



THE INSPIRE

BAMIDBAR - SHAVUOT

MAZAL TOVS

BIRTHDAYS

Alan Winter Sunday
Stuart Fox Wednesday
Simon Klein Wednesday
Marilyn Michaels Wednesday
Yoav Barnes Friday
Galit Goldstone Saturday

ANNIVERSARIES

Mr & Mrs Warren Thursday

YARTZEIT

Davis, Yochevet father Mantel, Dovid Dovid Ben Yacov Saturday
15/5/21 Sivan 4

Trainis, Avril sister Dightmaker, Marlene (Milly) Miriam Monday
17/5/21 Sivan 6, 5781

Lane, Shirley father Don, Harold Zvi Hersh ben Eliezer HaCohen
Monday 17/5/21 Sivan

Berg, Sharon father Chisick, Harold Hersh ben Shmuel Tuesday
18/5/21 Sivan 7

White, David father White, Shaul Chayim Shaul Chaim ben Avraham
HaLevi Wednesday 19/5/21 Sivan 8

Baskin, Tracy mother Baskin, June Yetta bas Eliezer Thursday 20/5/21
Sivan 9, 5781 Baskin, Stanley 1st wife Baskin, Louise mother

Cyril wife Laderman, Daniel mother, Robert mother Laderman, Miriam
Miriam bas Binyamin HaLevi Thursday 20/5/21 Sivan 9 Laderman,

Golstein, Leonard charles Wife - Golstein, Andrew Mother Caplan,
Janine Mother, Susan Shashana Bas Moshe Friday 21/5/21 Sivan 10

TIMES

SHABBAT & YOM TOV TIMES

14 May Friday 20:31
15 May Shabbat ends 21:46
16 May Sunday 20:33
17 May Monday light from pre
existing flame 21:47
18 May Yom Tov ends 21:49

PARSHAH POINTERS

In the Sinai Desert, G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age (20 to 60 years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary. They replace the firstborn, whose number they approximated since they were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborns who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel "ransom" to redeem themselves. When the people broke camp, the three Levite clans dismantled and transported the Sanctuary, and reassembled it at the centre of the next encampment. They then erected their own tents around it: the Kohathites, who carried the Sanctuary's vessels (the Ark, menorah, etc.) in their specially designed coverings on their shoulders, camped to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merari, who transported its wall panels and pillars, to its north. Before the Sanctuary's entranceway, to its east, were the tents of Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons.

Beyond the Levite circle, the twelve tribes camped in four groups of three tribes each. To the east were Judah (pop. 74,600), Issachar (54,400) and Zebulun (57,400); to the south, Reuben (46,500), Simeon (59,300) and Gad (45,650); to the west, Ephraim (40,500), Manasseh (32,200) and Benjamin (35,400); and to the north, Dan (62,700), Asher (41,500) and Naphtali (53,400). This formation was kept also while travelling. Each tribe had its own nassi (prince or leader), and its own flag with its tribal colour and emblem.

IT'S EASY FOR YOU RABBI, YOU WERE BORN RELIGIOUS

ELISHA GREENBAUM

It's an argument I hear all the time. People will approach me at weddings and after funerals, they'll stop me on the street and corner me in the supermarket, and attempt to explain to me exactly why they can't accept more Judaism into their lives: because they just weren't born into it.

Their parents didn't practice, they didn't attend a Jewish school or weren't paying attention during religious classes. They can't read Hebrew fluently, they've never felt comfortable in shul, and they're sorry, but it's definitely too late to start now.

Is that true?

There have been tens of thousands of ba'alei teshuvah over the last few decades—men and women who weren't born into religious families but who have chosen to become Torah-observant. We all have the free choice to change and the ability to succeed. Admittedly, it might be harder to pick up a new language or to adopt new rituals at a relatively advanced age, but it definitely can be done, if one wants it enough.

Perhaps even more extraordinary than ba'alei teshuvah are geirim, converts, who weren't born Jewish and yet have taken the audacious step of transforming their lives and casting their lot in with ours. We welcome them aboard, and we admire their courage.

If you think about it, Shavuot is the festival where we celebrate this capacity to adopt Judaism and commit ourselves to G-d. The men and women clustered around Mt. Sinai didn't really know what they were getting into, but they were willing to find out. Right then and there, they chose G-d and promised to spend the rest of their lives changing, learning and practicing until they got it right. It's not easy, but it's worth it.

On Shavuot, we all become ba'alei teshuvah and we all promise to convert. It makes no difference where we've come from; the real question is, where are we heading?

When Moses climbed the mountain to receive G-d's commands to His new nation, G-d instructed him to "say to the House of Jacob and tell the Children of Israel." Biblical commentators point out that the variant expressions "the House of Jacob" and "the Children of Israel" are a reflection of the different types of people whom Moses was addressing.

Jacob and Israel are both names of our forefather Jacob. Jacob was the name that he was given at birth, and reflects his identity as an innately holy Jew, born to spiritually pure parents. Israel is the name that he received when, as an adult, he demonstrated the courage and maturity to struggle against adversity and independently chose to transform himself.

The "House of Jacob" is a reference to our birthplace. We don't get to pick our parents, and we have done nothing to deserve the treasures into which we're born. The "Children of Israel," by contrast, describes us as the adults we have become, who choose our own paths in life and deserve the rewards that we have personally earned. G-d was instructing Moses to speak on both levels and tailor his message to every stage in the journey through life.

G-d is speaking to all of us, all the time. No matter what we've been doing till now, we can and must do better in the future. The training we've received to date and the legacy we inherited from our parents and teachers are useful only if we utilize them to better ourselves in the future. We were all born holy and, at the same time, we must all improve further.

When we gather in the synagogue on Shavuot to hear the Ten Commandments and receive the Torah anew, let us be truly grateful for the gifts we've received in the past, and let us promise to transform ourselves into the people that G-d wishes us to become—and thus earn the reward that He is confident we deserve.



Romeo and Juliet are found dead on the floor in a bedroom. When they were discovered, there were pieces of glass and some water on the floor. The only furniture in the room is a shelf and a bed. The house is in a remote location, away from everything except for the nearby railroad track. What caused the death of Romeo and Juliet?

JOKE

Moishe Rubenstein had begun to worry about almost everything in his old age, especially his health. One day, Moishe bumped into his doctor at the supermarket. "Doctor!" Moishe exclaimed, "I've been meaning to tell you, remember those voices I kept on hearing in my head? I haven't heard them in over a week!" "Wow! What wonderful news Moishe! I'm so happy for you!" his doctor exclaimed. "Wonderful?" asked a dismal looking Moishe. "There's nothing wonderful about it. I'm afraid my hearing is starting to go now!"

RABBI SACKS OBM

What the Israelites heard at Sinai has become known as the “Ten Commandments.” But this description raises obvious problems. First, neither the Torah nor Jewish tradition calls them the Ten Commandments. The Torah calls them *aseret hadevarim* (Ex. 34:28), and tradition terms them *aseret hadibrot*, meaning “the ten utterances.” Second, there was much debate, especially between Maimonides and Halachot Gedolot as understood by Nahmanides, as to whether the first verse, “I am the Lord your God ...,” is a command or a preface to the commands. Third, there are not ten commandments in Judaism but 613. Why, then, these but not those?

Light has been shed on all these issues by the discovery, already mentioned, of ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties, most of which share certain features and forms. They begin with a preamble stating who is initiating the covenant. That is why the revelation opened with the words, “I am the Lord your God.” Then comes a historical review stating the background and context of the covenant, in this case, “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the slave-house.” Next come the stipulations, first in general outline, then in specific detail. That is precisely the relationship between the “ten utterances” and the detailed commands set out in later chapters and books of the Torah. The former are the general outline, the latter, the details. So the “ten utterances” are not commandments as such but an articulation of basic principles. What makes them special is that they are simple and easy to memorise. That is because in Judaism, law is not intended for judges alone. The covenant at Sinai was made by God with an entire people. Hence the need for a brief statement of basic principles that everyone could remember and recite.

Usually, they are portrayed as two sets of five, the first dealing with relationships between us and God (including honouring our parents since they like God brought us into being), the second with the relations between us and our fellow humans.

However, it also makes sense to see them as three groups of three.

The first three – No other gods besides Me, no graven images, and no taking of God’s name in vain – are about God, the author and authority of the laws. The first states that Divine sovereignty transcends all other loyalties (No other gods besides Me). The second tells us that God is a living force, not an abstract power (No graven images). The third states that sovereignty presupposes reverence (Do not take My name in vain).

The second three – the Sabbath, honouring parents, and the prohibition of murder – are all about the principle of the createdness of life. Shabbat is the day dedicated to seeing God as creator, and the universe as His creation. Honouring parents acknowledges our human createdness. “Thou shall not murder” restates the central principle of the Noahide covenant that murder is not just a crime against man but a sin against God in whose image we are created. So the fourth, fifth and sixth commands form the basic jurisprudential principles of Jewish life. They tell us to remember where we came from if we seek to know how to live.

The third three – against adultery, theft and bearing false witness – establish the basic institutions on which society depends. Marriage is sacred because it is the human bond closest in approximation to the covenant between us and God.

The prohibition against theft establishes the integrity of property, which John Locke saw as one of the bases of a free society. Tyrants abuse property rights. The prohibition of false testimony is the precondition of justice. A just society needs more than a structure of laws, courts and enforcement agencies. It also needs basic honesty on the part of us all. There is no freedom without justice, and no justice without each of us accepting individual and collective responsibility for truth-telling. Finally comes the stand-alone prohibition against envying your neighbour’s house, wife, slave, maid, ox, donkey, or anything else belonging to him or her. This seems odd if we think of the “ten words” as commands, but not if we think of them as the basic principles of a free society.

The greatest challenge of any society is how to contain the universal phenomenon of envy: the desire to have what belongs to someone else. Rene Girard, in *Violence and the Sacred*, argued that the primary driver of human violence is mimetic desire, that is, the desire to have what someone else has, which is ultimately the desire to be what someone else is. Envy can lead to breaking many of the other commands: it can move people to adultery, theft, false testimony and even murder. It led Cain to murder Abel, made Abraham and Isaac fear for their life because they were married to beautiful women, and led Joseph’s brothers to hate him and sell him into slavery. It was envy of their neighbours that led the Israelites often to imitate their religious practices and worship their gods.

So the prohibition of envy is not odd at all. It is the most basic force undermining the social harmony and order that are the aim of the Ten Commandments as a whole. Not only though do they forbid it; they also help us rise above it. It is precisely the first three commands, reminding us of God’s presence in history and our lives, and the second three, reminding us of our creativeness, that help us rise above envy.

We are here because God wanted us to be. We have what God wanted us to have. Why then should we seek what others have? If what matters most in our lives is how we appear in the eyes of God, why should we seek anything else merely because someone else has it? It is when we stop defining ourselves in relation to God and start defining ourselves in relation to other people that competition, strife, covetousness and envy enter our minds, and they lead only to unhappiness.

Thirty-three centuries after they were first given, the Ten Commandments remain the simplest, shortest guide to the creation of a good society.

THE STORY

Onkelos was the son of Emperor Hadrian's sister. Being a clever, handsome, well mannered young man, he had grown up to be one of the most promising future leaders of the mighty Roman Empire. His uncle looked forward to the time when Onkelos would be ready to make his formal debut on the stage of public Roman life.

By chance, Onkelos had become acquainted with some of the noble Jewish families who had settled in Rome. Through them, he was introduced to the Jewish religion, and was very much attracted to it.

Onkelos had to remember, however, that he was the noble son of the most eminent family of the Roman Empire. It was unwise for him to be observed associating with Jews. Still more dangerous would it have been, had he openly stated his intention of changing to the Jewish religion. It would have been sheer suicide. On the other hand, Onkelos felt increasingly drawn to the Jewish faith.

After long deliberation, he worked out a solution to his problem. He visited his uncle, Emperor Hadrian. During their conversation, he casually mentioned that he had become interested in the world of commerce and that he would like to dedicate some time and effort to becoming fully acquainted with the principles and workings of this most important field of public endeavour.

Hadrian, who was very fond of his nephew, was highly pleased at this show of interest in such complicated matters as the theory and practice of economics. He gave Onkelos this advice: "The basic approach to commerce is the discovery of merchandise of a highly marketable product which has yet to come before the public. This type of merchandise is the most profitable kind of business."

This is exactly what Onkelos wanted to hear. Now he was given a free hand to travel about and to associate with merchants, many of whom were Jews, without attracting unwanted attention and giving cause for suspicion. In the course of extensive trips, he visited the Holy Land, and remained there to study Torah.

Gifted with an extraordinary and keen mind, he easily overcame the difficulties of the Hebrew language, law and lore.

After a while, he was ready to adopt the Jewish religion and to abide by the commands of the Torah. Secretly, he became a ger, a convert to Judaism.

Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua were the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people in those days. Onkelos visited them and begged them to accept him as their disciple.

The Sages saw the deep change that had taken place in the attitude of the young, noble Roman. Instead of haughtiness, he now showed humility and a readiness to study, like all other students of Torah.

They finally agreed to the urgent request of the young ger, and spent much time and effort on his Jewish education. The time came when Onkelos could no longer delay his return to Rome. Confident in G-d's help, he parted from the Sages who had become his revered teachers and embarked on his trip home.

After his arrival in Rome, he paid his due visit to Emperor Hadrian, who quickly noticed the deep change that had come over his nephew during his long absence. It was a more humble, yet wiser Onkelos, who now stood before him, than the one who had left to study commerce.

"What has happened to you, my dear nephew? Did you meet failure in your business ventures, or did anyone dare to harm you?" the emperor asked him.

"Who would harm the nephew of the mightiest man in the world?" replied Onkelos with a smile.

"Why then do I see such humility in your countenance, my nephew?"

Onkelos decided to be straightforward. "I cannot but tell you the full truth, my dear uncle. The reason for the change in me is the fact that I spent much time and effort in the study of Torah, the Law of the Jewish people. What is more, I even went so far as to adopt the Jewish religion as my own."

Emperor Hadrian's face grew red with fury over his nephew's confession. This spelt the end of Onkelos's political career and deprived him, his uncle, of the one on whom he had counted heavily in his future political plans.

When his fury abated, Hadrian felt that he should give his nephew a fair chance to explain his behaviour before doing anything to punish him. "You have thoroughly disappointed my high hopes and expectations of you. Yet I am curious to know what caused such unbelievable foolishness on the part of such a clever young fellow as you. Perhaps there was some young woman who trapped you against your will?"

"My dear uncle and friend, to be frank, I must state that no such reason was at the root of my change of religion. What prompted me to take such a weighty step was none other than your sound advice before I parted from you."

Angrily, Hadrian retorted: "I would be the last man to advise you so stupidly."

"Yet remember, dear uncle, before I left, you advised me to search for merchandise that had the promise of being a best selling article. On my extensive trips and thorough study of many countries and conditions, I did not discover any merchandise that, at the present time, is considered lowlier or cheaper than the Jewish religion and the Jewish people.

Yet, there is also no doubt in my mind that it will become the most valuable merchandise of all in the future. As the Prophet Isaiah said: 'Thus said G-d, the Redeemer of Israel, the Holy One, to him who is despised by men, to him who is abhorred by nations, to the servants of rulers; kings shall see it and rise up; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves.' I should think no reasonable businessman would miss the chance of such great profit."

Hadrian recognized his nephew's conviction, and despite his regret and sorrow, he let him go. He did nothing to interfere with Onkelos's open conversion to the Jewish faith, and his life as a pious and observant Jew.

FOOD 4 THOUGHT

"Every day, the Torah must be new to you." (Sifrei)

Torah is our life, and life is here and now, forever new.

This means that for you to be truly alive, the Torah you learn today must touch the core of your soul.

And the same tomorrow. And the next day as well.

To live with Torah is to be forever newly born.