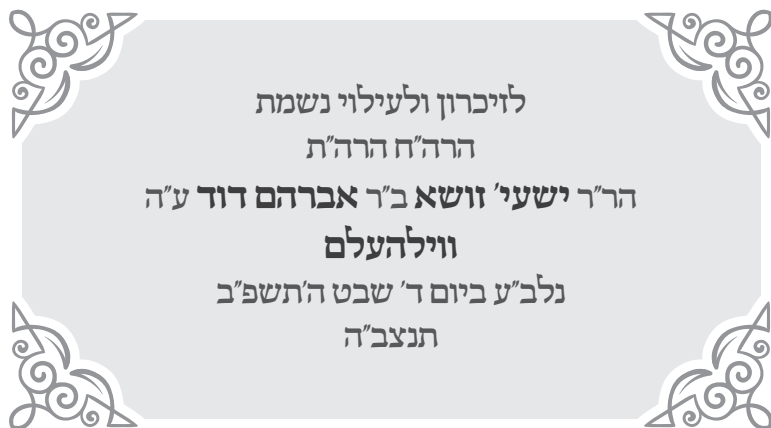


Yisro

THE WEISS EDITION

*Light
points*

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ON THE
WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



לזיכרון ולעילוי נשמת
הרה"ח הרה"ת
הר"ר ישעי' זושא ב"ר אברהם דוד ע"ה
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יתרו *Yisro*

יט:ב | 19:2

וַיַּחַן יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹגֵד הַהָר

And there Yisrael encamped opposite the mountain.

United: Verb or Adjective?

Bnei Yisrael's encampment opposite Mount Sinai is described by the Torah using the singular verb וַיַּחַן, “and *he* encamped.” Rashi explains that the singular form denotes that Bnei Yisrael camped at Sinai in perfect unison—“as one man, with one heart,” harmoniously readying themselves to receive the Torah.

Rashi offers a similar explanation on the verse “And behold, Egypt was advancing behind them,”¹ where the Torah uses the singular verb נִסְעָה to describe the thousands of Egyptians who pursued Bnei Yisrael after they left Egypt. There, too, Rashi explains that the Egyptians were unified—“with one heart, as one man”—in their pursuit of Bnei Yisrael. There is,

1. Shemos 14:10.

however, a noticeable difference between Rashi's explanations in these two places. Regarding the Egyptians, Rashi says that they were "with one heart, as one man," whereas regarding Bnei Yisrael, Rashi reverses the order, saying, they were "as one man, with one heart."

This distinction highlights a significant difference between the two types of unity.

The people of Egypt were obviously a diverse group, as the Torah itself distinguishes between the average Egyptians and the sorcerers, and between "those who feared the word of G-d"² and those who did not. They were unified, however, in their hatred of Bnei Yisrael.³ Their mutual *feeling* of animosity toward Bnei Yisrael, "with one heart," led to their unified *actions*, "as one man."

Bnei Yisrael's unity in their preparation for the giving of the Torah, on the other hand, was not merely a uniform reaction to a shared feeling. Rather, their mutual feelings were due to an even deeper unity, an inherent unity that is part of their very identity as Jews. This essential Jewish oneness—"as one man"—is what caused Bnei Yisrael to share equal feelings of anticipation and desire to receive the Torah—"with one heart," despite their individual differences.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 21, pp. 102-104*

2. Shemos 9:20.

3. See Rashi, Shemos 14:7.

 יט:טז | 19:16

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהִיט הַבֶּקָר וַיְהִי קֶלֶת
וּבְרָקִים... וַיִּחַרד כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי בַּמַּחֲנֶה

*And it came to pass on the third day as morning
dawned, that there was thunder and lightning...
and the entire nation that was in the camp shuddered.*

Shock and Awe

Why was the giving of the Torah accompanied by thunder and lightning? If it was to drive home the awesomeness of the moment, surely the fright caused by the thunder and lightning paled in comparison to the profound sense of awe that Bnei Yisrael experienced from the revelation of G-d Himself!

Rather, the dramatic physical storm that accompanied the giving of the Torah reflected the earthshattering *spiritual* discovery that Bnei Yisrael and the world at large experienced at that historic moment.

The Midrash describes G-d's revelation at Sinai as the "annulment of the decree" that separated "the higher realms and the lower realms."⁴ Meaning that the divide separating the spiritual reality and the physical world that derives from it was breached.

Until the revelation at Sinai, the "truth" of the physical reality was unquestionable. At the giving of the Torah, that perception was shattered. We were shown—and given the eternal ability to recognize—that the truth of all existence is

4. Tanchuma, Va'eira 15.

not its tangible matter, but its derivation from G-d, the One and only true Being, who constantly generates its existence.

Imagine the shock and inner upheaval of a person who discovers that everything he thought he knew until now was a gross distortion of the truth, that reality is in fact the complete opposite of what he perceived it to be. Such was the blow that the G-dly revelation at Sinai dealt to the world's consciousness.

Accordingly, the thunder and lightning at the giving of the Torah were merely the physical reflection of the spiritual storm that swept over and shocked all of existence at that incredible juncture.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 33, pp. 23-24*

 י"ט:יז | 19:17

וַיִּתְּצֻבוּ בְּתַהֲתִית הַהָר

And they stood at the bottom of the mountain.

Who Wouldn't Want the Torah?

The Talmud interprets the words “And they stood at the bottom of the mountain” to mean that at the giving of the Torah, G-d raised Mt. Sinai over the Jewish people and said: “If you accept the Torah, good; if not, you will be summarily buried beneath this mountain.” “This,” concludes the Talmud, “furnished a strong disclaimer against the acceptance of the Torah,” until the Jews willingly reaccepted it after the Purim miracle, almost 1,000 years later.⁵

Why was this coercion necessary? When Moshe told them that they would be given the Torah, had Bnei Yisrael not willingly committed themselves to its complete observance, proclaiming, “We will fulfill and we will listen?”⁶

The Talmud's assertion must therefore be understood to mean not that Bnei Yisrael were coerced into accepting the Torah *against* their will, but that their *willing* acceptance *itself* was coerced.

A person who recognizes and understands that a life of Torah observance is the ultimate blessing, and that the opposite is true of a life devoid of Torah, would find it virtually impossible to refuse to accept the Torah. Bnei Yisrael, however, having left Egypt a mere 50 days earlier, could not have independently undergone such an extreme paradigm shift—

5. Shabbos 88a.

6. Shemos 24:7.

from the influence of Egypt, “the shame of the earth,”⁷ to an appreciation of the Torah’s holy ideals. Thus, their willful and unconditional affirmation to live by the Torah was the result of *being shown* from Above that a life without Torah is no life at all; it was not an ideal that they had come to appreciate on their own yet.

When the G-dly revelation at Sinai ended, Bnei Yisrael faced their prior commitment, but without the level of appreciation for the Torah that they had been exposed to when they made that commitment. Observing the Torah now, without that inspiration, was thus much more difficult than it had been at the moment of their original acceptance. “This,” says the Talmud, “furnished a strong disclaimer against the acceptance of the Torah,” until they reaccepted it later on their own initiative.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 26, p. 424*

7. Bereishis 42:9.

 כ:א | 20:1

וַיִּדְבֹר אֱלֹקִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֹר

G-d spoke all these words, to say.

Ten for Ten

When the Torah uses the phrase וַיִּדְבֹר ... לְאֹמֹר—“He spoke... to say,” it usually means that the person being addressed should repeat what he is being told to a third party. For example, when G-d instructs Moshe regarding a particular mitzvah, the Torah writes, “G-d spoke to Moshe, to say,” meaning that Moshe should relay the command to Bnei Yisrael.

In light of that, the verse “G-d spoke all these words, to say,” which precedes the Aseres Hadibros, the Ten Commandments, demands explanation. Wasn’t the entire nation present when G-d spoke the Aseres Hadibros? In fact, according to the Midrash, the souls of *all* Jewish people—past, present and future—were present at Sinai!⁸ If everyone to whom the Ten Commandments were directed was present when G-d stated them, to whom must they be repeated?

The Maggid of Mezeritch explains, homiletically, that here the word לְאֹמֹר—“to say”—alludes to the Asarah Ma’amaros, the “Ten Utterances”⁹ with which G-d created the world (e.g., “G-d *said*, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light,”¹⁰ “G-d *said*, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation,’”¹¹ etc.). Accordingly, the verse וַיִּדְבֹר ... לְאֹמֹר that precedes the Aseres Hadibros is to be under-

8. Shemos Rabbah 28:6.

9. See Avos 5:1.

10. Bereishis 1:3.

11. Ibid. 1:11.

stood as a directive to draw **וַיִּדְבֹר**—the Torah contained in the Aseres Hadibros—into **לְאִמֵּר**—the world that G-d created with the Asarah Ma'amaros.

Practically speaking, the Maggid's explanation teaches us that we should not compartmentalize our lives, separating the Torah and holy aspects from the mundane. Our interactions with the "Asarah Ma'amaros," i.e., the day-to-day of our physical lives, must be permeated with a Torah attitude and framed by a Torah lifestyle. Even our mundane activities must be guided not by the attitudes of the secular world, but by an outlook that reflects our attachment to the Aseres Hadibros, the eternal Torah.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 1, pp. 148-149*

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