

In this Torah portion we have the Ten Commandments. At one time the Ten Commandments were part of the davening right next to the Shma. The Rabbis, though, about over 2000 years ago took the Ten Commandments out of the prayers although they are still at the end of the Siddur because to many people were saying that all there is to religion is the Ten Commandments. The trouble with this is that the Ten Commandments are just statements of principle. It's how you apply them that counts. How do you honor your father or mother? How do you worship G-d? How do you create a society in which there is no murder or robbery? It is how you implement it that is important. Unfortunately, too many people feel that if they believe in the principle that's all that's important. Whether or not they implement the ideals of the Ten Commandments is irrelevant. This is wrong. This reminds me of the story of when I was teaching school and one little girl raised her hand and said, "What is the difference between unlawful and illegal?". Another little girl raised her hand and said, "I know, I know. Unlawful is when you do something that's against the law. Illegal is when you have a sick bird". Unfortunately, this is the way many people treat the Ten Commandments. They are not so sure how to apply them. One of the reasons communism ^{doesn't} works is because when it's everybody's money it's nobody's money. We just read how somebody embezzled the bank claiming what difference does it make? The insurance company will pay anyway. People fail to make the correct distinctions. They have a way of fudging moral distinctions. This Torah portion which contains the Ten Commandments is named after a non-Jew, Jethro. Not only is it named after a non-Jew it is named after a man who worshipped idols, who joined seven different cults, a man who even made Moshe promise to raise his first son as an idolator. That's why when Moshe was going down to Egypt the angel of death wanted to attack him because his son was not circumcized but Sipporah, his wife, circumcized him. Why should this Torah portion which contains the Ten Commandments be named after him?

After all, why isn't it named after Moshe? There is not even one Torah portion named after Moshe. The answer, to my mind, is because when the Jewish people were being enslaved Pharoah had three advisors. One was named Bilam, one was named Job and the other was Jethro. When Pharoah decided to issue his evil decrees Bilam thought it was a good idea. He told Pharoah he had to do it to preserve his kingdom, etc. Job remained noncommittal. He did not say yes. He did not say no. He fudged his position. That's why the Rabbis say later on he was punished because he should have spoken out. Jethro, on the other hand, protested and he left. He was a man of integrity. That's why he also changed his religion so many times. He would not put up with things which were not on the up and up. When he came to see his son-in-law, Moshe, he also did not like it that Moshe was sitting while the people were standing. This was not proper. This did not show the people the proper respect. The reason this Torah portion is named after Jethro is because he taught us that the Torah must be implemented with integrity. He also told Moshe that he should divide the people into tens and hundreds and thousands. He should delegate authority. He should not be a tyrant. The Torah would spring from the people. After we read about the Ten Commandments we also learn how the altar is to be made. Religion also can become corrupt if it is not pursued with integrity. Why did Jethro come to see the Jewish people? Because he heard that Moshe Rabbeinu and Joshua fought for the Danites. When the Amalakites attacked them they thought the rest of the Jews would not fight for them since the Danites were backsliders and had become idol worshippers. Moshe and Joshua fought for them. The Ten Commandments must always be implemented with humanity and integrity and then they will survive. If they are only worshipped as holy principles they will lead to great abuse.

YISRO 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

This Torah portion opens with the statement that Jethro, the Priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all which G-d did from Moshe and for Israel and its people that G-d brought out Israel from Egypt. Rashi explains that what did Jethro hear? He heard about the splitting of the Red Sea and the war of Amalek and Rashi also continues to say that when it says "all which G-d did" this means the manna, the well of water, and the war of Amalek. Why this contradiction? Rashi should say he heard five things or four things since he repeats the war of Amalek. Also, why does it say Jethro, the Priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe? Why must it say both these things? The answer to this question, I believe, is in a Midrash which states that when G-d was giving the Ten Commandments all the nations of the world were quiet. They were also listening. When they heard the first few commandments about I am the Lord Your G-d, you should have no other G-ds, do not take G-d's name in vain, keep the Sabbath day, they were not impressed. They said what an egotistical G-d. He is only interested in His own glory. But when they heard about the commandment honoring your father and mother they quickly became impressed. In the Haphtorah that we read today we learn how Isaiah overheard the angels say, "Holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts". G-d is holy and completely different than we are. He is special. He is unique yet he wants to have a bond with each of us. This is the type of relationship that we must have with each other as well. We must each recognize each other's uniqueness and specialness. We must never tamper with it or try to destroy it, but we must want to have bonds of friendship with everyone. Jethro heard two things which made him come. He heard about the splitting of the Red Sea. G-d was doing miracles for the Jewish people. He had a special relationship with them, and he heard about the war of Amalek. He heard how Amalek could not stand the fact that the Jewish people had this special quality. He did not want to have any bonds of friendship with Israel. Unfortunately, in our day this is still true. People want to destroy us because we are special and unique. Zionism is now a code word for evil. Jethro wanted to throw in his lot with our people because he knew that this special relationship should be maintained and he knew that the Jewish people wanted to have bonds of friendship with everybody. We also learned what G-d had done for Israel.

G-d had given them water and food and the ability to overcome their enemies. Jethro is referred here as the father-in-law of Moshe to emphasize the point that the Jewish people got this strength only because of their families. If they will keep their families, strengthen them, the nations of the world will be impressed and G-d will give them the strength to take care of their material needs and to overcome their enemies. But if their families falter they will not have this strength. Each of us must establish families in which everyone is treated as special and unique but with whom everyone wants to have a bond. The story about a man whose daughter married a fellow who did not seem to have too much on the ball. The father-in-law took him into the business. He told the young man that he would give him 50% of the business but he wanted him to start at the bottom to learn the business and when he retired he would give it all to him. He put him in the shipping room where he made a terrible mess. He put him in accounting and things got all messed up. He put him in sales and all the customers got insulted. He put him in manufacturing and all the machines broke. He took him to the office and said, "What should I do with you? You made a mess of everything." He said, "I don't know, why don't you buy me out?". Unfortunately, the nations of the world say the same thing to the Jewish people. They take our principles and ideas and twist them around and they want to buy us out. They do not want us around but we have been assured that if we keep our families strong we will always have the strength to overcome.

YISRO 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion, Yisro, we have the famous statement when G-d gave the Torah to Israel "so you should say to the house of Jacob and to the sons of Israel". The Rabbis learn from this verse that G-d first gave the Torah to the women before He gave it to the men, because He knew that if the women would not accept the Torah it was no use giving it to the men. It was the moral courage of the women which allowed and still allows the Jewish people to continue. The Jewish women did not participate in the sin of the Golden Calf and they also did not participate in the sin of the spies who returned from the land of Canaan with an evil report. In fact, the Rabbis say that the blessing that the women say thanking G-d for making them according to His will only women can say because they are closer to G-d's will than are men. They do not have as many violent impulses. In this Torah portion we learn how Yisro joined the Jewish people and became a Jew. The Rabbis tell us that Yisro became a Jew because he heard two things; one, about the splitting of the Red Sea, and two, about the Jewish people's fight with Amalek. The Rabbis tell us that these two things impressed him because they said something about the Jewish people's values. When the Jewish people were trapped between the desert and the sea with the Egyptian army pursuing them, they did not give up. They tried their best. They were even willing to go into the sea. The ability to persevere in spite of troubles and problems is a very important quality. G-d does not require that we do more than we can. He just requires that we persevere, that we try. The reason the battle with Amalek impressed Yisro was because Yisro heard that Amalek attacked the tribe of Dan who were idol worshippers. They were not sure that they wanted to be Jewish, but the Jewish people fought for them. They did not abandon them because they had the wrong ideology. The ability to help and the willingness to help is very important. To persevere and always help everyone are the values which drew Yisro to Judaism. Yisro was a man who had tried all different philosophies. The Rabbis say that he had seven names because he had tried seven different ways of living and they did not work. He eventually came and became a Jew. He tried Chovov, to be a lover. He tried Chovav, to social climb. He tried Petuel, to become a rich man, a millionaire. He tried Re'uel, mysticism. He tried Kaine, to be an artisan, to be just

YISRO 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE TWO

concerned with the arts, but that did not work. He tried Yeser, ideology, but that did not work either. Unfortunately, people who submit to ideology are doing the worst thing because they sacrifice truth. This week I heard Patrick Moynahan talk and he said how once again you Jews are in the forefront of the fight against totalitarianism. In the 30's it was Hitler screaming "Jew, Jew". In the 80's it is the Russians screaming "Zionist, Zionist". You know who murdered all the Jews at Babiya? Zionists and Nazis. To say something like that is ludicrous, but people believe it now. In the world today Zionist and sinister mean the same thing. We find the Arabs at the UN saying that Israel is Zionist Nazi State. How can anyone believe that? Patrick Moynahan told us that we are in great danger and so are the democracies. Hitler's attack in the 30's on the Jews was really against democracy. So today Russia's attacks are against democracies. Zionism will allow them to pick democracies off one by one. After all, nobody wants to fight for the Jews. Yisro was very impressed with the Jewish people because they put people above ideology. We must always do something. I am reminded of the story they tell about a shortage of meat in Russia. One day they announced they would hand out meat. Everyone came at 6:00 a.m. At 7:00 they told all the Jews to go home. At 8:00 they told all the non-Communist to go home. At 10:00 they told all those who were not Communist officials to go home. At 11:00 the local Commisar came out and said, "We really do not have any meat. Please go home." at which point one Russian said to another, "See, these Jews, they always get preferential treatment".

YISRO 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In this Torah portion we learn how Yisro comes and joins the Jewish people. Up to this time his name had been Yesser not Yisro. When he came to join the Jewish people he became different. He added a Vahv to his name. Jews have always been looked at differently. Yisro was an educated man. In fact, the Rabbi say he was a very good and compassionate man. They say that when Pharaoh was about to issue his decree casting all the Jewish boys in the river he asked his three counselors to give their opinion about it. The Rabbis say his three counselors were Bilam, Job, and Yisro. Bilam told him it was a wonderful idea. Job was silent. Yisro told him he did not like the idea and he quit and went into the desert. We Jewish people have been made the scapegoat for many things in the world. The world does not want to face up to its own problems. Yisro was not going to be looked at differently. Even today we Jews are judged and condemned for events which are totally ridiculous, like, for example, this recent event of the Marine who supposedly stopped three Israeli tanks from entering U.S. controlled territory. Everyone agrees the tanks were in territory assigned to Israel. A non-Jewish reporter from "The Philadelphia Inquirer" who saw the incident, relates that the tanks were in Israeli assigned territory. It looks like they went out to get shot. This, of course, would have created a terrible incident and then all Israeli support could be withdrawn as if without Israel all the problems of the Middle East would be solved. The headlines and slanted news, though, make Israel and all Jews by inference to be terrible people. In this week's Torah portion we learn that when the Jewish people would accept the Torah it says "and Moshe brought out the people to greet G-d at the camp and they stood under the mountain" which the Rabbis interpret to mean that the mountain was bent over them like a cask. If they would accept the Torah, well and good. If not, the mountain would tumble over them. But why did G-d had to resort to this strategem to get the Jewish people to accept the Torah? Hadn't they already said, "We will do and we will obey"? There are many answers to this question one of which I wrote about in the bulletin, but another answer is that the Jewish people wanted the Torah but they feared the consequences, the consequences that would come to them from the other peoples. They would be different. They would be set apart. In fact, the Rabbis say the word for hatred in Hebrew, "Sina", and the word "Sinai", the mountain

upon which we received the Torah are related. Since the time the Jewish people received the Torah they have been hated and singled out and judged much more harshly than anyone else. It was this difference, this knowledge that hatred would now be directed against them which caused the Jewish people to equivocate. However, there is another explanation. Tachtis can mean "under". The Jewish people would become subterranean people, people without identity and purpose, helpless and hopeless if they did not accept the Torah. Unfortunately, in our day we see that this is true, that many Jews do not realize the great contributions that Jews throughout the centuries have made to the world, and they are somehow ashamed to be Jews. We have to remember what is stated in this Torah portion, "and you shall be for Me My own treasure among the peoples and you shall be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy people". We Jewish people should be proud of what we have given to the world. Unfortunately, many Jews have believed the lies that have been told against us. In fact, there are even Jews who sympathize with the Nazis. Just this past week, January 30th, marked the 50th year that Hitler rose to power. He rose to power by directing and deflecting all the people's frustrations upon our people. Some Jews even went so far in Berlin as to commit suicide because they believed Hitler and the best thing they could do for the world was cease to exist and then all the world's problems would cease to exist. This, of course, is nonsense, but it is still happening today. If somehow the stubborn Jew could be humbled, everything would be fine. The papers today are trying hard to discredit Israel. Nothing they do could ever be right. We, of course, should always be proud of our achievements, but we should never boast. In the last sentence of this week's Torah portion it says "you shall not go up by steps upon My altar, that your nakedness should not be uncovered". The Rabbis interpret this to mean you should not bring up your "Malos", good qualities, all the time unless people start to concentrate on your bad qualities, on your weaknesses. We Jews are not perfect but we are not the devils the world makes us out to be either. Every Jew should open his mouth and say the truth and not accept lies or phony incidents to be used against him. The story about a young man who went to Hollywood and got a part in a movie. He called his father and said, "Dad, I just got a character part in a movie playing opposite a woman who is very similar to Mom". His

YISRO 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE THREE

father thought a minute and said, "I am sorry, Son, I was hoping that you would get a speaking part". Not enough Jews speak up. The hatred may be inevitable, but we do not have to believe it.

How do we arrive at truth

FEBRUARY 1983

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Too often today people are looking to understand their problems in newspaper headline fashion. They really do not want to probe into their problems and find out what all the issues are before coming to a decision. Instead, they want someone else, in two or three words, to explain to them what they should do or what they should believe in and let it go at that. They are not interested in looking for the context which surrounds their problems or in really analyzing the issues so that they can come to a correct conclusion. They have a notion that truth and right are very simple things and should be able to be stated in a very few words.

In fact, many times they will tell me, "Rabbi, I am not interested in all these speculations, just tell me what I should or should not do". I might tell them what they should or should not do but then they are acting like robots. They have not thought the issues through and in other situations they may do the wrong thing. They then could say, "But, Rabbi, you told me to do this", and I would have to answer them, "Yes, I told you to do what you are doing, but I told you to do what you are doing in a different situation". The problem of ascertaining the truth and thereby establishing a course of action is not an easy one. The Jewish idea of truth is different from the Greek platonic idea of truth. The Greek idea was that there was one truth, one ideal for everything. There was one ideal man, society, building, etc. and we just had to conform all our actions to it. We do not believe this. Life, ^{to us} ~~thus~~, is a constant tension between many contrasting and conflicting truths and every situation forces us to look again and to clarify what is true and right in every particular circumstance.

This is what Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz pointed out in his brilliant lectures when he stated that the Talmud is a strange book. It is a strange book because ~~in order~~ to learn it you must argue with it and doubt it. In fact, the very text shouts at you, "Doubt me".

The problems and dilemmas which the Talmud discusses are never really resolved. They continue from generation to generation. We are constantly called upon to re-evaluate positions and to clarify issues based upon these debates which are always couched in the present tense, "Rova says or Abaye says". Because of this fact many times in Talmudic

debate when two sages are arguing one sage will actually say to the other, "You know, you can get out of the dilemma I got you into by my sharp questions by offering me this solution". In other words, the important thing is the debate, not who wins. We should all want to debate the subject further. You should even help your opponent clarify his opinions when you can. When we deal with truth it is not important who wins or loses. We all must struggle and struggle over and over again to find out what is proper in every context.

Most problems in life arise because we take mental shortcuts. For example, I remember once when as a boy I entertained a visitor from a foreign country who knew just a little English. He arrived at my house just as the evening paper was being delivered. As a boy I was very interested in sports and the first thing I did was turn to the sports page. There he sounded out the headline. It read "Reds Massacre Cardinals". He was convinced that a Communist revolution was taking place and that all the bishops had been killed. I tried to assure him that this was not so, but it took a lot of explaining. Many times we, too, make all sorts of assumptions which are fallacious, and the problem with many people is that they do not want to sharpen their thinking so that they can tell what are facts and what are assumptions and thereby be able to get to the heart of the problem.

In the Torah portion, Yisro, we learn about the Ten Commandments. It says "Honor thy father and thy mother". Besides, of course, the literal explanation there are other explanations which refer the character of a father and the character of a mother to other parts of our tradition. In the "Yalkut Reuven" we read that "thy father" refers to the written Torah and "thy mother" to the oral Torah. The association of father with the written Torah and mother with the oral Torah is similar to the roles of the two parents. The written Torah is like a father, strict and authoritative, demanding obedience, making no concessions and knowing no compromise. The oral Torah, on the other hand, is compared to a mother. It considers circumstances. It looks at the weaknesses as well as the strengths of human nature. It puts things into context. It would seem, at first glance, that the oral Torah would be more appealing and attractive to the Jewish people than the

FEBRUARY 1983

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

PAGE THREE

written Torah. However, the Rabbis explain that this was not so.

In the Midrash Tanchuma we learn that Israel would not accept the Torah until the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them like an inverted cask. This is because of what it says in our Torah portion, Yisro, "and they stood under the mountain".

Rav Dimi explains that this means that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel, "If you accept the Torah, o.k., if not then ~~there~~ ^{will fall on you and it} Mount Sinai shall be your burial place".

The Midrash continues by saying that we cannot claim that G-d threatened to overturn the mountain on them because they would not accept the written Torah, because as soon as G-d had asked them if they would accept the written Torah the Jewish people had responded, "We will do and we will listen". It must, therefore, be that they did not want to accept the oral Torah. The reason why they were so willing to accept the written Torah was because there was no toil and trouble about it and it was brief. On the other hand, G-d had to coerce them to accept the oral Torah because it demanded rigorous thinking and going into minute details. To understand the oral law was an extremely hard undertaking. The written Torah, on the other hand, required no effort.

People today especially do not want to put forth any effort. They want to make learning fun. This extends to religion as well. Anything that requires hard work and effort they shy away from. "Rabbi, just tell me what the rules are, that's all I want to know." Unfortunately, in life it is not so easy to give a few rules and hope everything will go well. Things are much more complex. When we say "Honor thy father and mother" and say that this concept of father and mother refers to written Torah and the oral Torah, we mean that just as the father initiates the birth process, so does the written Torah initiate the Torah process, and just as the mother labors to give birth to a child, so does the toil and laboring of the oral Torah produce the unique Jewish personality. The very toiling and struggling with the oral law is what establishes the unique Jewish personality. In fact, we learn in the Talmud, itself, that G-d has said, "Better that My children should forget Me than that they should forget My Torah. Let them study My Torah and forget Me rather than vice versa."