

# FACING THE CHALLENGE

*by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig*

"G-d our L-rd sealed a covenant with us at Chorev. Not with our forefathers alone did G-d seal this covenant, but with us, we who are here today, all of us alive. Face to face G-d spoke to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 5:2-4) Moshe then repeated the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments that G-d uttered as the central event of the Revelation at Sinai when the Children of Israel accepted G-d's Torah to create a timeless covenant. Sifri (Tannaitic halachic medrash to the Books of Bamidbar and Devarim) discusses G-d's initial offer of the Torah to the nations of the world. Understandably, they wanted to know what it contained. To one nation He told the ban on murder, to another the prohibition of adultery. When they heard of these restrictions they had no interest in accepting the Torah. They refused the offer.

In Beraishis/Genesis, centuries before the Torah was given, G-d spelled out the Seven Noahide Laws that all of mankind is obligated to follow. These seven include the prohibitions of adulterous relationships and homicide. Why, then, did G-d, when offering the nations of the world the Torah, describe the Torah using mitzvos (commandments) they were already commanded to follow? More so, why would the nations of the world forego the opportunity to become G-d's chosen people simply because the Torah contained commandments they were already obligated to observe?

Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr (Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath in New York; 1910-1979; acknowledged as one of the first American trained gedolim [Torah giants], he authored Ohr Gedalyahu on the Torah and festivals) explains the fundamental difference between the Decalogue and the Seven Noahide Laws. Rashi (Shemos/Exodus 22:12) clarifies that all 613 of the Torah's mitzvos are alluded to in the Ten Commandments. Each one of the ten has numerous lessons and obligations extending from it, guidelines for the countless intricate details of life. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that an extension of the ban on murder is a prohibition of embarrassing another person; such an act is tantamount to killing the person. But the original Noahide restrictions were not nearly so broad and imposing. One could readily go through life, maintaining the guidelines of the command with no requisite character refinement. The Torah was given to people to enable them to realize their spiritual potential. This accomplishment necessitates attention not only to the big picture but on all of the small details as well.

This is what G-d was telling the other nations when he offered them the Torah; this is the level of responsibility they rebuffed. But the Jewish nation answered "we shall do and we shall listen." We accept the challenge, we will grow from the challenge.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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