

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.

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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.

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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

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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".

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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

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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

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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

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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."

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In life today we are all looking for short answers. We have fast service food, digests of every sort, instant two minute news, and because of this we think we can also have instant religion and instant wisdom without the toil and the effort that are required. This has spilled over into our marriages and into all our relationships. Instant gratification is the rule. It will not work. We need to struggle and toil with concepts and ideas. We need to work at things if we want to make them work. We are Jews not because of the written Torah. We are Jews because of the oral Torah. Other religions have, for the last 2000 years, taken over our written Torah but not our oral Torah. We Jews have accomplished much in the world because we have always maintained our capacity to think and to analyze, to struggle and to see both sides of almost every issue, to combine faith and doubt. As Rabbi Steinsaltz said, the secret of the Jew is that we have learned to think. We have never stopped analyzing and learning.

In the story of Purim we have a prime illustration of what happens when a people does not think. Achashveros is a man who always wants ready-made opinions. He is only interested in partying. He hasn't the time to think. Because of this, he executed his first wife, almost has all the Jewish people murdered in his name, and ends up looking like a bumbling idiot. We not only harm ourselves when we don't think clearly, we also can end up harming others. We Jews have always prized thinking and analyzing. This has been the secret of our success. May we continue to do so because it is only in this way that we will, like the Jews of Esther's time, survive as Jews.

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We are going to read the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are grouped into two parts; those between man and man and those between man and G-d. Those between man and man speak about the limitations of human achievement. They, though, by inference stress the fact that we are to go out and achieve. The first five Commandments stress the fact that we all need someone to bring these achievements to. We all need to be appreciated. Most people, what wouldn't they do to get a Yasher Koach, a well done, from their family or parents? Many times people achieve something not for the money, but for appreciation from those they love. That's what it means to be a blessing, a Brocha. The word Brocha in Hebrew means not only to bless, but to greet, to thank, to appreciate. Unfortunately, in our day and age there are too many people who do not know this. They never want to appreciate or thank anyone. Because of this, their families suffer. We all need to be appreciated. In the Torah portion, Beshalach, we learn about a strange word, "Horem" which is used only three times in the Torah. This word is used by G-d when He tells Moshe to lift up his staff before the Red Sea splits. This word began the splitting of the Red Sea, and the subsequent song of praise that Moshe sang. We must learn to sing, to thank, to appreciate. The Rabbis tell us that Chisyaho was supposed to be the Mashiach. He was a great and a good King, but after a miracle happened to him (the Assyrian army had ^{Surrounded} ~~seized~~ Jerusalem and when all seemed lost either a terrible plague or a meteor explosion or some other event happened which destroyed the Assyrian army) Chisyaho did not sing praise to G-d and, therefore, the Rabbis say he could not be the Mashiach. We all need families to teach us how to thank and appreciate and lift up each other's spirits. The other two times "Horem" is mentioned is in the story of Elisha when a fisherman lost his tools and Elisha said, "Lift, oh sea, these tools". The third time is when G-d told Isaiah, "Lift up your voice". Education should teach us three things. It should teach us how to thank, how to appreciate. It should give us character. It should also teach us skills and finally it should teach us how to express ourselves, how to lift up our voice, how to express ourselves in music, art, etc. Unfortunately, in our modern day we only learn skills and how to express ourselves in school. We do not learn how to thank and appreciate. A few months

ago a young man came to see me. He was a Phi Beta Kappa. He had a very fine job in computers, but the man had nowhere to go. All he did was come home, take a walk, and go to bed. He could not relate to anybody. He had a severe personality problem. I tried to get him to get help. I don't know if he did or didn't, but I am sure that if he will not he will end up committing suicide. On Shabbos we have three different portions in the Shmone Esre. On Friday night we speak about G-d being the Creator. On Saturday morning we speak about G-d giving us the Torah, and on Saturday afternoon we talk about G-d sending the Messiah. We need all these things to be man the appreciator. We need to know that G-d has created us, that we are here for a purpose and a reason, that we are needed. We have to know that there is a right and a wrong. We also have to know that we can contribute to the future. It is not enough just to have skills. We must also have character, must know that we are needed and wanted and that we know how to appreciate and thank others, that we know how to be a blessing. We learn this mainly in the family. It is my hope and prayer that our youngsters will form these types of families because it was these types of families that molded the Jewish people. Sure, there was criticism, but there was also love and appreciation. What we wouldn't do to get a good word from those we love. There is too much emphasis on skills now. We need more than skills. It reminds me of the story of the missionary who was sent to Borneo to convert the cannibals. Then he returned home to England three or four years later he was asked if he was a great success. He said that he was. He was then asked if he had stopped the cannibals from eating other human beings. He said he hadn't. They then asked how he was a success to which he replied, "I taught them how to use a knife and fork". Unfortunately, in our day we are not teaching our children how to be human beings. We are teaching them how to use a knife and fork.

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In the Torah portion Yisro we learn about the Ten Commandments. Originally, the Ten Commandments were put right next to the Shma and were recited every day. However, since many people thought that all there was to the religion was the Ten Commandments, the Rabbis discontinued this practice. In Judaism the important thing is not espousing principles. It is implementing these principles in practice. This Torah portion, Yisro, opens by telling us how Yisro held the priest dominion, the father of Moshe all which G-d did for Moshe and for Israel, His people, and Yisro took the father-in-law, Moshe, Ziporah, the wife of Moshe, after he had sent her away and two of her children, etc. Later on it says that Yisro became the father-in-law of Moshe. Why does the Torah stress over and over again the father-in-law of Moshe? Yisro was obviously bringing Ziporah, his wife, and children to him. Moshe, when he had gone down to Egypt, had seen the persecution and slavery the Jewish people were under and he sent his wife and his children away so that they would not suffer. Yisro was now sending a message either by letter or a messenger telling him that he was coming. Here he is mentioning over and over again that he is Moshe's father-in-law, and, what is more strange, he mentions two of her sons. Why didn't he say two of your sons, your being plural? Why does he mention that these sons were Ziporah's sons? What's more, when Yisro does come to Moshe he gets very upset because he sees that Moshe is sitting all day judging the people while they are standing. He does not like that. He feels that Moshe is being disrespectful to the people. He proposes that Moshe delegate authority and appoint judges over hundreds and tens and thousands. It is wrong to concentrate authority.

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We do not believe that just one person should have all the power, but what upsets Yisro more is the fact that Moshe is sitting and the people are standing. This is not right. Either Moshe should be standing and the people standing, or Moshe sitting and the people sitting. Yisro is very sensitive to these types of slights. The Rabbis tell us that originally Yisro was one of Pharaoh's three advisors when Pharaoh decided to throw all the Jewish boys in the river. Bilam thought Pharaoh was doing the right thing, Job, who was Pharaoh's second advisor, stayed quiet. He did not comment. Yisro thought it was a terrible thing and left. Yisro did not care that the astrologiers predicted that a baby would be born who would save the Jewish people from slavery and who would ruin Egypt. It was wrong to hurt little babies. It was wrong to hurt people. Yisro was very sensitive to this. According to the Rabbis, Yisro tried every religion and philosophy that there was, but he was always disappointed because these religions and philosophies put theory in front of people. When people were suffering they said, "Oh, well, that's the way it has to be." They are willing to sacrifice people for theory. They are willing to heap insult, injury, degradation, and even death for the sake of their theory. Yisro could not take this. Yisro knew that you always had to respect people. All the other philosophies with their protestations of love and good were no good unless they resulted in good. Many times philosophies say they stand for love and kindness, like in our day when Communism stated a beautiful theory: "Each should give according to his ability and take according to his needs", but, of course, we know how it ended in degradation and death. This same lesson is brought

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home by the story they tell of a potential convert who came to Shammai and he said, "Teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot so that I should know if I want to convert." Shammai got mad at him and chased him away with a builder's tool. This was not a serious approach. The potential convert then went to Hillel, who was tolerant and forbearing, and he said, "Teach me the Torah while I stand on one foot." Hillel told him, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah. The rest, go and learn." The prospective convert was impressed, learned, and did convert. Why, though, did Hillel state the golden rule in the negative while the Torah states it in the positive, "You should love your neighbor as yourself." Hillel did not even quote it to him in Hebrew but in Aramaic. Why should Hillel have quoted the rule in the negative? Why didn't he quote it in the positive as the Torah does? The answer is that it is a lot harder to love your neighbor as yourself. It is a lot harder to do unto your neighbor as you would have him do unto you, because then you have to know him. You have to know what he likes and dislikes. When it comes to hurt and pain, it is almost universal. What hurts one person will probably hurt another. This is the very least that religion had to be based on. Many times people, for the sake of a greater good, feel they can insult and hurt people, but this is not so. The very bottom line is that you cannot hurt anybody. You may be able to go to a higher level and love them more intensely, but this does not mean that your love can allow you to hurt them. This was, of course, Torquemada's, the Spanish inquisitor, argument. He said he loved the Jews so much he was willing to torture them for an

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hour or so so they should not have to suffer the pains of eternal hell. Loving somebody never gives you the right to treat them with disrespect or cruelty or gives you the right to insult or degrade them. Many times people will say, "But, you know how I feel." That does not count. It is your deeds that count. This is, too, why the Rabbis tell us that the fourth commandment to honor thy father and mother is to be taken literally and also has a second meaning. The father refers to the written Torah and mother to the oral Torah. We need to have both. The oral Torah tells how to implement the written Torah. We just cannot believe the ideals of the written Torah without implementing them in practice. That is, too, why the Rabbis teach us that when the Torah was given to the Jewish people it says that "Vayis Yatz Vu B'Sachtees Hohor" "and they stood underneath the mountain". The Rabbis explain that this means that the mountain was hovering over them like a cask. If they would accept the Torah it would be all right, but if they would not accept it the mountain would come cascading down on them. Other Rabbis say how can this be so because we have just learned how the people had said, "Na'ased Vanishma" "We will do and we will understand the Torah." The Rabbis tell us that the Jewish people had accepted the written Torah, but not the oral Torah. Without implementing religious ideals in practice by showing respect and dignity to every individual, religious ideals become false. This is why in the beginning of the Torah portion it said, "and Yisro held the priest dominion, the father of Moshe, all which G-d did for Moshe and for Israel, His people" it mentions the father-in-law Moshe over and over again because when Yisro sent the message he was not sure how

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Moshe was going to greet him. After all, at one time he had been an idol worshipper. Was Moshe going to treat him with disrespect? What's more, Yisro was not sure how Moshe was going to treat his own wife, Ziporah. After all, maybe her conversion was suspect. That's why it says "and the two of her children" because the children go after the mother. If Ziporah's conversion was suspect, too, her children were not Jewish. Yisro did not know whether common decencies were going to be sacrificed for great goals as in other religions. That's why, too, Yisro was upset when he saw Moshe sitting and everybody else standing. After all, nobody else could love the Jewish people more than Moshe. He was willing to give his life for them. Even accidental disrespect rankled Yisro. Yisro knew that any religion whose adherence will demean and insult others is not worth much. You cannot go to a greater love. The basis must be, do not hurt anybody. Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you. There is a cute little shaggy dog story I heard which illustrates this point. A dog went into a bar and ordered a drink. The bartender was astounded, but gave it to him and told him it would cost \$10. The dog made a terrible face but put his paw in a purse, pulled out \$10, and put it on the counter. The bartender was astounded and looked at the dog and said, "We don't get many dogs here." The dog said, "Yeah, and at \$10 a drink, you won't see me here anymore either." Taking advantage of people or treating them with disrespect is a terrible thing and shows that a person who does that is truly not religious.

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In the Torah portion Yisro we learn about the Ten Commandments. We learn that the Jewish people had to make many preparations before they were allowed to receive the Ten Commandments. The rabbis explain on the verse, "And they travelled from Refitim and they came to the desert of Sinai and they camped in the desert and he camped there Israel opposite a mountain three different requirements that the Jewish people had to do before they were found worthy of receiving the Ten Commandments. When it says that they travelled from Refitim it means that they had to be willing to correct their deficiencies, their moral lapses, because Refitim is where they had been attacked by Amalek, and the rabbis say that the reason the Jewish people had been attacked by Amalek at Refitim was because they had doubted whether or not G-d was in there midst. In order for us to receive the Torah, in order for us to implement the Torah's teachings we, first of all, have to believe that we have the power to overcome our problems. If we do not believe that we have the power to overcome our problems then, of course, the Torah will do us no good because we will not feel that we have the strength in order to implement the teachings of the Torah into the world. The Jewish people after Refitim felt that they could change, they could make different characteristics stand out in their own personalities, that they could correct their moral lapses, and that they travelled through Refitim. The emphasis here is on the word travelled. Only if a person believes they can face the day with the inner strength necessary in order to become a better person it is only then that he can be found worthy of receiving the Torah. Those people who feel for some reason or another that they cannot face the new day, that they have to either use alcohol or drugs or something else in order to face their problems, they cannot receive the Torah because they do not feel they have the inner strength in order to do those things necessary to implement the teachings of the Torah in their own personal lives. So the Jewish people had to travel from Refitim, from this terrible depression which affects many people in all strata of society whether they are rich or poor. In fact, we know that other religions actually

say that a person has no power in order to be good, that other religions run around the problem, I know what is good, but where do I get the power to do it? They believe that they have to believe certain things or do certain things in order to get the power. We believe that G-d has given us all the power necessary for us to do good. We just have to be willing to use that power and want to do good. Our problem is we say, I have the power to do good, but what is good? That requires study, the study of the Torah to give us the exact way that we should evaluate different situations so that we can arrive at doing that which is good.

The second requirement before they could receive the Torah is that it says that they came to the desert of Sinai. The Jewish people had to realize that their lot was like living in a desert. There is a big difference between living in a desert and living in fertile land. If you live in Iowa or Indiana or Illinois all you basically have to do is put the seed in the ground and something is going to grow. You have really very little to do, and an individual can farm great tracts of land, but if you live in a desert it is not so. A desert needs the cooperative efforts of many, many people working together to grow anything. You have to have irrigation and fertilizers. It requires an awful lot of cooperation in order to grow anything in the desert. A person has to realize before he can accept the Torah that he is part of a family, part of a nation that helps him and that he needs them. You cannot make it all on your own. No farmer alone in the desert can make it by himself. He needs irrigation. He needs the water that is brought from someplace else. All the supplies have to come from someplace else. He cannot make it on his own. Therefore, you have to realize that you are part of a group and that the group needs you. In fact, we emphasize this over and over again in Judaism by the fact that we say that you have to daven by a minyan. We all need other people in order for us to realize our own potential. So they came to the desert of Sinai.

Finally, it says here, too, "And he camped here there Israel opposite the mount," singular. They were united. Here the essence is not that I need the other people to fulfill my destiny but also I have to be willing to contribute to society. Unless I am willing to contribute to society then I, too, will not be able to accept the Torah because the Torah demands that I be concerned about other people, that I have a compassionate relationship with them, that I am a caring individual, that I share what I have with other people so that Israel really becomes one, and they use the singular here, Vayeechan. It is not enough that I realize that I need other people to fulfill myself. I have to also realize that I, in order to fulfill myself, must also give to other people. That is the third requirement that is mentioned here before the Jewish people could receive the Torah.

It is also interesting to note that when Moshe came to the Jewish people and he told them about the Torah it says, "And all the people answered together and they said, 'All which G-d said we will do'." Notice that they emphasize the fact that they said that they are going to do it, and Moshe returned the words of the people to G-d. Actually, if we notice earlier what G-d said to Moshe He said something different. He said, "Now, if you will listen to My voice and you observe My commandment..." First He says, "If you will listen to My voice," means to understand what I am talking about. The Jewish people here did not say that we will understand. It says that we will do. Many times people are not interested in understanding things. They are only interested in what they have to do in a given situation, but G-d, in effect, says that that is really not enough. G-d wants more from us than that. Notice, also, that when Moshe gave this word to G-d about how the people said they were willing to do, G-d said to Moshe, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud in order that the people listen when I speak with you and the people will understand when I speak with you." It is not enough many times just to know what particular

commandments Judaism demands of us. We also have to understand how they relate to our lives, how they bring us closer to G-d and to man. We have to show how they are relevant to who we are as human beings, and that requires study. That, of course, is why Jewish study is so important because the more we study about Jewish things the more we see that the insights of the Torah have great bearings on our personal lives, that they teach us how to have better interpersonal relationships. It was only later in the Torah portion Mishpotim where the Jewish people said, "Not only will we do," although there, too, they answered, "And they answered all the people with one voice and they said, 'All the things which G-d spoke we will do'." But G-d was not really satisfied with that. It was later when it says, "And he took the book of the covenant (referring to Moshe) and he read in the ears of the people and they said all the people, 'We will do and we will understand'." It is not just enough to do because, unfortunately, many people, if they do not understand what they are doing, will stop doing it. We see that here in America today. In order for the Torah to be a part of our lives it is not enough that we should just say that we are going to do it because in most instances if we do not understand how what we do brings us closer to others, how it actually enhances our lives, we will not do it. We will say we will do it but we will not. We also have to have a certain basic understanding. It does not mean that we have to understand all the reasons to their full depth as to why G-d commanded certain things, but we have to realize how they really do bring us closer to G-d, how they really do bring us closer to our fellow human beings. Even though at the first blush many of the commandments may seem to have nothing at all to do with our relationship with others and with G-d, but we know that if we do them and we see how they bring people closer together. We see how a Friday night dinner brings a family together. Staying home on Shabbos is a wonderful thing because it draws a family closer together. Singing at the table brings a family together even closer than just eating together.

If we see, too, how when a family comes to shul together, how they discuss things together, how the children see how the father, too, needs the help of G-d, this draws a child closer to G-d and closer to his parents. It is important that we understand as well as that we do. Unfortunately, many people neglect Jewish learning. If we neglect Jewish learning then Jewish practices seem unconnected. They do not seem to fit together as a whole. They do not seem to have an effect on the whole personality of a human being. Therefore, it is very, very important that not only that we do but that we also understand. So another actual requirement for receiving the Torah is the effort that we must expend in order to learn how to keep the Torah. In fact, the rabbis say that when it says in the Torah that Moshe Rabbeinu brought out the people to greet G-d from the camp and they stood underneath the mountain, that that means that G-d had arched the mountain over the Jewish people like a cast and He had said, "If you are willing to accept the Torah, fine and dandy, if not, I'll have the mountain fall on you." How can that be? We just said before that the Jewish people had willingly said twice we will do it. They said another time we will do it and we will understand. The answer to that is that there are actually two Torahs. One Torah is the written Torah. The written Torah is a short Torah, like the constitution of the United States is a short constitution. The oral Torah, though, teaches us how to apply the Torah in every given situation, and that is very difficult and requires a great deal of effort. It requires a great deal of understanding. The Jewish people were willing to accept, the rabbis say, the written Torah but the oral Torah they were not sure they wanted at all because it was so much work, so much effort, but G-d said, "Unless you accept the oral Torah the written Torah is almost worthless because you will not know how to apply it." It will become some sort of an idealized vision, a utopian vision of how people should live but you will not be able to live it in your real life. In order for us to make it part of our life we have to learn it. We have to be willing to expend the energy and the time in order to make it part of us in every single one of