Overview

Hearing of the miracles Hashem performed for Bnei Yisrael, Moshe’s father-in-law Yisro arrives with Moshe’s wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yisro is so impressed by Moshe’s detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts and joins the Jewish People. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yisro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate the smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. The Bnei Yisro arrive at Mt. Sinai where the Torah is offered to them. After they accept, Hashem charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain, and to prepare themselves for three days in order to receive the Torah. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, Hashem’s voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving to them the Ten Commandments:

1. Believe in Hashem
2. Don’t have other gods
3. Don’t use Hashem’s name in vain
4. Observe the Shabbos
5. Honor your parents
6. Don’t murder
7. Don’t commit adultery
8. Don’t kidnap
9. Don’t testify falsely
10. Don’t covet

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay Hashem’s word to them. Hashem instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them. 

Insights

PRIDE AND PRIVILEGE

“These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel.” (19:6)

Rashi: “These words — no less and no more.”

We live in a world where inflation is an everyday part of life. But there’s one thing that’s inflation-proof. There’s one thing that costs exactly the same today as it did three thousand years ago.

Being Jewish, you can join the Jewish People today for exactly the same price as three thousand years ago — accepting the Torah and the mitzvos.

Anyone can become Jewish if they want to.

The enemies of the Jewish People accuse the Torah of being racist, setting the Jewish People apart as a treasured people and a holy nation. But how can Judaism be racist and exclusive if anyone can join?

It’s true, the Jewish People are privileged: They have a special place in the purpose of Creation, to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” With every privilege, however, comes responsibility.

Rashi tells us that the above command, to speak “these words” to the Children of Israel, contains an implicit mandate not to add or subtract from Hashem’s words.

However, the Sages tell us that Hashem instructed Moshe to convey the Torah in different ways to different sectors of the Jewish People: For example, when speaking to some people, Moshe was to use gentle words. When speaking to others, Moshe was to use language as tough as sinew.

So how could Moshe on the one hand not change a word, and on the other hand vary his words to suit his audience?

When the Jewish People heard “And you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” some heard these as gentle words, words alluding to the glowing reward of such an exalted mission. Others heard these same words, but they heard them as words bespeaking a destiny as tough as sinew. For to be a holy nation and a treasured people is a responsibility of awesome proportions.

Privilege comes only at a price.

THE HUMAN JUNGLE

“And G-d spoke all these words saying...” (20:1)

Why were the Ten Commandments given on two tablets of stone? Why wasn’t one enough?

There’s a difference between the five mitzvos on the first tablet and the five on the second tablet: Included with the mitzvos on the first tablet is the reward for keeping them and the punishment for failing to keep them. On the second tablet, the mitzvos are stated without mention of reward and punishment.

The first five are mitzvos where a person honors the Creator: Believing in Hashem, not making idols, not using Hashem’s name for no purpose, observing Shabbos. Thus these first commandments are accompanied by descriptions of reward and punishment.

The second group of five commandments are for the benefit of people. The prohibitions against murder, kidnapping, adultery and false testimony are fundamental to living in peace with society.

Their mere performance is their own reward. Failing to observe them creates a society which is little more than a jungle — and that’s punishment enough in itself.
**Haftorah: Yeshayahu 6:1-13, 7:1-6, 9:5,6**

We say "They (the angels) call one to another and say 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the L-rd of Hosts. The whole world is filled with His Glory.'" 

Man is not an angel. When the angels say kedusha, they begin by calling to each other as if to say “You go first because you are greater than me.” To which comes the reply “No, you are greater than me!” Finally, they all praise Hashem together. The angels repeat the word “holy” three times. Anything which is done three times has permanence and perpetuity. Thus the angels never cease saying “holy,” for Hashem is infinitely Holy.

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**A SACRED BIRTHRIGHT**

The most sacred part of the Beis Hamikdash was in the portion belonging to the Tribe of Binyamin. Since this included the Holy of Holies and the Holy Ark, Binyamin is referred to as “the host of the Divine Presence.” Why did Binyamin merit that the Divine Presence should be in his portion? Because all the other sons of Yaakov were born outside of Eretz Yisrael. Only Binyamin was born in Eretz Yisrael.

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**Parshas Yisro**

**For the week ending 18 Shevat 5758, 13 & 14 February 1998**

**Sources:**
- Pride And Prejudice - Sfas Emes
- The Human Jungle - Ramban
- He Ain't Heavy - The Dubner Maggid
- Winning And Dining - Toldos Yaakov Yosef
- The Rules Of The Game - Rabbi Yehoshua Hartman