

Parshat Yitro Interpersonal Injunctions

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Imagine a convention of the greatest *Torah* luminaries. The keynote speaker delivers his address: "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal..." Is this not something every one of those scholars already knows? Yet this is the metaphor presented in Ruach Eliyahu as the scene for *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. Hashem gives over the Ten Commandments that appear to be self evident. Yet in fact much depth and wisdom lies beneath the surface. Rav Saadia Gaon postulates that each of the Ten Commandments are the heading of a full category of related commandments that constitute the 613 mitzvot.

It is important to acknowledge that the entire *Torah* is meant to increase *yirat shamayim*. The Malbim explains that although the five *dibrot bein adam l'chavero* all appear logical, unless their observance is based on a fear of Heaven, our human logic could easily be distorted by our human passions. The Malbim explains that all of the Commandments contain within them laws that encompass thought, action, or speech, thereby incorporating all aspects of human behavior. In the first five, we are commanded about belief in one God, abstaining from making a statue, honoring parents by serving them, speaking by reciting Kiddush, and remembering each day in reference to *Shabbos*. The latter five warn us first not to harm another through actions like murder and thievery. This is followed by speech, bearing false witness,

and finally controlling thought, coveting. These laws constitute the ethical minimum for peaceful social interaction, adds Rabbi Munk z"l.

Could not Hashem have created Man without a desire to steal or murder? The Lev Eliyahu explains, Hashem first wrote the Torah and then used it as a blueprint to create the world. Had He created Man without a *yetzer horo*, Man would not have had the ability to earn any reward. The only thing that would keep Man from following these negative urges is fear of God. Hashem wanted us to develop this trait within ourselves, and so He gave us the *yetzer horo*. We have the ability to soar to great heights, notes the Saba of Kelm z"l, but we have the equal ability to sink just as low. Rabbi Zaidel Epstein z"l and Rabbi Munk z"l, discuss the various actions and behaviours that are part of the prohibition of each of the commandments. For example, any behaviour which diverts the flow of blood, such as embarrassing someone, is a form of murder. Similarly, anything which may inadvertently cause someone's death, such as slander or bad advice, falls within this rubric.

Rabbi Sher z"l and Rabbi Svei z"l add that anything which lessens the dignity of another constitutes a form of stealing. For example, not returning someone's greeting, or texting while your neighbor (or your child) is trying to talk to you. If you have the ability to comfort another or to give encouragement and you fail to do

so, you're killing his ability for greatness and robbing him of dignity. Insincere flattery or leaving someone with a false impression of your actions, is *geneivat da'at*/stealing their mind (knowledge). If you're careless with someone else's property, you can easily end up stealing at least petty things. And you can steal someone's space, or, as Rabbi Rivlin z"l notes, you can steal someone's air by standing in the doorway and blocking the flow.

The Parsha concludes with Hashem telling *Bnei Yisroel* about building an altar. Included in the instructions are two prohibitions. You may not use any metal to hew the stones, for your sword shall desecrate it, and you shall not ascend the altar on steps, so that your nakedness will not be uncovered. With these injunctions, writes Rabbi Sher, z"l Hashem is telling us that any hint of indignity or of immodesty, must be avoided. To drive this point home, Hashem wanted to proclaim it from *Sinai*, loud and clear. The commandment against adultery includes all immodest behavior. Certainly the priests wore pants as they ascended the altar. Yet Hashem was concerned about the hint of immodesty by walking up steps. We can further expand on this idea by including immodest clothing, speech, magazines, or internet material. Hashem wanted to be very clear that the Ten Commandments are meant to impact every aspect of our lives, both in our relationship with Him and in our relationship to others.



The Ending of the Book Ohel Rachel

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Every home is a small kingdom. The Rambam teaches that a woman should view her husband as a king and follow the desires of his heart. The king within each person is the voice within him that says, "I want, I can, I'll build." This idea of inner kingship is not acknowledged in contemporary society. We live in a culture of blame where nobody is a king. Nobody has any real responsibility for who they are. The ideal is to believe one can be whatever one wants to be. Hashem put every possible choice in front of us and we can build.

A person's desires follow who it is they want to be. There could be many different aspects of self. The woman is meant to see the king in her husband. A person's desire is only relevant to something that he is ruling. When a woman hands her husband responsibility, a sense of, "You are the king, decide how you want it to be," she gives him inner strength to actualize his potential. If you put your husband in the driver's seat, he will start driving. If not, he won't. It says in Tehilim, "Hashem, with your strength you caused the king to rejoice by giving him the desires of his heart." A king is someone who knows what he really wants and is strong enough to make it happen. The husband must feel that he has a place where his feelings and his will is what's

leading. The more you give your husband the ability to lead, the more his faith in himself and the refinement of his vision will have him take responsibility for the home which is what you want. You don't want to be the husband and father. You want a partnership. But if you push him out there will be no partnership. A king's role is to know his kingdom, figure out its direction, and institute laws and decrees to give his vision direction. You don't want that role. It belongs to your husband. A king relates to his people like a heart relates to the limbs of the body. The heart of the king is the kingdom itself. This is why the kings of England would sign documents with the word England as though it was their own name.

It says concerning a king that he shouldn't have many wives in order that they not turn aside his heart. A wife is meant to take her husband's vision and give it direction. But if there are many wives each doing it their own way, the husband will not know who he is any longer. A king's success is dependent on whether his heart's desire and yearning are clear and can be fulfilled.

Most decisions a person makes are not black and white. They are related to a person's inner direction or heart. One's ability to rule comes from one's vision on how things should be. A person's will is their heart's desire and their

kavod (self respect). When you do what someone wants, that shows you have *kavod* for him. Conversely when you do what they don't want, you show that they have no *kavod* or *malchut*; which means you're eroding their ability to lead. This is most important in a person's own home. The king's heart is manifested by saying, "I care about my household. I know I can lead them." The heart affects the limbs, but there's no body without limbs being able to follow it and make it happen. Happiness in marriage is dependent on two things- the woman understanding her husband's heart, her ability to give over to him the *malchut*-the power to lead. And secondly, showing loyalty by being like the limbs that are in obedience to the heart.

The wife takes her husband's heart and brings it forth so that their life together is an expression of his deepest inner will. This is why it says in Eishet Chayil, "*Batach bah lev baaleh.*" The husband knows that his wife's heart is with his heart. He could trust her. Her entire value as a wife is knowing his heart and if she knows it, he's missing nothing. This is what the Rambam says, "And she goes according to the desires of his heart." It's the way a kingdom follows the king's heart, the way a *gabbai* follows his Rebbe. Together they can then create a perfect marriage.

Eishes Chayil Pasuk 1 Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Hochheimer

We need to respect our spouse's individuality. Being a partner doesn't mean judging our spouses, holding up standards for them, or telling them how to live their lives. When Sarah told Avraham about Yishmael she communicated what was right and wrong. There was no judgment, rather she stated the situation. In a relationship it is important that we accept our partners for who they are. We cannot change them. When Avraham and Sarah had a spiritual conflict, Hashem himself made the decision for them. Likewise, every couple should have a spiritual mentor, a person they respect who can act as a sounding board when conflicts arise. This doesn't replace our internal compass. Often our questions arise from that. But when we're emotionally invested in an argument, we need

a neutral party grounded in Torah who can look at the problem from an external perspective.

A couple should share a common vision and meaningful values. One value is not more important than another. It may just be a question how to prioritize them. There will be inevitable disagreements but if there are common goals, a couple can have a conversation based on values rather than on personalities.

The initial goal that were set at the beginning of the marriage can't stay stagnant. It needs to be revalued and revised based on new situations that come up. When we have honest and relevant goals rooted in a commitment to Hashem, we use that as a barometer as to

how things are going as opposed to externals in life that can change. If we have shared values that we keep reevaluating and we keep that as our focus when we make decisions, we can grow as opposed to getting into conflicts.

The life of Avraham and Sarah was one of shared goals and partnership and their ability to work together and transcend issues was remarkable. They represent a relationship more precious than pearls and we look to them as the ultimate role models. They had values and visions and they lived and breathed them thereby creating a nation. The Midrash teaches us that the *eishet chayil* doesn't exist in a vacuum. True greatness comes from partnering with one's spouse to create a home with shared spiritual goals.