

Protection and Promotion: Parshat Yitro

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

The most seminal event in Jewish history was God's revelation to us at Mount Sinai. [After God spoke the first two utterances], they trembled and said to Moses, 'You speak to us... Let God not speak lest we die.' Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear, for in order *lenasot etchem*/to test you/to elevate you has God come...How was this a test and what was its purpose? What is the connection between the two definitions of *lenasot*, testing and elevating?

The Ramban begins by citing Rambam that the trembling of *Bnei Yisroel* at hearing God's "voice" and surviving would strengthen them to survive any future challenges to their faith, for now they have heard the true voice of God. The Ramban then presents a different nuance to the test explaining that since this experience has removed any doubt about Hashem, Hashem wanted to see if we would observe His commandments through love, and resist the human temptation to sin.

Citing Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, *Letitcha Elyon* focuses on our emotional experience at Sinai at hearing the sounds, God's voice, seeing the smoke—the physical sensations created an emotional experience that we draw upon throughout our lives to strengthen our faith. The command to remember our standing at Sinai is means re-experiencing our emotions at that time, just as we are commanded to re-experience our personal redemption from as well. It is that Egypt. The Novominsker Rav adds, when we remember the experience, it will evoke the fear and awe we need to prevent us from sinning and to inspire us to learn *Torah* and do *mitzvot*. It is not a matter of knowing Hashem; we must feel His presence always beside us.

Withstanding this test now, at Sinai, would become embedded in our spiritual DNA, adds Rabbi Kofman citing *Kedushat Levi*. It would become part of our permanent connection to Hashem and if one can maintain that, one is

sure to get compassion and Divine assistance in his life.

Why did Hashem choose to give us the *Torah* under these frightening circumstances instead of through a soft and gentle touch, asks the Novominsker Rav? Because *Yiras Shamayim* is an absolute necessity for a relationship with Hashem and *Torah*. When one lives with this, one remains inspired by Hashem's constant presence, a knowledge that generates joy in one's life.

The entire purpose of *Torah* and *Torah* study is to bring us closer to the Giver of the *Torah*. It is this awe of Heaven that will bring us closer to the Giver of the *Torah*.

When a person lives a life where there is no contradiction between his life and *Torah*, he becomes a living *Torah*, teaches us Rabbi Hurwitz. You are not on that level? Rabbi Dessler suggests, act as if you are. Try saying "*Baruch Hashem*," "*Im Yirtzah Hashem*" and "*B'Ezras Hashem*" regularly. This bring awareness of Hashem into your routines. Rav Walkin recognizes that we all have ups and downs in our lives. There are times when we have complete clarity of Hashem's presence, similar to the clarity we experienced at Sinai. Keep them front and center and it will change your life and keep you from sin.

At Sinai, we witnessed Hashem's revelation to each of us. How great were we in Hashem's eyes that He deigned to appear to each of us personally. If Hashem valued each of us so highly, we too must value ourselves, writes Rabbi Wolbe.

Just as Hashem is unique, so has He created each of us unique. No one like me has ever existed before, with my path to glorify Hashem's Name, and no one like me will exist in the future, writes Rabbi Brazile. We must believe that the entire world was created for me, and its continued existence depends on my actions.

What stops us from reaching our potential? Our lack of clarity, a clarity we had before Adam's original sin. We reached that clarity again at Sinai, and we each have the ability even today to attain that clarity again by connecting to the inner royalty Hashem has implanted within us.

Rav Dovid Cohen suggests that the purpose of our experience at Sinai was to develop both *yirah* and *ahavah* for Hashem. Together they form the foundation of faith. The Gra says that the first two of the *dibrot* actually encompass all the *mitzvot*. The first encompasses all the positive commandments and represents all we do through love of Hashem. The second encompasses all the negative commandments and represents our obedience out of fear and awe. Therefore, it was sufficient for *Bnei Yisroel* to hear just these two commandments directly from Hashem. These two together epitomize the dual meaning of *lenasot* -- both to test and to elevate *Bnei Yisroel*, each enabling us to avoid sin.

Rabbi Hurwitz points out the synthesis of these two emotions. When one truly fears the Almighty, nothing else exists but Him, nothing can sever his relationship with God, a relationship that fills him with tremendous joy. He fears nothing else. Because He loves me, I want to make Him proud and not disappoint Him.

Tiv Hatorah explains how every challenge we face tests our *yirat Shamayim*. If we fail, we are embarrassed, but if we pass, we feel greater. Thus the fear has now created greater love both of Hashem and of self.

We are told that all Jewish souls were at Sinai and experienced the Divine revelation. Each Jewish soul was imprinted with both awe and love of Hashem, and each receives its uniqueness that elevates him and should bring him joy. Our task is to tap into that experience.

Shabbos

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

The Gemara says, "*Shamor v'zachor b'dibur echad- Shamor v'zachor* were both originally said simultaneously so that we would understand that they are one thing. *Shamor* means to guard and *zachor* is to remember. Hashem wanted the message of *Shabbat* to be remembered all week. *Zachor* is saying yes to all the positive *mitzvot* and to wanting connection, which comes from our inner capacity to discover the love of Hashem within us. *Shamor* is guarding ourselves, from

our need to take over and control, it's the source of all the negative *mitzvot*, saying no to our egos and desires. The 39 forbidden melachot are related to our recognizing Hashem as the ruler. There's no *zachor* without *shomer* because the ego is so overwhelming that we have to hear both at the same.

There are 613 *mitzvot*, *Klal Yisrael* heard 611 through Moshe, while the first two were heard directly from Hashem. The first, "*Onochi*

Hashem Elokecha," is the source of *ahavat Hashem* and all the positive *mitzvot*. The second, "*Lo yihyeh Elohim Acheirim*," is the source of all the negative *mitzvot*. The name *yud keh vav keh*, that Hashem is the source of all being, is what ignites love and corresponds to *zachor*. The name, *alef daled nun yud*, that Hashem is master over all, corresponds to *shamor*. The gematriya of these two names is 91. If one adds 91 to 611 it equals 702 which is the numerical value of *Shabbat*.

Lost Property-Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

The Gemara discusses a case of two friends who were traveling together through the desert. One was carrying a barrel of wine and the other was carrying a barrel of honey. We presume the honey was worth more than the wine. While they were walking, a crack developed in the honey barrel and it began dripping out. The wine owner, without being asked, poured out his wine and used his empty barrel to save the honey. Does the honey owner have to pay his friend for the wine? If the honey owner was present, and the wine owner made a condition with him that he would only throw out his wine if he was compensated, he must be paid back. If he didn't make that condition and the honey owner was present, and without being asked, he threw away his wine to save his friend's honey, he doesn't need to be compensated, as it is presumed he's relinquishing ownership of his wine. However, if at the time it happened the honey owner wasn't there, and the wine owner of his own volition threw out the wine, he would be compensated as we can presume that since the honey is worth more than wine, the honey owner would certainly agree to pay for the wine to save his honey.

Where the honey owner is present and he

asks the wine owner to throw out his wine offering to pay for it, then according to some opinions there's a *tenai beit din*, that the honey owner must throw out his honey to save his friend's wine. This is based on the principle that where a Jew will suffer a small loss to save his fellow Jew from suffering a larger loss and he will be compensated for it, he is obligated to do so.

Any honey that dripped out from the barrel becomes ownerless; seeing that it's lost, we presume the owner has relinquished ownership and anyone can take it. We can also apply this principle to a fire, earthquake or flood when people have to be evacuated and they have no possibility of saving their property. Just as in the case of the honey that dripped out, even though it hasn't been lost yet, we presume the owner relinquished ownership and it becomes ownerless. However, since according to the law of the land, this would be considering looting, it has the power of an accepted practice which must be upheld, and the property may not be taken.

Where a person will suffer a tremendous loss due to extortion, the Gemara allows the person to agree to pay the extortion price and when it comes time to pay, he can pay just the normal price. This only applies if he hasn't paid yet. If

he already paid, he would not be able to demand the money back. If you order a taxi to take you to the airport and you have only a half hour left to make the plane, if you expect the taxi driver to break the law to drive faster than normal, then he's justified in demanding a higher price. However, if he's driving normally and he sees you stuck in a bind and he demands a higher price, you would be allowed to agree and then pay the normal price. However, if you take a private driver, you would not be able to pay the normal price of a taxi. He could be a businessman who could be closing a million dollar deal in the time that he's losing to drive you. So here, you would have to pay the price he demands.

The *poskim* discuss different cases of when you would be required to pay extortion prices. In the case of a doctor who treats terminal illness, where that is the market price, one would be required to pay the fees he demands. If a car mechanic helps someone whose car got stuck on the way and he demands an exorbitant fee, you can agree and then pay the normal price. But if the price isn't so extortionist and he could have done other things in that time and he really does need the compensation for it to be worth his while, then you have to pay him the price he demands.