

TANK-FULL

by Rabbi Label Lam

And G-d spoke all these words saying, "I am HASHEM your G-d that took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me." (Shemos 20:1-3)

These two "statements" are not just the introduction to of the Ten Commandments. They are the building blocks of the entire Torah. On these two the whole Torah rests. How so? The Ohr HaChaim states that the key to all the 248 activity Mitzvos are animated by the knowledge of the reality of G-d's existence. If I'm clear that G-d demands that I do something, how can I refuse or delay? The authentic motivation behind all the 365 refraining- "don't do"- Mitzvos can be traced to the Divine mandate to entertain no other gods. If the Almighty is understood to be the ultimate authority and there is no other, then there is no room for negotiation when my desire conflicts with a heavenly- "NO!"

It's no mistake that these alone, according to our Talmudic sources, were heard directly by the entire Nation of Israel, as the verse states, "Torah Tzivah Lanu Moshe"- "Moshe commanded us Torah...." (Devarim 33:4) The numerical value of Torah is 611 our sages reckon meaning that 611 were received from Moshe but the first two of the 613 Mitzvos we heard directly from HASHEM on Mt. Sinai. (Makos 23B)

How important is it then to contemplate the value of these two giant foundation stones that impact our relationship with HASHEM affects directly all of our interpersonal relationships and for all time!? Why are these two the chosen notions to be installed into the psyche of our people when we stood together on Mt. Sinai? Why are the myriad of critical details served then secondly? Maybe there's an educational lesson to be gleaned from this approach.

The story is told that a teacher stood before his class with a giant empty fish tank on his desk. The students watched as he carefully placed within the tank a number of large stones. He asked the student if the tank was full. They all said that it was. Then he took out a bucket of gravel and proceeded to pour it into the tank and they watched as the smaller rocks now filled the smaller crevices left open by the big rocks. Then he asked his students again if the container was full and they agreed that it was. He then took out a bag of sand and before their surprised eyes he emptied the whole lot as the fine granules snuck into the even smaller spaces between the pebbles. He asked the class again, "Is this tank full?" They agreed unanimously, "Yes! Now it's full!" To their amazement he withdrew a large pitcher of water and deposited it into the tank till it was brimming. Again he asked, "Is the tank full?" They acquiesced with a huge, "Yes!" Now the teacher asked them,

"What do we learn from this exercise?" Immediately hands were raised and the common conclusion was, "We could put a lot more into the tank than we thought!" The teacher then told his students even that though it's true that it's not the main point. They all wondered what else the answer could be. He told them, "We learn from this demonstration, that if you don't put in the big rocks first, you'll never be able to get them in later."

So it is with these first two Mitzvos and "The Tablets" of stone- bearing the Ten Commandments. We might be seduced into thinking that we can do more and more and that makes everything better and better. How do we do it? Volume! Mass quantities! Get as much into and out of life as you can! Even Torah and Mitzvos! However, certain great notions need to be anchored first if we are to realize how to really be, pardon me, **tank-full!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.