



BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV

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DVAR TORAH YITRO RABBI YEHUDA MANN, ROSH BEIT MIDRASH

A Change We Can Believe In

This upcoming Shabbat, it is highly likely our children will tell us the famous story found in the Midrash [Pesikta Rabbati 21].

The Midrash tells of G-d going among the nations of the world and asking if they are interested in accepting the Torah. G-d goes to the descendants of Esav and asks if they want the Torah; they respond by questioning, "What is written in it?" God tells them that it says, "You shall not murder." The descendants of Esav immediately refuse, saying that they were blessed with "By your sword you shall live." G-d goes to the descendants of Ammon and Moab, offering them the Torah. They also ask, "What is written in it?" G-d tells them about the prohibition of adultery. Ammon and Moab promptly refuse, as they originated from an illicit relationship between Lot and his daughters. G-d then goes to the descendants of Ishmael, offering them the Torah. They too inquired, "What is written in it?" G-d responds, "You shall not steal." The descendants of Ishmael refuse, stating that it is said about Ishmael, "And he shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man..." Finally, G-d comes to Israel and offers the Jews the Torah. Without asking questions, the Jews immediately declare, "We will do and we will hear."

There are two questions to ask about this Midrash: 1) It seems that G-d is attempting to market the Torah to the nations of the world, but the marketing strategy appears unsuccessful. Why would G-d offer the most

challenging aspects of the Torah to these nations? Why would Esav want a Torah that says, "You shall not murder" when they were blessed with "By your sword you shall live"? Couldn't God market the Torah by emphasizing commandments which are more universally appealing?

2) A greater question is that the nations of the world, whether they accept the Torah or not, are still bound by the commandments of "You shall not murder," "You shall not commit adultery," and "You shall not steal." After all, the nations of the world are commanded by the Seven Noahide Laws, which include prohibitions on murder, theft, and illicit relations. Why does G-d tell them about commandments that they are already obligated to observe under the Seven Noahide Laws?

I heard in the name of Rabbi Dovid Cohen the following idea that reconciles these questions:

There is a significant difference between the purpose of the 613 Commandments of the Jewish people and the Seven Noahide Laws. The Noahide Laws are designed to establish order in the world. The world will collapse if people steal, murder, and engage in illicit relations. For the world to exist in peace, it needs the Seven Noahide Laws.

However, this is not the case with the 613 commandments intended for the Jewish people. The 613 commandments are meant to change us, to improve us, to elevate us.

Humans were created with different natures and inclinations, and the purpose of the commandments of the Torah is to break the nature and evil inclination within us, transforming us from individuals with a destructive nature into individuals with a good and compassionate nature. The goal of the commandment "You shall not murder" is not only to establish order in the world but to change the human being into a compassionate and considerate individual who values the lives of others. The Seven Noahide Laws aim to maintain order, while the 613 commandments aim to transform us into more virtuous and pure individuals.

With this idea, we can answer the two questions: Indeed, the nations of the world are commanded in "You shall not steal" and "You shall not murder," but it is a different kind of "You shall not steal" and "You shall not murder." These commandments are intended to maintain order and peace in the world. However, individuals can remain corrupt, with a nature and desire to commit evil and crime. The Torah Commandments are designed to change human nature, to break our dark inclinations, and to elevate us to become more virtuous and pure individuals. Therefore, G-d specifically offers the nations of the world the most challenging aspects of the Torah because the goal of the Torah is to change human nature, to break our dark inclinations and elevate us to become more virtuous and pure individuals.



Yirmiyahu 8

At the end of Chapter 7 Hashem warned Yirmiyahu that the Jews would not listen to his rebuke, and the result would be punishment for their sins. That punishment continues into Chapter 8. Yirmiyahu describes the bones of the failed leaders of Judea—kings, nobles, kohanim and false prophets—laid out beneath the glare of the celestial bodies they worshipped, alongside the bones of the general population. For the survivors, death would be better than the life they will live (8:1-3).

Yirmiyahu then turns to the people in rebuke: Hashem would accept you back if only you would return; why do you not repent? Birds of the heavens know how to avoid harm and flee to safety; why don't you? (8:4-9)

But the nation is stubborn, and therefore Hashem will allow the enemy to despoil

them. The leaders who lie, soothing the people with assertions of "Peace, peace," will pay for their sins as well (8:10-12).

The prophet then speaks in the voice of the nation, describing their own misery for the punishment they have received; this is the beginning of the haftorah read historically on the morning of Tisha b'Av. They describe their unrealized hopes for peace and healing, and the sound of horses charging in from Dan's land in the north. Hashem then interjects, promising to send poisonous snakes, the symbol of Dan. But rather than bite the horses of the enemy, these snakes will attack the Jews (8:13-17 as explained in Malbim).

The prophet describes the Jews saying that they cannot overcome their grief. The following line (8:19) admits two interpretations:

1. The Jews of the southern kingdom of Yehudah cry out at the arrival of an enemy from distant lands. "Is there no G-d in Zion? Is her King not there?" To which Hashem responds by blaming the idolatry of the Jews (Radak).
2. The Jews of the northern kingdom of Yisrael, exiled to distant lands, cry out when they see the destruction of the southern kingdom of Yehudah. "Is there no G-d in Zion? Is her King not there?" To which Hashem responds by blaming the idolatry of the Jews (Malbim).

The nation then bewails the fact that the happy seasons of harvest and summer have come and gone without salvation. There is no healing—no balm in Gilead—and instead the nation weeps endlessly. This will continue in Chapter 9.



Week 2: Chasdai Crescas

Rabbi Chasdai Crescas (c. 1340-1410/11) was an influential Spanish-Jewish philosopher as well as a teacher of *halacha*. He was the grandson of Ran (who we met in our previous unit) and was himself a Talmudic scholar. He served as a communal leader and was active in anti-Christian philosophical polemics. In addition to Rabbi Yosef Albo, he taught other scholars such as Rabbi Mattityahu of Saragossa.

While he is generally grouped with the other medieval rationalist philosophers, he was highly critical of Rambam, specifically of the Aristotelian influence in his work. His central work, *Or HaShem* ("The Light of God") is a particularly difficult work to read, but it has been influential within and without traditional circles, impacting people such as Pico della Mirandola and Baruch Spinoza. It is within that work that he offers an alternative view to that of Rambam's.

His work is perhaps best known for challenging the centrality of free will in Jewish thought, though the exact contours of his

own belief are complicated. He definitely rejects the robust free will embraced by Rambam, but does not seem to fully accept determinism either. Formally, his view may be referred to as compatibilism.

Or HaShem is also the first Jewish work to explore the potential implications of extraterrestrial life, a topic that was barely taken up after Rabbi Crescas until the twentieth century by Rabbi Norman Lamm and Rabbi Avraham Price.

We will focus on his treatment of *ikkarei Emunah*. In his central presentation, he has six *ikkarim*, though he also introduces various kinds of *ikkarim*, such as *ikkarim hateluyim b'mitzvot*, fundamentals that depend on (or perhaps emerge from) commandments, a category that does not have a parallel in either Rambam or Rabbi Yosef Albo's. Besides for the general importance of comparative study, as Rabbi Crescas taught Albo, studying their *ikkarim* together is necessary for a full understanding.



Should one stand during the reading of Asseret Hadibrot?

Question: In our shul, the custom is to stand during the reading of the Ten Commandments in Parashat Yitro. However, a friend of mine told me this custom is wrong! Is there really a problem standing for the reading of the Ten Commandments?

Answer: Indeed, this matter is a subject of controversy. Some explain the reason for this custom is because the people of Israel stood during the hearing of the Ten Commandments, as stated: "And they stood at the bottom of the mountain" [Exodus 19:17].

However, significant rabbis, including Maimonides, have criticized the practice of standing during the recitation of the Ten Commandments. The objection stems from a Talmudic passage in *Berachot* 12a, which mentions a suggestion to include the Ten Commandments in the "Shema Yisrael" prayer which was ultimately rejected due to concerns about claims of the heretics [Tar'omet Haminim]. Rashi explains that there was a fear that heretics would argue that the Torah is not valid except for the Ten Commandments. Consequently, Maimonides

states in his responsa [Siman 46 or 263] that those who stand during the recitation of the Ten Commandments give the impression that there is exceptional significance to the Ten Commandments, and therefore, one should not stand during their recitation. In places where it is customary to stand, they should be advised to change their custom.

Throughout the years, there have been great rabbis who permitted the practice, including the *Maharshal*, the *Chida*, and others. However, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef ruled [Yecheve Daat 1-29] that all previous generations did not see Maimonides' response, which was only discovered in later years. Since Maimonides explicitly states that this practice should not be followed, we are obligated to adhere to his ruling and one should not stand during the recitation of the Ten Commandments.

In contrast, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein [Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:22] ruled that it is permissible to stand during the recitation of the Ten Commandments. One of the reasons he provided is that we also stand during other Torah readings. For example, many

people stood during the recitation of the Song of the Sea [Shirat Hayam] last week. Thus, we demonstrate that not only the Ten Commandments hold special importance, and therefore, there is no need to attribute extra significance to them compared to the entire Torah.

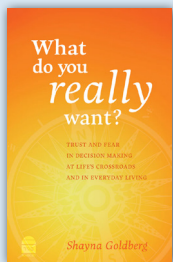
Additionally, there were Rabbis who proposed alternative solutions. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein ruled that if one stands throughout the entire Torah reading on this Shabbat, it indicates that there is no extra importance attached to the Ten Commandments. Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch suggested standing only for a few verses before the Ten Commandments and by doing that expressing that there is no extra significance attributed to the Ten Commandments.

In practice, the subject remains a matter of dispute, and it is advisable to consult the community's Rabbi on how to conduct oneself in your specific congregation.

Have a halachic question? Share it with Rabbi Mann at [ymann@torontotorah.com](mailto:ymanntorontotorah.com).



Our Next Book: What Do You Really Want?



What Do You Really Want?
By Shayna Goldberg
Maggid Press, 2021

We live in a world filled with opportunities. Every day we have countless chances to make good decisions that better our lives and/or the lives of others. Sometimes, making these decisions is easy and straightforward. If you want to incorporate more Torah into your life, for instance, you simply pick up an issue of Toronto Torah.

But sometimes our decisions are fraught. The right answer doesn't always present itself, at least not immediately. And this is to say nothing of our *chayalim* who are forced to

make life-or-death decisions daily for the safety and security of Israel and Jews around the world. Their courage and sacrifice serve as a stark reminder of the weightiness of decision-making, especially in times of crisis.

While we may not face these same types of choices, our decisions can also feel daunting. And an inability to easily resolve them can lead to stress, fear, and hopelessness. It is in response to these feelings that Shayna Goldberg wrote our next book, *What Do You Really Want?*

In her book, Mrs. Goldberg explores the questions that plague many of us at various times throughout our lives: How do I make significant, and sometimes difficult, life decisions? An expert educator, *yoetzet halacha* and *mashgicha ruchanit* at Migdal Oz, Mrs. Goldberg brings a wealth of experience to her exploration of decision making.

Whether or not you have a major decision looming, there is something meaningful to be found in this book. Please join me over the next few weeks as we read it together.

Want to check out the book first? Check out the first 19 pages on Koren's website: tinyurl.com/InsideWDYRW

What Do You Really Want? can be purchased from Koren Publishers at tinyurl.com/KorenBMZD. Use the code *TorontoTorah* for a 10% discount on this or any other book on their website.



TABLE TALK RABBI NOAH SONENBERG, DEAN

Source: Rashi - Shemot 20:7

זָכוֹר—This word "remember" which opens this commandment here and שְׁמוֹר "observe" which opens it in Deuteronomy (5:12) were spoken in one utterance.

- How do you remember Shabbat?
- How do you observe Shabbat?

Shulchan Aruch 271:2

Kiddush, even though it is a positive commandment

that time causes (meaning, a positive commandment dependent on time), because Remember is compared to Observe. And these women, since they are included in watching, they are included in remembering.

- How do the obligations of remembering and observing complement each other?

After Shabbat, please share your family's answers with us at nsonenberg@torontotorah.com to enter our raffle for a \$15 voucher for Tova's Bakery!

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Shabbat	Halacha from the Parasha	Clanton Park	After Hashkama Minyan	Rabbi Mann
	Gemara	BAYT	Between Mincha & Maariv	Rabbi Gutenberg
Sunday	Tzurba M'Rabanan – Halacha	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:30 AM	Rabbi Shor
	Men's Semichat Chaver: Hilchot Smachot	Clanton Park	9:00 AM	Rabbi Spitz & Rabbi Mann
	Shiur b'Ivrit	BAYT (Milevsky/Mizrachi)	9:00 AM	Rabbi Mann & Rabbi Lax
	Sefer Shemot	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Cancelled this week	David Koschitzky
Monday	The Torah: A Psychic Turn. Psychological Theories in the Eyes of Tanach	Zoom: tiny.cc/idanrak	2:00 PM	R' Rakovsky
	Men's Halacha	Shomrai Shabbos	8:30 PM	Rabbi Mann
	University Women's Beit Midrash	Yeshivat Or Chaim	7:45 PM	Rabbi Anstandig
	Introduction to Gemara: Learn how to learn	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Sonenberg
Tuesday	Then and Now: Returning to the Land of Israel – a Study in Tanach	Zoom	1:30 PM	Rabbi Horovitz
	Women's Gemara Shiur	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Anstandig
	Women's Contemporary Halacha Shiur	Clanton Park	8:15 PM	Rabbi Mann
Wednesday	Morality, Ethics and Religion	Zoom	10:00 AM	Rabbi Sonenberg
	Men's Contemporary Halacha	Clanton Park	8:00 PM	Rabbi Mann
	Men's Gemara Bekiut	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Sonenberg
	Eliyahu HaNavi: A Prophet of Fire & Water	Shaarei Tefillah	8:00 PM	R' Rakovsky
Thursday	Tanach: Sefer Shmuel	Zoom: tiny.cc/BMZDTanach	1:30 PM	Rabbi Horovitz
	Men's Tzurba M'Rabanan	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Turtel
	Men's Gemara Iyun	BAYT (Milevsky/Mizrachi)	8:00 PM	R' Diena
Sun-Thu	Men's Community Night Seder	Yeshivat Or Chaim Clanton Park	Sun-Mon, Wed-Thurs: 8:00–9:00 PM Tues: 8:00–9:00 PM	
	Pre-Maariv Shiur	Yeshivat Or Chaim	New Time 8:45–9:00 PM	Rabbi Sonenberg

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Kumzitz with Rabbi Moishe Lexier	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Thursday, February 1, 2024, after Maariv
BMZD Shabbaton	Clanton Park	February 2-3, 2024
Rabbi Toczyner: Medical Ethics	Zoom	February 12, 2024 7:30–9:00 PM

YOUR BEIT MIDRASH

Rosh Beit Midrash

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