identify our mission in life. Because other religions are of human origin, they achieved acceptance even before they were practiced. The converse is true of Judaism. Indeed, in the beginning people were not yet ready to accept it. Hashem raised the mountain above their heads, catalyzing an affirmative response. Many hundreds of years later -- after struggle and, at times, "kashyus oref," stiff-necked, opposition -- the Torah was finally accepted wholeheartedly, with joy and goodwill. This, once again, demonstrates its supernatural origin.

In order to imbue into the Jewish psyche the idea that the spiritual plane upon which the people presently stood was not acceptable by Torah standards, Hashem enjoined them with two mitzvos that would demonstrate their distance from the Torah ideal. They were to sanctify and set boundaries for themselves. Although they are not presently on a level appropriate for accepting the Torah, they could prepare themselves to achieve Kabbolas haTorah. The requirement of commitment to cleanse and purify their "clothes," was a reference to their spiritual raiment, which was at that time unclean. Setting boundaries around the mountain clarified to them that, even after all the preparations, they would still be distant from the mountain. They were not ready. Judaism is not a religion that emerged from a human. Hashem seeks conviction, commitment to perfection, striving for holiness and purity, a realization that we have not yet attained the required status. These two mitzvos taught us how far we were then. How are we to respond now?

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On the third day...there was thunder and lightning...and the entire people that was in the camp shuddered. (19:16)

Klal Yisrael was not the only one to shudder from the noise. That awesome sound, the "mysterium tremendum" that accompanied the Revelation and Giving of the Torah, echoed far beyond the periphery of that mountain. It reached an entire world. They all gathered together, the kings and princes, the common man and scholar, to offer praise to the Almighty. The Midrash says that they were scared; they feared for their lives. They thought the world was coming to an end. Perhaps Hashem was deluging the world with another mabul, flood. They went to their "wise man," seeking guidance and encouragement. "Was the end near?" they asked Bilaam, the wicked archenemy of our People. "Is Hashem returning the world to a state of disaster?" they asked. "No," Bilaam responded, "there will no longer be a flood. The noise emanates from an entirely different experience. The Almighty has had a precious treasure hidden away since 974 years before the creation of the world. It is called the Torah. He has waited all this time to give it to His children, the Jewish People." When they heard this, they all began to sing shirah, a song of praise to the Almighty.

What is the Midrash teaching us? While the nations of the world were far from virtuous, what led them to believe that their behavior had deteriorated to the extent that they deserved to be obliterated like the generation of the flood? Horav Elchonon Sorotzkin, zl, feels that they were justified in their fears. The world population had fallen to a nadir of depravity on a level with the generation of the flood. After all, how do we explain a world that stands idly by while a treacherous Pharaoh enslaves an entire nation, drowns their male offspring, bathes in the blood of their slaughtered children, all directed at the persecution of the Jews? Is there a more revolting form of indifference than this? The world is deaf to the screams of the dying children, to the bitter cries of their grief-stricken parents, to the moaning sounds of the broken-hearted Jews falling under the Egyptian whip. And we wonder why Hashem would want to destroy them. Only Hashem heard the cries, empathized with the sorrow and felt the pain of the hapless Jews.

He liberated them from bondage, freed them from persecution and destroyed their cruel oppressors. The world heard a loud cacophony of sound, the sounds of Revelation. They were afraid, however, that the sound was for them, that it heralded their well-deserved punishment. Bilaam told them not to worry. Those were not the sounds that accompanied disaster; rather, they were the clarion call of hope, the harbinger of the Giving of the Torah. If the Jewish People would accept the Torah, guard it, and observe its precepts, then the entire world would be saved. Chazal analogize this to a king who entrusted his beautiful garden to the hands of a sharecropper. After awhile the king returned to see the fruits of the sharecropper's labor. He entered the garden and noticed thorns - large, ugly thorns all over. He quickly obtained a large shears and began cutting away at the thorns. Suddenly, a beautiful, perfectly shaped, sweet-smelling rose appeared. "For this rose, I will spare the entire garden!" exclaimed the king. So, too, does Hashem spare the world because of His rose - the Torah for which He created the world. He waited twenty-six generations after Creation and "looked down" at His garden; He took His shears and cut away the thorns of evil, the wicked generations that sinned unrepentantly against Him. He kept on searching and cutting until He "discovered" a rose, the Jewish People who would accept His Torah. He took this rose and smelled it at the very moment that Klal Yisrael accepted the Aseres Ha'dibros, Ten Commandments, and He was revived/pleased. When Klal Yisrael rang out with the words "naase v'nishma", "we will do and we will listen," Hashem responded, "Because of this rose/Klal Yisrael I will spare the world."

What a beautiful interpretation of Chazal! What profound meaning Chazal's timeless words

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have for us today. Is the world that different today? Modern technology has blessed us with tools for destruction as never before. The world is filled with cruel demagogues bent on taking advantage and destroying those weaker than they. Our own people experienced a subhuman cruelty that would be impossible to believe if it were not true. All of this occurred while almost an entire world, including our own "host" country, turned away - deaf, mute, not seeing a thing. Yet, the world exists and is sustained by Hashem. Why? Why do they deserve to go on? It is because of the precious rose - Klal Yisrael and their commitment to the Torah!

The entire nation saw the thunder and the flames. (20:15)

The level of prophecy and spiritual perception which Klal Yisrael achieved during the Giving of the Torah was unprecedented. Indeed, as the pasuk implies, they were able to "see" the "sounds." Although thunder is an invisible sound, Klal Yisrael were able to transcend the barriers of human limitation and rise to a level of superhuman comprehension. They could now see what is heard under normal physical constraints. Seeing and hearing are two functions of the human body, each of which projects its own individual level of perception. One sees with clarity. To see means to perceive with an unambiguous level of recognition. Hearing, on the other hand, does not present an equivalent clarity of perception. Indeed, regarding the testimony of witnesses, the Talmud says, "Hearing shall not be considered greater than seeing." While an individual sees more clearly, he is only able to see short distances - within the limitation of human vision. Hearing is, of course, not restrained to such limits, since one has the ability to hear much farther than he can see.

Horav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, zl, applies the distinction between sight and sound to explain Chazal's comment regarding Klal Yisrael's level of perception during the Revelation: "They saw what is (normally) heard, and heard what is (normally) seen." The physical dimension of man, or the world in which we live, usually is perceived through the concept of sight. In the spiritual dimension, the Eternal world, perception is defined through the concept of shmiah, hearing, since one cannot see the supernatural through the limited vision of the human eye. Hence, we find the enjoinder of "Shma Yisrael", Hear O Yisrael, or "V'haya im shemoa tishmeu el mitzvosai," "and it shall be if you will surely listen to My mitzvos." We listen; we are not able to see beyond the boundary of the physical.

During Matan Torah, Giving of the Torah, we transcended this boundary, when Hashem "opened" the Heavens. A Revelation heretofore never experienced by mankind occurred. Hashem revealed the hidden secrets of the spiritual dimension to them as never before. They could now "see" what until now had only been "heard." They could "traverse" the distance between the physical and the spiritual by experiencing through imagery - hearing. Furthermore, they could now "hear" what previously had been perceived only through "sight." This physical, mundane world until now had been contained within defined limits. Suddenly, the world became wider, as perception was not confined to the sense of sight. Klal Yisrael were so spiritually elevated that they no longer "saw" this world - they related to it through shmiah, hearing, because they were lifted beyond its physical periphery.

"And Yisro rejoiced over all the good which Hashem had done for Yisrael." (18:9)

Rashi cites the *Talmud Sanhedrin 94a* which suggests that the word alludes to the word, prickles. The reference to prickles could have one of two connotations. They might be prickles of joy,

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indicating that Yisro was overwhelmed with happiness. Alternatively, they could be prickles of distress. Although Yisro was filled with happiness for the Jews, he still felt uneasy over what had happened to the Egyptians. *Chazal* go on to say that one should neither humiliate a gentile, nor speak disparagingly in the presence of a *ger*, convert, even up to ten generations after his conversion. **Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl**, notes that *Chazal* recognize a strong innate attachment to one's roots, to the point that ten generations later one might still be sensitive to a negative reference to his biological ancestors. Certain traits remain inherent in a person's character, unaffected by time or superficial environmental changes.

Horav Levenstein continues to posit that if we learn of *tzaros*, afflictions, which our brethren in another part of the community -- or anywhere in the world -- are enduring, we are responsible to act on their behalf. If we do not feel a strong sensitivity towards them, it is not simply a deficiency in the *middah* of *chesed*. Rather, it represents a blemish in our personality, a lack of human decency. A person should have a natural

inborn attachment to his own people. If he does not, if he has somehow divorced himself from his heritage, then he is not a *mentch*! He is missing that ingredient which determines his ability to be an *adam*, a connected human being.

"And the father-in-law of Moshe said to him, 'The thing that you do is not good. You will surely become worn out - you as well as this people that is with you... Now listen to my voice. I will advise you and may Hashem be with you.'" (18:17,18)

Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, gave him advice which was included in the *Torah*, setting the standard for the entire judicial system in *Klal Yisrael*. Was this advice so unique that Moshe could not have thought of it? Why did Moshe not suggest appointing officers for individual groups? What happened to the *zekeinim*, elders, who probably had served as magistrates in Egypt?

Horav Avigdor Miller, Shlita, establishes two reasons for Moshe's initial reluctance to employing the old system - in which appointed magistrates rendered decisions instead of Moshe himself. First, the original code of laws had been based primarily upon human logic, a system which would now cede to Divine dictate. This change in directive would effect a transformation in everyone's lifestyle, a transition - which Moshe predicted would present difficulties. Moshe would train new judges, imbuing them with a different type of approach - *Torah* logic. Everything was to be framed by a new form of reasoning, one that would supersede any previous form of human dialectic. This plan motivated Moshe to take the unusual step of temporarily proclaiming himself the sole interpreter and adjudicator of the law, until others that he had trained were ready to establish their new roles.

Second, Moshe's goal was to teach the people to govern themselves without coercion from higher authorities. To be a *mamleches Kohanim*, a nation of priests, means that the people have an inborn nobility, conscience and self-esteem. It was not Moshe's intent for *Bnei Yisrael* to be scrutinized by a system of magistrates unless it was necessary. A nation of "priests" should be predisposed to self-government.

Yisro once again countered pragmatically. Moshe would be correct in establishing a system of self-government if these people had not recently begun to live by a totally new and unfamiliar set of laws. These people had previously been permitted to eat whatever they pleased, and to perform labor during all seven days of the week; they were not prepared to obligate themselves to these new laws in a

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vacuum. They required encouragement and supervision in order to prepare to become a great and noble nation. Moshe understood all of this. Hashem gave Yisro the honor of voicing that which Moshe himself understood.

"I am Hashem your G-d Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt." (20:2)

The **Kuzari** explains why Hashem identifies Himself as the one Who took us out of Egypt, rather than as the Creator of the universe. The Exodus was a phenomenon that was clear for all to see. Hundred of thousands of Jews witnessed this unprecedented break with the course of natural events. While everyone was aware that there had been a creation, no man had been present. It, therefore, makes sense to refer to an event that would have greater credibility in the eyes of man.

Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, offers an interesting response to this famous question. He claims that it simply is not necessary for the *Torah* to inform us that Hashem created the universe. After all, who else could have created it? Surely we did not create it! He cites the **Chafetz Chaim** who relates an analogy in the name of the **Dubno Maggid**. Two people were traveling together when one checked his wallet and discovered that his money was missing. Immediately, he grabbed hold of his companion and demanded that he return his money. "Why do you accuse me?" screamed the companion. "What proof do you have that I stole your money? Did you see me in the act of stealing?" The victim responded emphatically, "Why do I have to produce proof? Who else could it have been? Obviously I did not steal from myself. By default, it must have been you."

The same concept applies to *Brias Ha'Olam*, the creation of the world. Man did not do it, so it makes sense that Hashem was the Creator of the world. When we are addressing the areas of human endeavor, we are making ourselves vulnerable to problems. We might forget about the "Hashem factor" in the miracles which we perceive. People often overlook Hashem, forgetting that it was He Who wrought the miracles, He Who brought about the healing, He Who saved us from disaster. It was necessary for Hashem to declare to *Bnei Yisrael*, "It was I Who took you out of Egypt," in order to ensure that we do not err in believing that human intervention was responsible for *Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

"For in order to elevate you Hashem has come." (20:17).

The word "*nasos*" is translated by *Rashi* as "to elevate." The fact that Hashem Himself has revealed Himself to you will elevate your position in the eyes of the nations. The *Rambam* and *Ramban* translate the word "*nasos*" as "to test." Hashem has come to test *Bnei Yisrael*. They differ, however, in regard to the time of this trial. According to the *Ramban*, the emphasis is upon the present. Hashem is telling *Bnei Yisrael*, "At *Har Sinai*, you were thoroughly prepared to meet Hashem. You had no doubt concerning His sovereignty. Now we will see if you will pass the test. Will you observe His *mitzvos*? Will you love Him? Will you repay His kindness to you?" The *Rambam*, on the other hand, feels that the test will occur in the future. The unprecedented events which took place on *Har Sinai*, the unparalleled experience of which *Bnei Yisrael* were a part, should have galvanized their trust in Hashem, so that they will be able to overcome the challenges of the future. Nothing should be able to undermine *Bnei Yisrael's* faith in the Almighty.

According to the *Rambam*, the experience has strengthened *Bnei Yisrael*, tempering their faith.

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They should have developed the fortitude to withstand all challenges to their faith.

The *Ramban* posits a different idea. His statement, "Will you repay His kindness to you?" implies that we owe loyalty to Hashem. Without a sense of *hakoras ha'tov*, appreciation and gratitude, we have no relationship with Hashem. *Horav Yitzchok Hutner, zl*, derives a fascinating lesson from the *Ramban*. We have always placed *hakoras ha'tov* among the fundamental character traits that a decent human being must possess. A noted axiom of *Chazal* is that "*derech erez kadmah la'Torah*," character development, moral and ethical behavior, are pre-requisites to *Torah* study. Gratitude to Hashem is no different. Before one can properly study *Torah*, he must be refined in *middos*. *Hakoras hatov* to Hashem should be no different.

We glean a more profound aspect to this expectation from the *Ramban*. Hashem arranged the revelation at *Har Sinai* as a test to see if *Bnei Yisrael* would repay His kindness to them. *Hakoras ha'tov* is not simply a character trait - it is the foundation for establishing *avodas Hashem*, it is a pre-requisite for serving Hashem. Indeed, Hashem brought about the entire spectacle of *maamad Har Sinai* as a test, to assess *Bnei Yisrael's* level of gratitude. If they are lacking in their sense of appreciation, then their relationship with Hashem will accordingly be inadequate.

"And wherever I permit my Name to be mentioned I shall come to you and bless you." (20:21)

It is significant that this *pasuk* follows immediately after the *Har Sinai* experience. No code of law, regardless of man's acquiescence, will be binding - unless he views that law as the direct result of the spiritual foundation of life. *Horav Moshe Swift, zl*, cites the *Talmud Succah 53a* which quotes Hillel's interpretation of this *pasuk*. "*If you will come into My House, I will come into yours.*" Hashem tells *Bnei Yisrael* that My relationship with you is not merely a reward. It is the product of a natural sequence of events. If you will come to Me - I will come to you. If you will mention My Name and make Me the basis of your life, I will reciprocate with reward and blessing.

Horav Swift continues with an exposition on the concept of prayer, indicating the appropriate approach toward reaching Hashem via the medium of prayer. The essence of prayer is not merely supplication. Rather, prayer represents the establishment of a relationship between man and Hashem. It shapes the spiritual basis of life. It is the foundation upon which one builds his day. Prayer used to be a uniquely spiritual experience in which one could pour his heart out to Hashem in praise, in joy and in sorrow. Through the vehicle of prayer, we have brought Hashem into every aspect of our lives. Morning, afternoon, evening, *Shabbos*, *Yom Tov*, the various milestone occasions of the life-cycle, all these are included in our *Siddur*. Our prayer book is our guide in offering praise to Hashem during all the moments of our life.

Regrettably, prayer has taken on a new form. It has become self-centered. We petition Hashem when we are in need. We pray with *kavanah*, proper intention, only when we need something from Hashem. We complete our prayers and wait to see if they have been effective. Jewish prayer means much more than praying for health during moments of illness, peace when we are at war, sustenance when our situation is bleak. Prayer is the communion between man and Hashem. Man offers praise as he proclaims the sovereignty of Hashem. He feels "good" knowing that he has just spoken to his Creator. He has poured out his heart to Him, rendering praise as well as supplication. He has, however, communicated for the primary purpose of relating to his Father in Heaven. Hashem asks that we come to Him, and He will then respond to us. Only after we establish a relationship, can we petition for

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favours.

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