

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 Yisrael* 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

A FREE RIDE

"You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me. And now, if you hearken well to Me and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples..." (19:4)

When a person first becomes religious, he gets tremendous help from Upstairs. He finds himself excited about every new religious experience: He leaps out of bed to put on tefillin (even when it's Shabbos). He can't wait to eat *matza*, shake the *lulav*, sit in the *succah*, and even fast on Yom Kippur.

They say that every *ba'al teshuva* (newly observant person) eventually becomes an FFB (observant from birth). All of a sudden, he can't get up in the morning. He drags himself out of bed, shooting an angry glance at the alarm clock, and manages to make the last minyan in the synagogue. He finds himself mouthing blessings without thought. His mind wanders all over the place when he's praying. The luster seems to have worn off.

When a baby starts to walk, its parents stand over it making sure that it doesn't fall. However, eventually, the parents withdraw their protection. If they didn't, the child would never learn to walk. The same is true in the spiritual world. G-d is our Father. He gives us help in our first stumblings toward Him, as a parent does to a child. And just as a parent withdraws his help so a child may achieve independence, so G-d eventually withdraws His special assistance so that we may make spirituality our own.

On the surface, the above verse *"You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me"* doesn't seem to have a lot to do with *"And now, if you hearken well to*

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Me and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples." What's the connection?

When the Children of Israel first came out of Egypt they were on a spiritual free ride on the "wings of eagles." But in order for them to attain the exalted level that G-d wanted for them, G-d was ending that extra-special assistance. G-d was telling them "Now, if you will hearken well to Me and observe My covenant." Now, they would have to hearken well and observe the covenant. Now the real work was starting. The Children of Israel would have to become the owners of their spiritual maturity.

CHAPEL OF LOVE

"In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai. And they journeyed from Refidim and they came to Sinai." (19:1)

One of the characteristic features of our society is impulsiveness. Everything has to be instant. Instant coffee. Instant success. Instant gratification. Instant spirituality. Marriage is also instant. In certain states in the United States, you can walk in (probably by now it's drive-thru) to a marriage chapel. You look up above the door and see:

"If marriage is on your mind

You've hit the spot

Come right in and tie the knot!"

How different than the preeminent wedding, the union of G-d and the Jewish People under the *chupa* (wedding canopy) of Sinai!

"In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai. And they journeyed from Refidim and they came to Sinai."

There's something unusual about these two verses. Why doesn't the Torah tell us where the Jewish People came from before it tells us where they arrived? The verse really should have said *"In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, they journeyed from Refidim and arrived at the wilderness of Sinai."*

When we long for something, all our focus is on where it will happen. We picture in our mind's eye what the place will look like, what the weather be like. Will there be trees? Will birds be singing? Things that lead up to the main event are subordinate in our minds. All our yearning is to be at the place where it will all happen.

The Torah is emphasizing here the *yearning* of the Jewish People to reach the appointed place for their union with G-d. Where they came from is almost irrelevant. Where they had arrived is essential.

The Torah is inevitable. The Torah is the only thing in this world that *has* to be. Just as the Torah has to be, its giving has to be in a way which was also inevitable. It could have no aspect of happenstance or casualness.

"In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai." The first verse doesn't mention where the Jewish People came from, so no one should say that Jewish People entered into a union with G-d by way of happenstance. No one should say that they were journeying from one place to another place and G-d just happened to put up the *chupa* and give them the Torah at Sinai; that Sinai was just another stop on the route. No. The exact time and place of the giving of the Torah are as immutable and inevitable as its very giving.

THE PRINCESS AND THE MERCEDES

"You shall not covet." (19:14)

How is it possible to command people not to covet? Coveting is a knee-jerk reaction, isn't it? You see someone driving along in Mercedes 500LS and before you can even think twice, your envy-glands go into overdrive. Covetousness is a reflex, isn't it? It's not in the domain of intellectual control, is it?

Once there was a peasant who stood in line all day to see the king pass by. At last, the royal procession drew close. He craned his neck to catch a glimpse of the royal countenance. Immediately behind the king stood the crown princess. The peasant was stunned. The princess was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She had delicate pale features. All the women he knew had coarse sun-browned skin and bad teeth. A peasant's life is not conducive to physical beauty. However, despite the princess's exquisite appearance, not for one moment did the peasant desire or covet her. She was someone so above his station in life, that it never entered his mind that he was even in the same world as her. She remained an ethereal unreality in another cosmos.

The root of all desire is the unconscious assumption we *could* have the object of our desire. If we feel that it's possible for us to have that thing, if we feel that it's within our orbit, the next step is to covet it. The mitzvah of not coveting tells us to look at someone else's Mercedes as a peasant looks at a princess.

Sources:

*A Free Ride – Netziv, as heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer
Chapel of Love - Gur Aryeh*

*The Princess and the Mercedes - Ibn Ezra, as heard from
Rabbi Moshe Zauderer*

Haftorah: Yishayahu 6:1-13, 7:1-6, 9:5,6

The revelation of the *Shechina* (the Divine Presence) at Sinai, the subject of this week's Parsha, is mirrored in the Haftorah by a revelation of the *Shechina* to the prophet Yishayahu.

No, No, AFTER YOU...

The nature of most people is to want to be first. To demonstrate their superiority over others. This is the driving force behind the desire to have money and power. I'm better than you! *You* go second!

And even when we allow others to go first, when we put them in front of ourselves, it's usually to demonstrate what elevated character traits we have — in other words — *elevated over you!*

In the *kedusha* (holiness) that we say at least twice a day, we borrow a prayer from the angels to magnify the glory of the Almighty.

We say "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the L-rd of Hosts. The whole world is filled with His Glory."

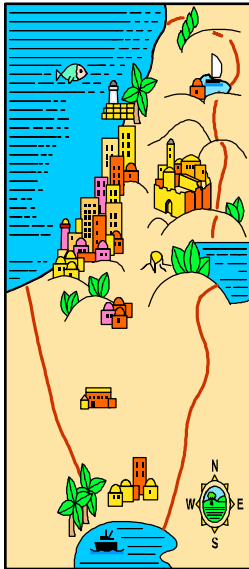
Man is not an angel. When the angels say *kedusha*, they begin by calling to each other, as if to say "*You go first, because you are greater than me.*" To which comes the reply "*No, you are greater than me!*" Finally, they all praise Hashem together.

The angels repeat the word "holy" three times. Anything done three times is considered to have permanence and perpetuity. Thus the angels never cease saying "holy," for Hashem is infinitely Holy.

Based on the Midrash

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



TIBERIAS (TEVERIYA)

This famous city on the shores of Lake Kinneret, sometimes referred to as the Capital of Galilee, has an interesting history surrounding both its name and its destiny.

There are different versions in our classical sources regarding the source of the name Tiberias. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah 23:1*) attributes it to the Roman Emperor Tiberius who named it in his honor. In the Talmud (*Megilah 6a*), however, the city's original name is given as Rakkat and the explanations offered for the Hebrew name Teveriya are that it is in the *tabur* — navel — of the land (for after the destruction of Jerusalem the main Jewish community was in Galilee) or that it is *tovah riyasah* — a beautiful sight.

Teveriya was the seat of great *yeshivos* and was the last station in the ten wanderings of the Sanhedrin. Our Sages (*Rosh Hashana 31a*) state that this represented the lowest point in the history of this august body (corresponding perhaps to its below sea-level depth) and that the redemption of Jewry will begin with the reestablishment of the Sanhedrin there before it returns to Jerusalem.

Modern Teveriya is a thriving Jewish community that attracts many local and foreign Jewish tourists who come to the Kinneret or to visit the tombs of Rabbi Meir, Maimonides and other distinguished *tzaddikim*.