

In this week's *Parashah*, we read (for the second time) of the giving of the *Aseret Ha'dibrot* / Ten Commandments. The *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 31a) relates: When *Hashem* said, "I am *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery," the nations said, "He is concerned with His honor." When he said, "You shall not recognize the gods of others in My Presence," they said again, "He is concerned with His honor." This continued until He said, "Honor your father and your mother." Then, the nations acknowledged the legitimacy of the earlier commandments. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Nosson Lewin *z"l* (1857-1926; rabbi of Rzeszów, Poland) asks: Could anyone really think that *Hashem* needs respect from the puny creature--man--that He created? Of course not! Rather, R' Lewin explains, this is a parable meant to teach us a lesson--that *Hashem* did not give us the Torah only to tell us what our obligations are to Him. Instead, He is also teaching us a way of life that will make organized society and the existence of nations possible.

This way of life, writes R' Lewin, begins with honoring parents. Even those nations that could not fathom the great spiritual heights to which a person can rise when he believes in "I am *Hashem*, your *Elokim*" and "You shall not recognize the gods of others" could acknowledge the benefits of the Torah's laws between man and his fellow--the first of which is the *Mitzvah* to honor parents. (*Petach Ha'bayit* to *She'eilot U'teshuvot Bet Yitzchak: Choshen Mishpat*)

Shabbat

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 118b) teaches: If only the Jewish People would observe two *Shabbatot* in accordance with law, they would be redeemed immediately, as it is written (*Yeshayah* 56:4, 7-8--in the *Haftarah* for Fast Day afternoons), "For so says *Hashem* to the barren ones who observe My Sabbaths, . . . 'I shall bring them to My holy mountain, and I shall gladden them in My house of prayer . . .' The words of *Hashem Elokim*, Who gathers in the dispersed of *Yisrael* . . ." [Until here from the *Gemara*]

Why will observing two *Shabbatot* bring about the redemption?

R' Yehuda Loewe *z"l* (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) explains: *Shabbat* is unique among the days, and *Yisrael* / the Jewish People is unique among the nations. Thus, *Shabbat* was given to *Yisrael* alone, and not to any other nation. *Shabbat* is elevated above all other days. If we would observe *Shabbat*, we would be elevated with it and we would be redeemed.

Also, *Maharal* writes, *Shabbat* is the "completion" of the Jewish People. When a person is burdened with physical toil and unable to find rest, he is incomplete. On *Shabbat*, however, a Jew can be complete. This is the idea of the "*Neshamah Yeteirah*" / "extra soul" that a Jew receives on *Shabbat*. And, when we are "complete," we are ready to be redeemed.

Why, then, is it necessary to observe two *Shabbatot* to achieve redemption? *Maharal* explains: In exile, the Jewish People are subdued by the nations. Observing one *Shabbat* is sufficient to elevate us out of that lowly state, but a second *Shabbat* must be observed to raise us to the lofty level where we are ready to be redeemed. (*Chiddushei Aggadot*)

R' Tzaddok Hakohen Rabinowitz *z"l* (1823-1900; *Chassidic Rebbe* in Lublin, Poland) writes: *Shabbat* is sanctified directly by *Hashem*. By observing a first *Shabbat*, we would bask in its G-d-given holiness. This would, in turn, give us the tools to sanctify the following workweek. Having sanctified the workweek, we could then sanctify the next *Shabbat* through our own efforts. With that, we would attain the pinnacle of holiness, which would free us from the *Yetzer Ha'ra* and from all forms of subjugation in this world that are inimical to true "rest."

(*Pri Tzaddik: Kedushat Shabbat* 2:6)

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“You shall love Hashem, your Elokim, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources.” (6:5)

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 61b) relates: The hour when the Romans took Rabbi Akiva out to be killed was the time to recite *Kri'at Shema*. As they were torturing him, he was accepting the yoke of Heaven upon himself [*i.e.*, he was reciting *Shema Yisrael*]. His students asked him, “Even this [you accept without complaints]?” Rabbi Akiva answered, “All my life I was pained by the words, ‘With all your soul’--which our Sages interpret, ‘Even if He takes your soul.’ I said, ‘When will I have the opportunity to fulfill this commandment?!’ Now that I have the opportunity, should I not take it?” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Yosef Yozel Horowitz z”l (1847-1919; the *Alter* of Novardok) writes: Rabbi Akiva was prepared to give everything, even his life, for *Hashem* because he recognized how much *Hashem* had given him. This is not true of most people, as the *Gemara* (*Niddah* 31a) teaches: “The beneficiary of a miracle does not recognize that a miracle was done for him.” Most of the time, we are unaware when we are in danger, whether physical or spiritual; therefore, we do not recognize that we are saved.

We read (*Mishlei* 6:23), “For a *Mitzvah* is a lamp and the Torah is light, and *Mussar* / reproving discipline is the way of life.” The *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni* explains by way of a parable: A man walking in the darkness of night must worry about thorns and thistles, wild animals, and thieves, and he does not know which way to go. When he reaches a crossroads, he is saved [Until here from the *Midrash*]. The *Alter* quotes R’ Eliyahu z”l (1720-1797; the *Vilna Gaon*), who writes: Our material world can cause a person spiritual harm in three ways--it can keep him so busy that he has no time for spiritual pursuits, it can place prohibited temptations in front of him, and it can distract him from finding the true path to character perfection. As long as he is far from Torah, he is in danger of erring, as the *Midrash* says. But, when he reaches the crossroads, *i.e.*, when *Mussar* puts him on the correct path, then he will be saved from spiritual ills. Until then, however, he does not even realize the danger he was in.

Similarly, with regard to physical dangers: The *Gemara* (*Arachin* 16b) teaches, “What is considered suffering [that can atone for a person’s sins]? Reaching into one’s pocket to retrieve three coins and coming up with only two.” If a person did not experience seemingly trivial inconveniences like this, he would never even know he was being judged for his sins, and he would not know that he was being saved from a worse fate.

(*Madreigat Ha’adam: Ma’amar Yir’ah Ve’ahavah* ch. 17)

“Honor your father and your mother . . .” (5:16)

We read (*Mishlei* 1:8), “Hear, my child, the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the teaching of your mother.” On this, a *Midrash* comments: Do not forsake the discipline you were given at Sinai regarding honoring your parents. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Eliyahu Hakohen z”l (1640-1729; Izmir, Turkey; prolific author) explains: Honoring parents is a common sense *Mitzvah*. Nevertheless, the *Midrash* is teaching, do not honor your parents because doing so makes sense to you. Rather, do it solely because that is what *Hashem* commanded us at Sinai.

(*Midrash Talipot: Anaf Av Va’em*)

“Who will make it that this heart of theirs will continue to fear Me and observe all My commandments all the days . . . ?” (5:26)

The *Gemara* (*Avodah Zarah* 5a) relates: Moshe said to *Bnei Yisrael*, “Ingrates the children of ingrates! When *Hashem* said, “‘Who will make it . . . ?’ you should have responded, “‘You should make it so!’” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Daniel Haymann *shlita* (Tel Zion, Israel) writes: Granted that *Bnei Yisrael* should have responded thus, but why does Moshe call them “ingrates”? He cites three explanations from earlier commentaries:

First, *Bnei Yisrael* did not respond, “You should make it so” because they did not want to feel indebted to *Hashem*; they did not want to owe Him gratitude.

Second, *Bnei Yisrael* did not make this request of *Hashem* because they failed to recognize and be grateful for all of the goodness He had done for them until that point. This was reflected in their failure to ask for more goodness.

Third, *Bnei Yisrael* did not view it as being a good thing if *Hashem* would implant fear of Heaven in them. They were considered ungrateful for not appreciating that potential gift.

R’ Haymann notes that there is a novelty in the third answer. We might have thought that not recognizing the beauty of a gift is simply foolishness. No! say the commentaries. That failure originates from a character flaw.

(*Hakarat Ha’tov Ke’halachah* p.26)

“If your child asks you tomorrow, saying, ‘What are the testimonies and decrees and ordinances that Hashem, our Elokim, commanded you?’” (6:20)

In the *Pesach Haggadah*, this question is attributed to the wise son. What distinguishes him from the wicked son, who also asks why we perform *Mitzvot*? R’ Gedaliah Silverstone z”l (1871-1944; rabbi in Belfast, Ireland and Washington, D.C.) explains: The wise son asks “tomorrow,” *i.e.*, he performs the *Mitzvot* as he is taught, whether he understands them or not. Not so the wicked son; he demands to know now, before he agrees to perform the *Mitzvah*, what the purpose of the *Mitzvah* is.

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Korban Pesach* [2nd ed.] p.24)