

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

FEBRUARY 6, 2021

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Malka ben Rav Kalman z"l.

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 17

Sponsored by Kalman & Chana Finkel. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

24 SHEVAT

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS YISRO

Struggling to Accept

Yisro, the minister of Midian and father in law of Moshe, heard all that God did for Moshe and Yisroel... (18:1)

This week's *parsha* opens with Yisro reacting to the news of what Hashem had done for Moshe and Bnei Yisroel. The first words in the *parsha* are, "וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ" and both Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonasan translate the words as "and Yisro heard." Later on in the *parsha*, when Yisro offers a management solution to the overburdened justice system, the Torah says "וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה" which both Targumim translate as "וַיִּקְבַּל מֹשֶׁה" — "and Moshe accepted."

This difference in the translation of the word "וַיִּשְׁמַע" is only natural. When it occurs by Yisro, it is referring to the accounting of the incidents that Yisro had heard. By Moshe the word is referring to his reaction to the solution that Yisro had proffered to resolve an overworked justice system; therefore the Targumim translate it as "accepted" because the Torah means

to inform us that Moshe valued Yisro's solution and agreed to implement his innovative design for the court system.

Yet in Aramaic the word "קבל" has another meaning, "to complain." Meaning, the word for accepting and complaining is the same. This is difficult to understand. A complaint is a personal rejection of an idea or situation; it is the opposite of acceptance. So what is the relationship between these concepts that allows one word to have two seemingly opposite meanings?

As discussed in prior editions of INSIGHTS, Aramaic is the language of understanding another perspective. Perhaps we can discern from here the process of accepting a new idea. In other words, if one just "hears" an idea, it likely will simply pass through his or her mind with little long



term effect. In order to really internalize an idea, especially one that is personally challenging, we must first begin by resisting it.

If we don't start the process of consideration of a new concept by intensely questioning and struggling to see if it's right for us, we aren't really opening ourselves to fully incorporating the concept into our lives in a meaningful way. Once we overcome our resistance, we are then open to acceptance. This is the process known as free will. Meaning, this struggle to decide what we want to do is the process of exercising of our free will, which is a key element in the purpose of creation. This is why the story of Hashem giving Bnei Yisroel the Torah is called *Kabolas HaTorah*.

Did You Know...

This week's *parsha* contains one of the most memorable events in Jewish history — that of our people standing at the base of Mount Sinai and receiving the Torah. Many incredible events transpired on that day, and perhaps the greatest of them all was when Hashem spoke to us and started telling us the Ten Commandments.

1. Rashi, in this week's *parsha* (24:12), tells us something quite fascinating. He quotes a Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:16) and says that included within these Ten Commandments, are all 613 *mitzvos*. How you ask? Well, we aren't entirely sure, but the very same Rashi

(24:12) points us in the direction of R' Saadia Gaon — who actually showed how each and every *mitzvah* fits into these Ten Commandments in the *Azharos* (poems written by Geonim on the 613 *mitzvos*) he composed.

2. The Midrash (ad loc.) further tells us that there are actually 620 letters within the Ten Commandments, 613 of them alluding to the 613 *mitzvos*, and the remaining seven as an allusion to the seven days of creation. This connection to creation is to show that the world was created for Torah.
3. The *gematria* (numerical value) of the word Torah is 611. This alludes to the verse "Torah Tziva Lanu Moshe —

Moshe charged us with the Torah," referring to the fact that the first two of the Ten Commandments were said to us by Hashem Himself. Unfortunately, Bnei Yisroel couldn't handle that level of revelation of Hashem (their souls left them as they yearned to return to connect to their Creator). So Moshe taught Bnei Yisroel the rest — 611 *mitzvos* (the numerical value of Torah).

4. Regarding the *luchos*, the Gemara (*Nedarim* 38a) tells us that their dimensions were six *tefachim* by six *tefachim*, and three *tefachim* thick. In today's measurements, this would be approximately two feet by two feet,

Highly Pleasurable

Yisro, the father in law of Moshe, took a burnt offering and a peace offering for God; and Aharon and all the elders of Yisroel came to eat bread with the father in law of Moshe before God (18:12).

Rashi (ad loc) comments on the last words of this *possuk* (i.e. “before God”): From here we see that one who partakes of a meal at which Torah scholars participate is as if he has taken pleasure from the splendor of the Divine presence.

Rashi here is consistent with his commentary on the Talmud (*Berachos* 63b). The Gemara there states that King Shaul, on the eve of attacking the nation of Amalek, warns the nation of Keinites to withdraw from the midst of the Amalekites or risk being eradicated along with the Amalekites. The Gemara quotes Shaul who explains the reason he allowed them to escape the fate of the Amalekites: “For you have done a kindness with the entire nation of Yisroel.” The Gemara goes on to explain that their forefather Yisro had hosted Moshe and that was their merit. In fact, the Gemara concludes with, “Yisro, who only connected himself to Moshe for his own personal honor, receives such a great merit (that his descendants are spared), how much more so an individual who hosts a Torah scholar in his home and provides him with food and drink and benefits him from his possessions, how much more so!”

Rashi (ad loc) explains the kindness that Yisro did refers to the story in our *parsha* whereby Yisro invites Aharon and the elders to partake in his meal. Maharsha (ad loc) questions Rashi’s interpretation by noting that, in this week’s *parsha*, Yisro had actually come to visit Moshe. In other words, Yisro was a guest himself, not a host! Maharsha therefore gives an alternate explanation: Yisro’s merit was actually from hosting Moshe when he was an escaped convict from Egypt. The kindness that Yisro showed him at that time was later repaid by King Shaul to his descendants. In truth, Maharsha’s explanation also seems to fit the simple

reading of the Gemara, for it makes no mention of Aharon and the elders of Yisroel. Why does Rashi feel compelled to explain Yisro’s merit from the story in our *parsha*?

Rambam in the *Yad* (*Hilchos Dayos* 6:2) rules: “There is a *mitzvah* to cleave to Torah scholars and their students so that one may learn from their actions, as the verse states, ‘and to Him you shall cleave.’ By cleaving to Torah scholars, one cleaves to Hashem.” In other words, socializing with Torah scholars is a specific commandment that is related to cleaving to Hashem.

Maharsha seems to understand that the Gemara is referring to the *mitzvah* of *hachnosas orchim* – hosting guests. But this is difficult to understand. The *mitzvah* of *hachnosas orchim* is derived from Avraham Avinu hosting the “three Arabs” that he found on the road outside his tent. We don’t find that there is a bigger *mitzvah* for welcoming guests who are Torah scholars.

In fact, a careful reading of the Gemara reveals why Rashi doesn’t agree with Maharsha’s interpretation. The Gemara makes a very clear statement about the value of hosting a Torah scholar and benefitting him from one’s possessions. This doesn’t fall under the category of hosting guests, this falls under the *mitzvah* of cleaving to Hashem. That is why the verse in our *parsha* ends with the words “before God.” When Yisro invited Aharon and the elder of Yisroel to partake in his meal he was displaying his desire to be connected with Hashem.

On the other hand, when Yisro offered Moshe refuge by inviting him into his home when he was a stranger in Midian, it was a *mitzvah* of *hachnosas orchim*. At that time, Yisro wasn’t inviting Moshe as a

means of connecting to Hashem. In our *parsha*, Yisro becomes a convert. Thus the significance of this message is conveyed specifically through Yisro, for a convert is uniquely positioned to attest to the Torah’s ability to transform a person into a Godly being. He himself has become a new person through his commitment to Torah. Therefore, he is the most sensitive to the changes in others through Torah study. He understands that Torah scholars become Godly through their commitment to Torah, and cleaving to them is the way to cleave to Hashem.

and one foot thick. Visually, this would be two completely square blocks that would actually form a perfect cube if combined. This should dispel the common misperception that the *luchos* were rounded off on top – a mistake probably brought into our cultural consciousness by uninformed artists.

5. The *luchos* were made of sapphire, making them incredibly heavy. Of course, we cannot know exactly how much they weighed, as we don’t know exactly how much was carved out for the words, but together they would have weighed somewhere around 640 pounds, making lifting them a mighty feat indeed.
6. There is some discussion that the first *luchos*, being from Hashem, had the entire Torah on it, while the second ones simply had the Ten Commandments (*Beis Halevi Derush* #18). However, there is an opinion in the Midrash (quoted ad loc.) stating that even in the second *luchos*, after each commandment, every *parsha* and detail regarding that commandment was written.

