



Parshas Yisro

February 5, 2021

A Taste of Torah To Honor the Torah

by Rabbi Chaim Gross

This week's parsha gives us an incredible account of what can aptly be described as the most awesome, magnificent event in world history: the giving of the Torah. The parsha also goes into great detail describing the preparations required before this revelation.

Among the many items Hashem prescribed to be done by Bnai Yisrael in anticipation of the event, one stands out, as it is the only one He deemed necessary to command and then reiterate a second time: the order to set a boundary around the mountain, and the warning that no one dare come too close, lest they meet a fate of death.

The question begs to be asked: Why was this commandment of such utmost importance? Indeed, Moshe himself wonders why Hashem issued this warning a second time, to which Hashem replies that, nonetheless, Moshe should convey this message yet again. Why?

To further complicate matters, the verse tells us that when it came time for the actual revelation, "The people saw and they moved and they stood from afar" (Yisro 20:15). The Gemara (Shabbos 88b) explains that when Hashem proclaimed the first and second of the Ten Commandments, the entire nation jumped backwards twelve *mil* (a great distance) out of fright, and required the aid of heavenly angels to assist them in coming forward again. If so, it is indeed puzzling why Hashem felt the need to warn them to keep a distance, not once, but twice, when He well knew that they would naturally do so anyway.

Let us attempt to answer this with the following scenario:

Imagine that the *gadol hador*, the greatest Torah leader of the generation, has begun to grow old and requires assistance. They search for a proper candidate to serve as an assistant, to be at his side throughout each day. At long last, they choose YOU for this great honor and opportunity. As your first day on the job approaches, you are so nervous you can hardly eat, and you

feel your knees trembling out of fear and trepidation. When you actually approach his door to knock for the first time, your heart is pounding so loudly it can be heard a mile away, and you're sure you're about to faint. The great man tells you to enter, and of course, you do - but you stand just inside the doorway, not daring to come close. You are speechless with awe and respect...

Now, let us fast forward five years. You have been at this job for quite some time, and feel quite comfortable in your role. You walk up briskly to the *gadol hador's* door, give a quick knock, and let yourself in. You stride into the room and busy yourself with the tasks that need to be done. As the day moves on, many people come seeking his advice, and you listen in, occasionally offering your own perspectives and suggestions, even when they differ slightly from what the *gadol hador* himself just advised...

The Torah is the most sacred and holy gift ever given to flesh and blood; it is the pure embodiment of the Creator's Divine Will. And when it was being presented to Bnai Yisrael for the first time, the entire nation understood its sanctity and jumped backwards out of fright, as they rightfully should have - and as Hashem knew they would. But there was something else that Hashem knew: that this fear would not last forever. He knew that down the road, there would be those who came to the conclusion that one need not keep a distance from it, that it was alright to meddle with and amend its holy words. It was for these future generations, whose souls were all present by Mt. Sinai, that Hashem commanded, not once, but twice, "You must keep a distance from my holy Torah! You must realize its' sanctity and exaltedness! For if you do not, death will reign."

Now, before we give ourselves a pat on the back, thinking, "Well, I am certainly not guilty of any such behavior," let's take a closer introspective look at ourselves. How many of us have had, at times, opinions

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Stories for the Soul

Suspicious Study

Following World War II, while the British still ruled Mandate Palestine, they began a crackdown on the underground Jewish resistance groups who often attacked their soldiers. At one point, they came searching for one of the leaders of the Irgun in Petach Tikva, where Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach (1899-2001) was, at that time, teaching Torah in the Lomza Yeshiva. Rav Shach was staying in an apartment complex known as Beit Zaks.

The police imposed a curfew and proceeded to do a house-to-house search, looking for their man. When they arrived at Rav Shach's apartment, they found it locked. Apparently realizing someone was inside and furious at being ignored, they pounded on the door, to no avail. As they prepared to break the door down, the apartment owner, Mr. Eliezer Zaks, hurried over to the police and begged them not to destroy his property, explaining that there was nobody but a rabbi inside, engrossed in his studies. To prove his statement, he took the officers outside and showed them, through the window of the apartment, that there was only a rabbi poring over his books in the apartment!

The police, now convinced that they would not find the man they were looking for in the locked apartment, moved on.

Afterwards, when Mr. Zaks encountered Rav Shach, he asked him why he had not opened the door, pointing out that could have been the cause of serious damage to the apartment if the British police would have broken the door down. Rav Shach looked at Mr. Zaks blankly, telling him that he hadn't heard a thing! He had been so engrossed in his studies he had not even heard the banging and commotion outside of his apartment!

In this week's parsha, Hashem offers the Torah to the Jewish People, not just for the purpose of keeping its laws, but so that they would fully devote themselves to its study.

Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL 23RD ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION VIRTUAL EVENT ON MARCH 10

The Kollel will hold its 23rd Anniversary Celebration, *The Journey*, on Wednesday, March 10 at 7 pm. The event will feature *A Journey of a Thousand Miles: The Sperber & Aragon Story*, and *A Never Ending Journey: The History of the Kollel Movement*. org. Reserve by February 25 and receive a gift bag and a special book. For details and to reserve, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: Two people are eating the exact same food without any particular intention or preference, yet they make different blessings - how can this be?

Answer: When two foods that require different blessings are eaten as one unit - for example, a salad or a chocolate-covered almond - only one blessing is recited on the main food, or *ikar*, while the secondary food(s), or *tafel*, do(es) not require a *bracha*. These laws are complex and involve a number of different categories. One such category is when one food is the primary interest to the person eating it while the other food is meant to enhance it; the *bracha* is recited on the primary interest food, since it is the *ikar* (assuming that this unit does not include the five grains [wheat, barley, spelt, rye, oats], which complicates matters further) (see Mishna Berura 212:6).

Thus, if two people are eating an item made of two foods, but one person views food 1 as primary and food 2 as the enhancer, while the other views food 2 as primary and food 1 as the enhancer, each one would make a different

bracha upon the same food item. An example of this may be (according to some opinions) a chocolate-covered fruit, as some people view the fruit as primary while others view the chocolate as primary. (If both are regarded by the person as primary, many opinions say that the item that is the *rov* (majority or plurality) is regarded as the *ikar*.) However, there are many other opinions regarding the status of chocolate-covered fruit, and a halachic authority should be consulted; see *Halachos of Brachos* by Rabbi Pinchos Bodner (1996 ed.) pg. 417 for details.

(If people generally regard one food as primary and the other as an enhancer, one person's contrary preference would not affect the "normal" status. For example, for a honey-glazed almond, the almond is primary and the glaze secondary, even if a particular person regards the glaze as his main interest.

This week's question: When would the purpose a particular ingredient serves within a food determine the proper blessing for that food?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part XV

A probate case came before David ben Zakkai, and he issued his ruling. However, the ruling of the *Raish Galusa* customarily also required the Ge'onim of Sura and Pumbedisa, the two main yeshivos in Babylon, to sign off on the ruling. The Exilarch's son obtained the signature of the Gaon of the Pumbedisa Yeshiva, Rabbi Kohen Tzedek, but when

he came to Rabbi Saadia, the latter refused to sign, and told Dovid ben Zakkai's son, "Tell your father that the Torah commands, 'You shall not give (special) recognition in judgement' (Devarim 1:17)." The son became angry and raised his hand against Rabbi Saadia, and he was removed from the premises by the Gaon's servants.

A Taste of Torah

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which were not exactly in line with the Torah's perspective? And when we hear the voice of the great leaders of our generation proclaiming one thing, (and the Torah commands us to listen to the Torah leaders that live in our times), how many are thinking, "Well, I know better"?

And when we actually enter the walls of the Bais Medrash to learn, our lips whispering the words of the Torah itself, do we accord it the proper awe and respect? The Talmud (Brachos 22a) tells us that just as we received the Torah "with dread and awe, with trembling and fear," so must one always

conduct himself as he learns words of Torah. Can anyone imagine that at the revelation of Mt. Sinai, as everyone jumped back in terror, a few were left standing in place as they checked a text message or e-mail on their phones? Certainly not!

Indeed, that commandment issued so many years ago at Mt. Sinai was not only meant for the ears of that generation, and not only for the ears of those who would change the words of the Torah to fit their ideas of modernity. It was for our ears as well, to remember always and for all eternity the exaltedness of that most precious gift - our holy Torah.

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