

TORAH FROM HEAVEN

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Yisro

Torah from Heaven

In this week's parashah, the Torah is given. R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204) writes about this in his exposition of the 13 ikkarim / fundamental beliefs: "The eighth ikkar is that the Torah is from Heaven. This requires us to believe that the entire Torah which is in our possession, which was given to Moshe Rabbeinu a"h, is from the 'mouth' of the All Powerful One. This means that it was received by him [Moshe Rabbeinu] through a process which, for lack of a better term, we call 'speech,' though we really don't know how he received it.

Moshe alone knew how he received it. He was like a scribe who wrote down the history, the events and the laws; that is why he is called a 'mechokek / legislator.' There is no difference [in holiness] between [the verses or phrases]: 'The sons of Cham--Kush, Mitzrayim, Put, and Canaan' (Bereishit 10:6); 'His wife's name was Meheitav'el, daughter of Matred, daughter of Mei-zahav' (36:39); and 'Timna was a concubine' (36:11), on the one hand, and 'Anochi / I am Hashem your Elokim' and 'Shema Yisrael,' on the other. They are all from the 'mouth' of the All Powerful One, they are all the Torah of Hashem--perfect, pure, and the truth which is holy. . . One who says that Moshe told the Torah's stories on his own is classified as one who denies [an essential belief], for he believes that the Torah has a 'heart' and a 'mind' and that these stories have no purpose. This is included in 'denying the Divine origin of the Torah,' [which causes one to forfeit Olam Haba, according to the Mishnah]. . . The way we make a sukkah, lulav, shofar, tefilin and other [mitzvah] objects today is exactly the form that Hashem told Moshe. He [Moshe] told us, and he is trusted that he fulfilled his mission honestly. The verse that teaches this principle is (Bamidbar 16:28), 'Through this [punishment of the mutinous Korach] you shall know that Hashem sent me to perform all these acts, that it was not from my heart.' [This demonstrates that trusting Moshe is a prerequisite to accepting the Divine origin of the Torah.]" (Hakdamah L'perek Cheilek)

"And her two sons -- the name of one of whom was Gershom, for he had said, 'I was a ger / sojourner in a strange land.' And the name of the one was Eliezer, 'For the Elokim of my father came

to my aid, and He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.'" (18:3-4)

R' Zvi Elimelech Shapira z"l (1783-1841; the Bnei Yissachar) asks: Why doesn't the second verse say, "And the name of the one was Eliezer, for he said 'the Elokim of my father came to my aid . . .'" He answers:

Some would say that the phrase "he said" in verse 3 serves both verses. However, that would not explain the similar absence of "he said" in the verse (Bereishit 32:31), "Yaakov called the name of the place Peniel--'For I have seen the Divine face to face, yet my life was spared'," and the verse (Bereishit 41:51), "Yosef called the name of the firstborn Menashe--'For Elokim has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household'." Rather, the common denominator of our verse and those two verses is that the speaker would have had to pronounce a Name of G-d to get his message across. Therefore, he only *thought* the words and, thus, the verses don't say, "He said." (Agra D'Kallah)

R' Menachem Mendel Krochmal z"l (rabbi of Nikolsburg, Moravia; died 1661) offers another explanation for the absence of "he said" in verse 4:

We read (Shmot 2:21), "Va'yoel Moshe / Moshe desired to dwell with the man [Yitro]; and he gave his daughter Tzipporah to Moshe." The word "Va'yoel" can mean, "He took an oath." Our Sages explain that, as a condition of marrying Yitro's daughter, Moshe took an oath that his first child would be pledged as a priest to idolatry.

The obvious question is: How could Moshe make such an oath? We also could ask: Earlier (2:16), Rashi z"l wrote that Yitro had abandoned the idol worship to which the Midianites were attached, and they banished him. If so, asks R' Krochmal, why would Yitro want Moshe to pledge his son to idolatry.

He explains: Our Sages say that Yitro was a seeker of the truth, and that led him to test every form of idolatry known to man. When Moshe met Yitro, the latter had recently abandoned the idolatry of Midian. But, there were other forms of idolatry still to be tested, and Yitro wanted his grandson to be pledged to serve idolatry. Moshe was confident, however, that Yitro would soon arrive at the truth and that Moshe's (as yet unborn) son would never be a priest to idolatry.

Because Moshe's firstborn son was pledged to Yitro's beliefs, Moshe had to explain the baby's name to Yitro. Thus we read, "The name of one of whom was Gershom, for *he had said*, 'I was a ger / sojourner in a strange land'." For the same reason, he didn't include G-d's Name in his firstborn son's name. In contrast, Moshe did not have to explain his second son's name to anyone. Thus, it doesn't say, "He said." And, he did include G-d's Name. (Pi Tzaddik: Drush 2)

"Moshe's father-in-law . . . said, 'What is this thing that you do to the people? Why do you sit alone and all the people stand over you from morning to evening?'

Moshe said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to seek Elokim . . .'

The father-in-law of Moshe said to him, 'The thing that you do is not good . . . Now heed my voice; I shall advise you, and may Elokim be with you'." (18:14-19)

R' Eliyahu Guttmacher z"l (1796-1874; rabbi of Grätz, Prussia) writes: From Yitro, we can learn the rules for giving advice properly. These include:

- (1) Generally, one shouldn't give unsolicited advice. However, one may give unsolicited advice to someone for whose welfare he is responsible, or to a loved one [such as Yitro to Moshe].
- (2) Before giving advice, one should ask questions and learn the relevant details in order to give useful and accurate advice [as Yitro did here]. Just as a doctor must know all the details of a patient's condition, so it is with anyone who is giving advice.
- (3) If the subject is a small one, one may rely on his own wisdom to give advice. But, regarding important matters, one should recommend that the person receiving the advice seek a second opinion from someone greater [here, Elokim]. (Derashot V'chiddushei R' Eliyahu Guttmacher)

"You shall not covet your fellow's house. You shall not covet your fellow's wife, his slave, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, nor anything that is le'rai'echa / to your fellow." (20:14)

R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) asks: Why didn't the verse say, "nor anything that is *shel* rai'echa / belongs to your fellow"? He answers:

The verse is teaching that you should not even covet something that does not yet belong to your friend, but is on its way to becoming his. For example, if Reuven sees Shimon (fictitious names) about to pick up an ownerless item in the street and Reuven runs and grabs it first, our Sages call Reuven a rasha / wicked man, even though he has not committed any technical transgression. Why? Because one is required to have faith that G-d has set aside for him all of the material belongings he is destined to have, and no one can touch that. Thus, if Shimon finds something of value, it was not meant to belong to Reuven. (Zechor L'Miriam p.57)

"Moshe said to the people, 'Do not fear, for in order to elevate you Elokim has come; so that fear of Him shall be upon your faces, so that you shall not sin'." (20:17)

R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi z"l (1745-1812; founder of Chabad; known as the Ba'al Ha'Tanya) asks: How could Moshe tell Bnei Yisrael not to be afraid when G-d revealed Himself? Isn't there a mitzvah to fear G-d? He explains:

The mitzvah to fear G-d, like the mitzvah to love G-d, describe a relationship between a person who

views himself as a being and another Being, G-d, external to himself. Ideally, however, one should transcend that level and elevate himself to a point where he nullifies himself and feels that he has no existence because nothing truly exists independent of G-d. Thus Moshe said, "Do not fear, for in order to elevate you Elokim has come." The next part of the verse explains: Fear of Him is only so that you will not sin. The level where a person still worries about sin is itself a low level. (Ma'amarei Admor Ha'zaken Ha'ketzarim)

Memories of Yerushalayim

R' Ben-Zion Yadler z"l (1871-1962; "Maggid / preacher of Yerushalayim"), describes in his memoir, B'tuv Yerushalayim, his role in supervising weights and measures in Yerushalayim. These procedures were established by the Aderet zt"l [Hebrew acronym of "R' Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim" (1845-1905; Assistant Rabbi of Yerushalayim)]. He placed the responsibility for this on the Bet Din Tzedek [the highest rabbinical court] and asked me to implement the matter in practice. In the beginning, he would accompany me to the stores, until it became routine that every storekeeper was obligated to inspect and repair his weights and measures.

Later, the government took over supervision of weights and measures. Government officials would repair weights by adding thin strips of iron, but the Aderet ruled that this wasn't sufficient because the strips could fall off. Therefore, I arranged for a blacksmith to repair them with thicker iron. I had clear instructions from the Aderet how to act in these matters. For example, storekeepers who sold sharp foods had to inspect and repair their weights twice a year, and all other storekeepers once a year. After the government announced a law governing this, we obtained the government's seal through the intervention of the Chacham Bashi [the Sephardic Chief Rabbi], and it was entrusted to me to stamp those weights and measures which were found to be accurate.

Special arrangements were made by the supervisors to supply precise weights and measures to anyone who wanted to buy them, and they also were lent to storekeepers when we took their measures for repairs. The blacksmith took half a grusch [a small coin of the Ottoman Empire] to repair each weight or measure. This is how things were until the First World War broke out.

[Footnote: Remember for good Rabbis Mattityahu Elbe, Binyamin Cohen and Nata Golomb who helped me with the difficulties surrounding these matters in the neighborhoods around the Old City, in Meah Shearim and in Machaneh Yehuda.]

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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