

**SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE**

YITRO

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 6:1-13

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**DEDICATIONS: Eliyahu Ben Esther – Eli Bibi and Chava Bet Esther – Evelyn Tawil – 21 Shebat**

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**TONIGHT: The Hands Of Moshe**

**Editors Notes**

This week we read the portion of Yitro which contains the Ten Commandments. We gave a class trying to understand a concept in the Zohar which teaches that, one is always connected to something spiritual. In essence one is either connected to HaShem or to something else. We delved into this concept by looking at the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment of honoring one's parents and how it relates to the first commandment which implies belief in Hashem and how the essence of both is to allow us the gift of making the connection with Hashem.

Although not part of the class, when reviewing the Talmud and the extent to which one must go in respecting one's parent, I found it a bit scary. The task is daunting to say the least and almost impossible to do correctly according to some.

The Talmud relates the following story as a lesson: Rabbi Eliezer was asked: How far does one have to respect parents? He said: Go and see what Dama Ben Nisina, a non-Jew in Ashkelon, did for his father.

The rabbis wanted to buy from Dama a jewel of extraordinary worth and beauty to replace missing stones on the High Priest's breast plate. The price was 600,000 gold coins. Dama's jewels were kept in a locked chest. The key to the chest was resting under the head of Dama's father, who was fast asleep. Dama would not disturb his sleeping father, and so he lost the sale.

A year later, God rewarded him. A red cow was born in Dama's herd. (This type of totally red-haired cow was extremely rare. The Jewish

people in the time of the Holy Temple used a red cow for spiritual purification rites and would pay a princely sum to acquire it.) The rabbis came to Dama to buy it from him. He told them: "I know you would pay me whatever amount I ask. But I will only ask you for the amount I lost (on the jewelry deal) because I respected my father."

The Talmud relates that the mother of Rabi Tarfon slept on a high mattress and to get into bed one needed to climb. Rabbi Tarfon, one of the greatest and most honored sages of the day would bend down so that his mother could to step on him when climbing into or out of her bed. Who wouldn't be impressed by the image of this great sage, respected by all the people humbling himself for his mother? Yet the Rabbis proclaim his actions not even constituting half as much as is required!

And the requirement to honor a parent never ends. Even after they have gone to the next world, one must remember that every action of the child reflects on the parents account in heaven for the good and the bad. A person is judged on the fruits of their actions and our actions are those fruits. So regardless of us saying or not saying, that I am doing such and such, in memory of so and so, our actions are tallied on their record.

One should know that through respecting one's parents, G-d equates it as if the person respected Him. And through respecting one's parents, we can better connect with Hashem and affirm our belief in the Al-Mighty. And through our faith we live a true life in this world and in the next.

See an article from the past relating to my dad's *yahrzeit* which I hope you enjoy ....

( I wrote this in February of 2015) On Tuesday we commuted the *hazkara* for my dad, Joseph R. Bibi, a'h. I am deeply grateful to all who attended and most especially who Rabbi Eli Mansour who came to pay his respects and not to speak, but who did speak so eloquently as he always does and told of his very long relationship with my dad. And also to Yigal Bibi, who came in from Israel and spoke. Twenty five years ago, my dad came back from Israel after having met Yigal, the former mayor of Tiberius, a

member of the Israeli Knesset and a close confidant of both Rav Mordechai Eliyahu z'sl and Rav Ovadia Yosef z'sl, and told us we in fact had relatives in Israel. I am now working closely with Yigal and other members of the community to establish a presence for us at the World Zionist Congress.

It's hard to believe that it was a year ago Tu Bishvat that we said farewell to our dad. They tell us that time heels, but honestly there is still a hole near my heart and I am sure it will always be there. It's a strange 1st yearzeit. You see this past year was a Jewish leap year and we are 13 lunar months from last Tu Bishvat so our mourning period in essence ended a month ago when we had a small Hazkara. Going forward I imagine we will commemorate and fast on the 14th and then celebrate our dad's life going into Tu Bishvat so I thought to relate some lessons that we as a family and a community can learn from my dad centered around trees.

There is a verse in Devarim which compares man to a tree - Ki HaAdam Etz HaSadeh - . A tree produces fruits which in turn cause other fruit-producing trees to grow. Our father understood that in this world one cannot be satisfied simply to grow on his own, to be an island for one's self alone. We must produce fruits with seeds for new trees and new fruits. We must exert positive influence upon friends, acquaintances, and anyone we happen to meet-that they, too, produce "fruits." That was our dad. Everyone he met was affected by him for the positive. He saw within everyone their Selem Elokim and he brought forward that image of G-d within each of us.

The prophet Yechezkel proclaims ... And you, the mountains of Israel, will produce your branches, and you will bear your fruit ... It is incumbent upon each of us to follow his example and fulfill this prophecy . That the branches or the shoots of our father will remain like our father. Each of us bears the responsibility to blossom and cause a chain-reaction of self-perpetuating fruits of Torah and mitzvot in ourselves and in others.

Upon creating man, G-d blesses him as it states .... Peru UrVu - Be fruitful and multiply. About a dozen years ago, I heard Rabbi Mansour (who was there to confirm) explain that there is a thought where the Rabbis suggest that the word UrVu means to direct or aim. Our father was very clear on the need to direct and guide

A child is like an arrow and the archer must aim the bow before he releases the arrow. Imagine how foolish one looks who releases the arrow without properly aiming and then twists and turns hoping his

body English will somehow cause the arrow to strike its target. Once released all the body English in the world will not help.

One can recognize an expert archer from amateur often by the touch. An amateur might be heavy handed exerting too much force. Reacting, he adjusts and then applies too little strength, falling very short. An expert on the other hand has a very light and delicate touch which masks his power. This is the touch that properly guides the arrow or the child.

He also recognizes exterior forces. The wind, the humidity and the temperature all affect that arrow. Each arrow has its own peculiarities based on the length and weight of the shaft, the design of the fletching and the type of arrow head and point.

King Solomon teaches us in Proverbs – Chanoch HaNaar – Train the child according to his individual path. Rashi Explains: According to what you teach a child and train him in matters, either for good or bad, even when he grows old, he will not turn away from it.

My mother may Hashem bless her with health and happiness almost always blames a parent for the shortcomings of the child. I always thought she was just being kind and perhaps somewhat Freudian in thinking. But I realize that King Solomon is telling us that the arrow is in the hands of the parents to properly form and direct.

The word Chanoch in this verse is spelled Chet Nun Chaf and is missing the Vav. Why is it written Chaser or incomplete? It's to teach us that every child is different. Every child lacks something but no two lack the same and we need to raise each child according to their own needs. My father often said about the four of us, that no two of us are the same.

In addition to his own gentle way, our dad was a master with tools. When he realized his own bow might not properly do the trick, he would employ the assistance of others orchestrating and working behind the scenes in our best interest.

The tree represents the balance within nature. Last week we read of the children of Israel arriving at Marah where the waters were bitter. Hashem shows Moshe a tree and that tree sweetens the water. It's interesting in our own world where pollutants are a major concern, where we worry about global warming; the potential savior is the tree. It's the tree which can help clean and neutralize the environment.

My brother Ruby told a story he heard from a member of the Shaare Zion Committee back in the

old days. Our father was Vice President there for many years there. And in the days of the two factions there would be wild arguments, but when Joe Bibi walked in, everything would calm down. He sweetened the bitter waters. He listened to people. He reframed their thoughts. Then he listened to others reframing their thoughts. He showed where they were similar and then endeavored to bring the two together. Perhaps he married my mother, a bat Kohen, because he personified the traits of the disciples of Aaron – OHEV SHALOM VE RODEF SHALOM – Loving peace and chasing peace.

At the same time he was always willing to stand for what's right and unyielding in his demand for justice – yet always sweetening that justice with a dose of kindness insisting one go beyond the letter of the law when others needed it.

My father would explain that although water flows down in nature, the tree shows that the opposite is possible. It's the leaves drawn to the sun which pull the water up against gravity from the roots through the trunk into the branches. He would explain that sometime one must go against one's nature. One must find the strength to reverse gravity lifting ourselves and all those around us. Just as the branches are drawn to the sky and the sun, we can reach for the stars and grasp them.

Let me close with a story that my siblings and many of my nieces and nephews will definitely relate to. One of the things we can do on Tu Bishvat is look at and appreciate nature and the miracle of nature, the miracle of trees and of fruits and the benevolence of Hashem who provides it all. My dad would explain that in each fruit, there was a different lesson.

I asked them to picture themselves sitting with our father / grandfather, perhaps on the porch on a spring day. We might be sitting next to him or maybe we were really little and sitting on his lap. In his hand is an Orange. We can see the orange in his giant but gentle hands and the sparkle of his masonic ring. With his other hand, he has a curved knife and he starts to remove the peel. He had a way of perfectly cutting away the peel in a cylindrical motion so that it came off in one long piece. You sat there in anticipation of the sweet and satisfying fruit.

He would explain the miracle of the skin and how it protected the fruit. He would describe Hashem's color code system telling us when the fruit was perfectly ripe to eat. And then he would continue his lesson explaining that in life we would often find shells covering, hiding or baring us from our goal. We would need to take the time to examine how to remove that

shell and how to get to that fruit without damaging the fruit inside. Our world is a world where the good in many is often hidden. Figure out how to get through a person's shell and one figures out how to get to the sweetness of that person.

Then he would pick up a peach. As he would slice and hand us piece after piece, he would recall sitting with his own grandfather who did the same for him and take us back into time, to a simpler world which we became a part of moving through the generations. I can still taste the sweetness of the fruit.

And then he would come to the pit and explain that just as some people had a cover, others might appear to be sweet but hid a hard pit inside. We needed to be careful not to judge a book by its cover either for the bad or the good. But even that pit if handled correctly could be planted and benefit all of us by becoming a tree yielding much fruit.

And then there were others, he explained cutting a seedless grape in half and handing it to us. No shell to worry about and no pit to worry about. I guess that was my dad, good through and through. He was an integral part of our lives and we will miss him every day, Tehi Nafsho Serurah VeSror HaChaim

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

### Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

#### Yitro - Matan Torah

- 1- Yitro comes to be part of the nation of Israel
- 2- Yitro advises Moshe to set up different levels of judges instead of judging all cases himself
- 3- Moshe follow the advice of Yitro
- 4- Benei Israel encamp by Har Sinai. Hashem offers us, through Moshe, to be his special nation
- 5- Benei Israel accepts. They ask to hear directly from Hashem and prepare for 3 days.
- 6- The 10 commandments
- 7- Benei Israel are afraid and ask that Hashem not speak to them directly but rather through Moshe

## FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

**“I now know that Hashem is greater than all the gods, for the evil that they perpetrated was returned to them.” (Shemot 18:11)**

Rashi, quoting the Targum, explains that the Egyptians' punishment fit their crime. Since they had decreed that the Israelite's should drown in the water, they too were drowned in the water. Why was Yitro so impressed by the manner in which Hashem meted out punishment to the Egyptians?

Rabbi Yaakov Sarna zt"l points out that Yitro was more moved by the manner in which the Egyptians were punished than by all of the miracles and wonders that he had heard about. We see from this that the punishment of *midah k'neged midah* (measure for measure) is a fundamental part of Divine retribution. The reason for this is, since the purpose of punishment is to arouse and inspire the person to repent, the only way in which he could know how to repent is if he is aware of what sin he is guilty of violating. Yitro was so impressed by this form of punishment because he saw that when Hashem punishes people, He does it in a manner which guides them on the path of self-improvement. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**“You shall not ascend with steps upon My Altar.” (Shemot 20:23)**

The Torah commands that steps should not be placed on the *mizbe'ah* (altar), but rather a ramp should be used. Rashi explains that the reason for this *misvah* is that if the *kohen* would need to climb steps in order to get to the top of the *mizbe'ah*, he would need to take larger steps than if he would go up a ramp. This would cause him to be somewhat exposed, and it would be disrespectful to the *mizbe'ah*. Rashi then adds, if the Torah is so particular about showing respect for the stones of the *mizbe'ah*, which have no feelings, how much more so must we treat our fellow man, who was created in the image of Hashem, with the proper respect.

However there is a much deeper message here. The *kohen* who is going up to the top of the *mizbe'ah* is on his way to do a great *misvah*, to offer a sacrifice to Hashem or another important service. He is probably very focused on what he is about to do, and is thinking very lofty thoughts. At this moment, the Torah is teaching, he must not forget about the honor of his fellow man. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter used to say, when a person is doing the *misvah* of putting on his *talet*, he needs to be careful not to hit the person behind him with the strings. A person might be concentrating very hard on the *misvah* he is doing, but that doesn't give him license to disregard the people around him. If someone is having a party in his home to celebrate an

engagement or another happy occasion, he needs to consider his neighbor's feelings before blasting the music. If someone is rushing to shul to catch a *minyán*, that doesn't allow him to park inappropriately. The ends do not justify the means.

The story is told of a great Rav who, in his later years, decided to change his morning schedule and to begin praying with the *vatin* *minyán* at sunrise. However, before he made the change, he reconsidered and decided to stay with the *minyán* he had been praying with all along. When his attendant asked him why he changed his mind, he responded that he didn't want the men who he had been praying with all along to feel hurt or slighted in any way by the fact that he wouldn't be praying with them anymore. This is true sensitivity!

Of course we are all striving to serve Hashem as best as we can. By considering our fellow man when we are performing a *misvah*, we will enhance our deeds tremendously, and at the same time we will increase the feelings of love and brotherhood with our family and friends. It may seem like a small thing, but in Hashem's eyes, it is at least as important as showing the proper respect to the holy altar itself! Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### We'll Do It!

"And all the people answered... all that Hashem has spoken we will do." (Shemot 19:8)

B'nei Yisrael responded with, "We will do," prior to saying, "And we will listen." This expression is normally reserved for angels. Because B'nei Yisrael were absolutely prepared to accept the Torah before hearing its commandments, they attained the highest spiritual level a human being is capable of achieving. We must try to understand the great secret of exclaiming *vagb* (we will do) prior to *gnab* (we will listen). What difference is there in the precise order of acceptance as long as the Torah is properly observed? In order to answer this question, we must explore why some people respond positively to various events, while others are seemingly unaffected. One's reaction is dependent upon his state of mind prior to the occurrences. If one is open to changing the nature of his ways, when he is confronted with the truth he will be further motivated to alter his previous lifestyle. If one is not amenable to change, however, nothing he hears or sees will have a lasting impression upon him. This is the great secret of "We will do" before "We will listen." One must first decide to "do" and behave properly, so that the various lessons that he "hears" and sees will successfully influence his judgment. Only one who is willing to listen will benefit from that which he hears. (Peninim on the Torah)

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR**  
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**Yitro's Response**

In the first section of Parashat Yitro, we read of the arrival of Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, at Beneh Yisrael's camp at Mount Sinai. Yitro is described as "Kohen Midyan"—the priest of the nation of Midyan. He was a prominent clergyman, but he ultimately recognized the truth of the belief in G-d, and went out into the desert to join Moshe and Beneh Yisrael.

Rashi writes that what led Yitro to this decision to join Beneh Yisrael were two miracles of which we read in the previous Parasha, Parashat Beshalah. Namely, he heard about the splitting of the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds), and the war against Amalek. These two great triumphs inspired Yitro and drove him to leave his faith and his people, and to join Beneh Yisrael.

We might ask why Yitro was especially inspired by the war against Amalek. It is easy to understand why the miracle of the sea would have a profound effect; according to one view, this event incorporated 250 miracles, and Beneh Yisrael themselves describe in the Az Yashir song of praise how the nations of the marveled over this miracle. The war against Amalek, however, does not appear to have been such a remarkable event. To be sure, Beneh Yisrael's victory over Amalek was miraculous, but what set this miracle above the numerous other miracles performed for Beneh Yisrael, that it led Yitro to the drastic measure of abandoning his faith and joining them?

There is also another aspect of this story that requires explanation. The Torah relates that before Yitro's arrival at the Israelite camp, he sent a message to Moshe informing him of his imminent arrival, seemingly indicating a request for a large, honorable welcome. Moshe indeed arranges a grand ceremony to welcome Yitro to the camp, and the question arises as to why a noble man like Yitro would request such a reception. Did Yitro really crave public honor, to the point where he asked Moshe to prepare a large reception for him?

The Be'er Yosef explained that Yitro decided to join Beneh Yisrael to counterbalance the effects of Amalek's brazen attack. After the miracle of the Yam Suf, Beneh Yisrael were deemed invincible. The nations around the world were awe-struck by the slave nation that overpowered the mighty Egyptian empire without even taking up arms. Beneh Yisrael

were looked upon with dread and reverence, as an untouchable people. Amalek, however, changed that perception. Amalek launched its assault in order to break this aura of invincibility, to demonstrate that Beneh Yisrael are not really that different than other peoples, to show that they, too, are vulnerable to surprise attack and can be dealt a debilitating blow.

Upon hearing of Amalek's attack, Yitro decided to join Beneh Yisrael. This decision was not borne out of inspiration, but rather out of a realization that bold action was needed to rectify the effects of Amalek's assault. Amalek succeeded in lowering Beneh Yisrael's estimation in the eyes of the world, and Yitro therefore responded by doing what he could to bring honor and prestige to Beneh Yisrael. If he, a highly respected pagan priest, would leave his people and join Beneh Yisrael, he figured, the world will notice. Word will spread that this is a special nation that has now emerged on the world scene. It was in response to the epic Hilul Hashem caused by Amalek's assault that Yitro decided to join Beneh Yisrael, out of a determination to do whatever he could to reverse the effects of this attack and restore the sense of awe and grandeur that Beneh Yisrael had achieved after the miracle of the sea.

And this is why Yitro, uncharacteristically, requested a large, public reception. He wanted his arrival to be made as public as possible, in order to achieve his goal. As he was joining Beneh Yisrael for the purpose of restoring their honor and prestige, he wanted his arrival to be made into a public spectacle, rife with pomp and fanfare, so that news of this event would spread far and wide, and people around the world would recognize the greatness and special stature of the Nation of Israel.

**VICTOR BIBI**  
**SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein**  
**TU B'SHVAT**

I think that if all of us stopped and contemplated the growth and success of the state of Israel in our time, we would truly realize that we are living in a miraculous age. Though the miracles are consistent and regular, oftentimes, perhaps even most times, we take them so for granted that the miraculous become mundane.

One of the great miracles of the state of Israel is its agricultural industry. Israel has an arid, rock filled landscape with very large patches of desert mixed in. It is not the lush landscape that exists in other parts of the world where agricultural industries bloom and prosper. Nevertheless, the prophets of Israel guaranteed that as part of the process of redemption and the Jewish return to its homeland, the desert would somehow bloom and the land would produce delicious fruits in abundance and variety.

As late as a half century ago this seemed to be an unlikely dream that would never come to fulfillment. The original Jewish pioneers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries faced harsh and unforgiving challenges as they strove for the development of any sort of agricultural success.

Climate, the earth itself, mosquitoes and malaria, the Arab marauders, and the lack of proper agricultural tools and training all conspired to make it almost a hopeless venture. But they persisted in tilling the soil, removing the rocks and eventually began to see the results of their labor and sacrifice. Their rate of mortality was high and many gave up on the project and returned to Europe. The hardy few stuck it out and eventually were rewarded with the miraculous success of their efforts.

Even so, there were grave doubts as to whether the land of Israel could ever feed the people of Israel. The main agricultural products were grapes, oranges and dates. The infamous Peel Commission issued its learned conclusions in 1936 stating that the entire land of Israel – then Palestine under British mandate – could not support a population greater than 2 1/2 million souls.

As a result, it recommended the curtailment of immigration into the country at a time when Hitler was forcing the Jews of Germany to find refuge outside of the German borders. The recommendations of the Peel Commission led inevitably to the White Paper of the British foreign office that closed off Jewish emigration to the country for the next nine years, especially during the Holocaust and its aftermath.

And it seemed that the conclusions reached were not far-fetched since food was scarce throughout this period in the land of Israel and of infinitely meager variety. When Israel gained its independence in 1948, for almost the next decade there were great shortages of food in the country, especially in the light of the doubling of its population in five years with the influx of the Jewish refugees from Europe and the Moslem Middle East.

Full packages were sent from the United States to families throughout Israel to help supplement their meager diet. I remember how my father and mother scrimped and saved, often to my childish and foolish feelings of deprivation, in order to send these foods certificates to our Israeli relatives who could then redeem them for food packages in American warehouses located in Israel.

But Israel struggled on in war and in peace. It developed a national water carrier that began to make the desert bloom. Its scientists and researchers developed new techniques, created drip irrigation and pioneered new methods of agriculture that began to make the country self-sufficient and plentiful in food and its varieties.

In 1959, Moshe Dayan was the Minister of Agriculture. He introduced the planting of tomato vines into Israeli agriculture. The first year's crop was hard, tasteless, and green in color, and understandably was not popular. The appreciative Israeli public nicknamed them 'moishelach' in honor of Dayan and his experiment. But soon the Israeli farmer developed the finest and tastiest tomatoes, as well as so many other types and of vegetables and fruits.

Bananas, mangoes, kiwis and other fruits previously unknown to the Eastern European Jewish palette made their appearance and rapidly gained popularity. Israeli fruits and vegetables were produced in such abundance that a large export market developed and for a long period of time agriculture remained one of the mainstays of the Israeli export economy.

All of this should be remembered by us as we commemorate Tu B'Shvat, a new year and holiday for the trees in the land of Israel. The prophecies long ago uttered by our holy sages have come true before our very eyes. What a blessed country the land of Israel truly is!

### **Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Bond of Loyalty and Love**

In the course of any life there are moments of awe and amazement when, with a full heart, you thank God shehecheyanu vekiyemanu vehigiyanu lazeman hazeh, "who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this day."

Two that particularly stand out in my own memory were separated by almost ten years. The first was the Lambeth Conference at Canterbury in 2008. The conference is the gathering, every ten years, of the bishops of the Anglican Communion – that is, not just the Church of England but the entire worldwide structure, much of it based in America and Africa. It is the key event that brings this global network of churches together to deliberate on directions for the future. That year I became, I believe, the first rabbi to address a plenary session of the conference. The second, much more recent, took place in October 2017 in Washington when I addressed the friends and supporters of the American Enterprise Institute, one of the world's great economic think tanks.

The two gatherings could not have been less alike. One was religious, Christian, and concerned with theology. The other was secular, American, and concerned with economics and politics. Both of them, though, were experiencing some kind of crisis. In the case of the Anglican Church it had to do with gay bishops.[1] Could the Church accommodate such people? The question was tearing the Church apart, with many of the American bishops in favour and most of the African ones against. There was a real sense, before the conference, that the communion was in danger of being irreparably split.

In Washington in 2017 the issue at the forefront of people's minds was quite different. A year earlier there had been a sharply divisive American Presidential election. New phrases had been coined to describe some of the factors involved – post-truth, fake news, flyover states, alt-right, identity politics, competitive victimhood, whatever – as well as the resurfacing of an old one: populism. It all added up to what I termed the politics of anger. Was there a way of knitting together the unravelling strands of American society?

The reason these two events are connected in my mind is that on both occasions I spoke about the same concept – the one that is central to this week's parsha, and to biblical Judaism as a whole, namely brit, covenant. This was, in the seventeenth century especially, a key concept in the emerging free societies of the West, especially in Calvinist or Puritanical circles.

To grossly simplify a complex process, the Reformation developed in different directions in different countries, depending on whether Luther or Calvin was the primary influence. For Luther the key text was the New Testament, especially the letters of Paul. For Calvin and his followers, however, the Hebrew Bible was the primary text, especially in

relation to political and social structures. That is why covenant played a large part in the (Calvinist) post-Reformation politics of Geneva, Holland, Scotland, England under Cromwell, and especially the Pilgrim Fathers, the first European settlers in North America. It lay at the heart of the Mayflower Compact (1620) and John Winthrop's famous "City upon a Hill" speech aboard the Arbella in 1630.

Over time however, and under the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the word "covenant" was gradually supplanted by the phrase "social contract." Clearly there is something similar between the two, but they are not the same thing at all. In fact, they operate on different logics and they create different relationships and institutions.[2]

In a contract, two or more people come together, each pursuing their self-interest, to make a mutually advantageous exchange. In a covenant, two or more people, each respecting the dignity and integrity of the other, come together in a bond of loyalty and trust to do together what neither can achieve alone.[3] It isn't an exchange; it's a moral commitment. It is more like a marriage than a commercial transaction. Contracts are about interests; covenants are about identity. Contracts benefit; covenants transform. Contracts are about "Me" and "You"; covenants are about "Us."

What makes the Hebrew Bible revolutionary in political terms is that it contains not one founding moment but two. One is set out in 1 Samuel 8, when the people come to the prophet Samuel and ask for a king. God tells Samuel to warn the people what will be the consequences. The king will take the people's sons to ride with his chariots and their daughters to work in his kitchens. He will take their property as taxation, and so on. Nonetheless, the people insist that they still want a king, so Samuel appoints Saul.

Commentators have long been puzzled by this chapter. Does it represent approval or disapproval of monarchy? The best answer ever given was provided by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes, who explained that what Samuel was doing at God's behest was proposing a social contract precisely on the lines set out by Thomas Hobbes in *The Leviathan*. People are willing to give up certain of their rights, transferring them to a central power – a king or a government – who undertakes in return to ensure the defence of the realm externally and the rule of law within.[4] The book of Samuel thus contains the first recorded instance of a social contract.

However, this was the second founding moment of Israel as a nation, not the first. The first took place in

our parsha, on Mount Sinai, several centuries earlier, when the people made with God, not a contract but a covenant. What happened in the days of Samuel was the birth of Israel as a kingdom. What happened in the days of Moses – long before they had even entered the land – was the birth of Israel as a nation under the sovereignty of God.

The two central institutions of modern Western liberal democracies are both contractual. There are commercial contracts that create the market; and there is the social contract that creates the state. The market is about the creation and distribution of wealth. The state is about the creation and distribution of power. But a covenant is about neither wealth nor power, but rather about the bonds of belonging and collective responsibility. As I put it in *The Politics of Hope*, a social contract creates a state. A social covenant creates a society. A society is the totality of relationships that do not depend on exchanges of wealth and power, namely marriages, families, congregations, communities, charities and voluntary associations. The market and the state are arenas of competition. Society is an arena of co-operation. And we need both.

The reason that the concept of covenant proved helpful to the Anglican bishops on the one hand, and the American Enterprise Institute on the other, is that it is the supreme example of a bond that brings together, in a single co-operative enterprise, individuals and groups that are profoundly different. They could not be more different than the parties at Mount Sinai: God and the children of Israel, the one Infinite and eternal, the other, finite and mortal.

In fact the very first human relationship, between the first man and the first woman, contains a two-word definition of covenant: *ezer ke-negdo*, meaning on the one hand “a helper” but on the other, someone “over-and-against.”[5] In a marriage, neither husband nor wife sacrifice their distinctive identities. At Sinai, God remained God and the Israelites remained human. A symbol of covenant is the *havdalah* candle: multiple wicks that stay separate but produce a single flame.

So covenant allowed the Anglican Communion to stay together despite the deep differences between the American and African churches. The American covenant held the nation together despite, in Lincoln’s day, a civil war, and at other times, civil and economic strife, and its renewal will do likewise in the future. In Moses’ day it allowed the Israelites to become “one nation under God” despite their division into twelve tribes. Covenants create unity without uniformity. They value diversity but, rather than

allowing a group to split into competing factions, they ask each to contribute something uniquely theirs to the common good. Out of multiple Me’s they create an overarching Us.

What made these two experiences in Canterbury and Washington so moving to me was that they showed how prophetic Moses’ words were when he told the Israelites that the Torah and its commands “will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deut. 4:6). Torah continues to inspire not only Jews but all who seek guidance in hard times.

So, if you find yourself in a situation of conflict that threatens to break something apart, whether a marriage, a family, a business, a community, a political party or an organisation, framing a covenant will help keep people together, without any side claiming victory or defeat. All it needs is recognition that there are certain things we can do together that none of us can do alone.

Covenant lifts our horizon from self-interest to the common good. There is nothing wrong with self-interest. It drives economics and politics, the market and the state. But there are certain things that cannot be achieved on the basis of self-interest alone, among them trust, friendship, loyalty and love. Covenant really is a life- and world-changing idea.

[1] One, Gene Robinson, had already been appointed and was serving in New Hampshire.

[2] I have set out the philosophy of this in *The Politics of Hope*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1997. Most recently I have summarised this argument in a whiteboard animation video released last month. You can watch the video or read a transcript using this link:

<http://rabbisacks.org/the-politics-of-hope/>

[3] One might ask: what is there that God cannot do alone? The answer – given the theology of the Hebrew Bible – is: to live within the human heart. That requires our free assent.

[4] *Kol Kitvei Maharatz Chajes*, vol. 1, 43-49.

[5] Gen. 2:18 and Rashi ad loc., based on *Yevamot* 63a.

### Rav Kook on the Perasha

What does the name Sinai mean? The Talmudic interpretation is surprising — and somewhat shocking:

“What is Mount Sinai? The mountain that brought enmity (*sin'ah*) upon the nations of the world.” (Shabbat 89b)

What is the nature of this animosity? What does it have to do with Mount Sinai?

Why Sinai?



Where would one expect that God would reveal His Torah to the Jewish people? The logical place would be on the holiest mountain in the world — Jerusalem's Mount Moriah, the site of the Binding of Isaac, Jacob's holy "gate to heaven" (Gen 28:17), the spot where both Temples stood. Why did the revelation of the Torah take place outside of the Land of Israel, in the middle of the desert?

The fact that the Torah was not given to the Jewish people in their own land, but rather in a desert, in no-man's land, is very significant. This indicates that the inner content of the Torah is relevant to all peoples. If receiving the Torah required the special holiness of the Jewish people, then the Torah should have been given in a place that reflects this holiness. Revelation on Mount Sinai attests to the Torah's universal nature.

This idea is corroborated by the Talmudic tradition that "God offered the Torah to every nation and every tongue, but none accepted it, until He came to Israel, who received it" (Avodah Zarah 2b). This Midrash is well known, but it contains an implication that is often overlooked. How could God offer the nations something that is beyond their spiritual level? It is only because the Torah is relevant to all peoples that their refusal to accept it reflects so harshly on them.

The Torah's revelation on Mount Sinai, as a neutral location belonging to none and thus belonging to all, emphasizes the disappointment and estrangement from God that the nations brought upon themselves by rejecting the Torah and its ethical teachings. It is for this reason Mount Sinai "brought enmity upon the nations of the world."

In the future, however, the nations will recognize this mistake and correct it:

"In those days, it shall come to pass that ten men from all the languages of the nations will take hold of every Jew by a corner of his cloak and say, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" (Zachariah 8:23)

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 133-134. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 219-220)

## AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

This is the greatest word in any language. It contains many meanings, all of which are based on the word Hayah ("to be"). Some meanings are easily evident.

He exists, and His existence is the only true existence (Rambam Yesode Hatorah 1:4). Everything else exists solely because Hashem wills their existence, but intrinsically nothing truly has existence except Hashem the Exister.

He caused existence. He willed the Universe to come into existence from Nothing. He is therefore the Owner of all (9:29).

He causes existence. Even after everything came into existence, they continue to exist only because Hashem continues to will their existence.

He shall always be the same. He chose the Abot and their seed forever. He chose the family of Levi forever. The seed of Aharon are Cohanim forever. The house of David is chosen for royalty forever. The land of Israel is sacred forever. His Torah is unchangeable forever. The reward of Olam Haba is forever.

**"I shall be what I shall be" (3:14).** Hashem means: the source of all Kindliness, and all Wisdom, and of all Power. Every object and every process testify to the endless Kindliness, Wisdom & Power of the Creator who causes them to "be".

Since "Hashem" means "Being, which is the only intrinsic Existence," and the future tense of this word therefore implies Eternal Existence; then the Afterlife of the righteous is included in this name. This is understood as follows:

There are two matters that even the greatest Prophet could not see while alive:

- 1) "No man can see Me when he is alive" (33:20) and
- 2) "No eye except Yours has seen that which (Hashem) shall do to those who hope to him" (Isaiah 64:3). These two matters are not seen by the living because they are one and the Same. The ecstasy of Life after death consists of the union of the soul together with its Creator. The existence in Olam Haba is the Presence of Hashem in its truest essence.

"The righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads and they delight in the splendor of the Shechinah (Berachot 17A). And just as "Hashem" indicates Eternity ("He shall be"), so is the happiness of Olam Haba eternal. (And the retribution upon the very wicked is also eternal).

Thus this First Commandment includes the requirement that we gain as much awareness as possible of Olam Haba. Quoted from "A Nation is Born" by Rabbi Miller ZT'L