

he said, “The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:8-16).

It is here in these concluding remarks, that a key, identifying title for the Holy One is mentioned. *ADONAI nissi* reminded not only the Israelites then—but Messiah followers today—that He is indeed a powerful banner of victory over His own people. Furthermore is the reminder that the descendants of Esau, through Amalek’s line (Genesis 36:12), would be perpetually at war with the saints down through the generations, despite the command to eliminate them given in this memorial account.

As our Torah reading closes, there is a stark reminder that the Almighty has and will continue to use tests to challenge the faith and perseverance of those who have ostensibly been freed from the bondage of sin, but may still be struggling with the inclinations of the flesh. May each of us learn from what we have read, and by faith be able to overcome the trials and tests of life, in order to accomplish all of the good works that the Father has foreordained for each and everyone of His chosen children.

Yitro Jethro “Blind Faith”

Exodus 18:1-20:23[26]
Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:5-6[6-7] (A);
6:1-13 (S)

The trials and tribulations of Ancient Israel’s deliverance from Egypt continue in this week’s Torah reading, with particular emphasis on the Ten Commandments that are received while the people were encamped at Mount Sinai. After observing the many miracles performed by God to free them from the bondage of Egyptian slavery—including the ten plagues, the cloud and pillar of fire, the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of the Egyptian army, making bitter water potable, provision of manna and quail, providing water from a rock, and defeating the Amalekites—the Israelites were definitely in awe of the power of their God. By experiencing and witnessing these visible, and in many respects, tangible acts of punishment, provision, and protection—Israel was prepared to do whatever the Lord declared, before even knowing what He was going to require. Accordingly, one might conclude that the people were finally at a point where they exhibited a “blind faith,” willing to follow the instruction of the Lord regardless of the outcome.

Jethro's Counsel

Before the dramatic encounter with the Almighty, where the Ten Commandments would be issued, we are told about the wisdom imparted to Moses by his father-in-law Jethro. The importance of establishing a reasonable way to judge circumstances within the camp of Israel was proposed by Jethro. Jethro recognized that the people were relying solely on the judgment of Moses to resolve disputes. With thousands of people, and all of the problems that might ensue from human interaction, it was obvious to Jethro that Moses needed to delegate some responsibility to other leaders. These would be individuals who feared God, knew the truth, and hated dishonest gain:

“It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, ‘What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit *as judge* and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?’ Moses said to his father-in-law, ‘Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws.’ **Moses' father-in-law said to him, ‘The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them *as* leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you. If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.’** So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge. Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land” (Exodus 18:13-27).

From the insertion of this encounter with Jethro, juxtaposed between the first few months of the deliverance from Egypt and the reception of the Decalogue, it is reasonable to conclude that God was concerned about an orderly means for Ancient

Israel to govern itself. God is not a God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). What is seen here in *Yitro* would later be integrated into many different judicial systems throughout the world. Note that Jethro still advised Moses to remain Israel's representative before God, with the admonition to teach the statutes and laws of God. Moses did not relinquish his role as a mediator before the Holy One, but he did not need to have to be burdened with every single issue that might have arisen among the people.

Preparing to Receive the Decalogue

After the departure of Jethro, our Torah portion turns to one of the most incredible events ever recorded in human history. The Creator God descended from Heaven and spoke the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel gathered at the base of Mount Sinai. But before this dramatic encounter occurred, the Lord had some extraordinary words for Moses to communicate to them:

“Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. **Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**” These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel” (Exodus 19:3-6).

Here the Almighty summoned Moses to the mountain to hear this declaration, so that he would share it with Israel. In some opening remarks, God reminded Moses about what He had done to the Egyptians, and how He personally protected the Israelites during their deliverance from slavery and along the path they were traversing. Obviously, there was no need for the Ancient Israelites to take any credit for being at a place of relative safety from their enemies.

There are then some incredible words, which should bring both comfort and awe to each of us who read or hear these words today. In order to be regarded as God's possession among all the peoples, and be considered a kingdom of priests and a holy nation—Israel was to obey Him. While on the surface, obeying God might sound somewhat doable, especially given anticipated blessings—but what we obviously discover from the remainder of too much of the Torah and Tanakh is that Israel inevitably failed over and over to obey. However, at this particular time in the history of Israel, given the preponderance of recent miracles and deliverance from enemies, and what could be considered a “blind faith,” the Israelites collectively responded to this proposition with a resounding affirmation:

“All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do!’ And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD. The LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you

forever.’ Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. The LORD also said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, “Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.” When the ram’s horn [*shofar*, CJB] sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.’ So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. He said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman’” (Exodus 19:8-15).

Whether this positive response to do all that the Lord would speak, even before He had spoken it—from *all* the people of Israel—was a reflection of their awe for what the Lord had just done, or whether it was really just enthusiasm being caught up in the moment, the fact is there was a genuine desire of the Ancient Israelites to obey the Lord. ***Their response must have pleased Him.*** Yet, immediately following this the Lord began to relay to Moses some warnings about what was to be expected when He would descend upon Mount Sinai. The Lord wanted His people to hear His voice, but He knew that a certain amount of personal consecration was required in order to be prepared to hear Him speak.

Instruction came forth so that, for a three-day period, the people would consecrate themselves through washings and separation from sexual contact. A prohibition about even touching the mountain was included, to keep the people from defiling it before the Holy One descended. Eventually a blast from a ram’s horn would signal that they could approach the base of the mountain, but still not touch it. God was very concerned about protecting the people from their over zealously to approach the mountain. When God did finally descend to Mount Sinai, it was accompanied with great thunder and lightning:

“So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, ‘Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them.’ Moses said to the LORD, ‘The people cannot

come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, “Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.” Then the LORD said to him, ‘Go down and come up *again*, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, or He will break forth upon them.’ So Moses went down to the people and told them” (Exodus 19:16-25).

This must have been an awesome sight to behold. After three days of being consecrated for the event, Israelites were gathered by Moses at the base of the mountain, as it turned ominously dark. A cloud descended, accompanied by thunder, lightning, and a trembling quake of the whole mountain. Then as the trumpet sounded, the Lord actually responded to the warning signal by thundering back, and calling Moses to join Him at the top of the mountain. It is difficult to imagine what this must have been like—despite a few attempts by motion pictures like *The Ten Commandments* or *Prince of Egypt* to try to portray it.

If you have ever been in a hurricane, coupled with an earthquake, while a tornado is raging by, with lightning lighting up the sky, as you gazed upon a fire blasting volcanic like smoke in the distance—perhaps you could envision this scene, *sort of*. If nothing else, the fear of the Lord would be an overwhelming emotion, because there would be so much out of your control, that you can only stand there in utter terror. And yet, as these types of natural phenomena are described in *Yitro*, Moses ascended the mountain to receive the Ten Words. The final warning regarding the priests kept them from touching the mountain, but there was one exception made for Aaron. So, the scene was set for Israel to receive the Word of the Lord from Mount Sinai.

The Decalogue is Spoken

The Holy One spoke forth the Ten Commandments, or the Ten Words, heard by all. These instructions are regarded as perhaps the most important and influential of Divine ordinances, with a resonating effect on all of humankind—most especially those of both Judaism and Christianity:

“Then God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six

days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:1-17).

Here, with an entire generation of Israelites to witness and hear, the Lord God proclaimed these Ten Words, which have become foundational building blocks and parameters for living life in a manner that loves Him and neighbor. In the first four commandments, the focus seen is on human relationships with God, and how He wants to be worshipped and followed. The last six commandments deal primarily with human interactions with others, and how God wants us to treat our fellow human beings. Without going into great detail about the specifics of each of these words, when men or women faithfully apply these words to their daily walk with the Lord, they will inevitably be adhering to what Yeshua defined as the greatest commandments in the Torah:

“One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND” [Deuteronomy 6:5]. ‘This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” [Leviticus 18:5]. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:35-40).

A Change of Mind

The Israelites had pledged, *rather blindly we may say*, to do all that the Lord had spoken—without even knowing what He was going to say (Exodus 19:8). They probably liked the idea of having this awesome God, who had delivered them from the Egyptians through a series of miracles, and helped defeat the dreaded Amalekites, speak to them. He was the God who was going to make them great, after all. But Israel’s initial response, to obey all that the Lord spoke, was perhaps being reevaluated by some, as they heard His commandments reverberating from the mountaintop.

After the Ten Words had been declared, we find a terrified people, who had just witnessed an incredible event as the voice of the Lord literally permeated their beings. Despite complying with the request to maintain a distance from the base of the mountain, the visible, audible, and tangible realities of the Creator God speaking directly to them must have been overwhelming—because they declared that if they heard God speak to them, *they would die*. We quickly discover that after

hearing the Ten Words, the Israelites impulsively requested Moses to maintain his intermediary position, as their point of contact with the Holy One:

“All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.’ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.’ So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God *was*. Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. You shall not make *other gods* besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it”’ (Exodus 20:18-26).

Moses listened to the requests of the Israelites, and responded with an explanation for why the Lord had allowed them to hear His audible voice. Apparently, this unique encounter by the Holy One, with His chosen people, was *to test* them. The Lord wanted the people to fear Him with a reverence that would help them avoid sin, and be genuine in following His instructions. By hearing His commands in this dramatic fashion, the Israelites were so awestruck, that they immediately asked Moses to be their mediator before God.

Without hesitation, Moses approached God in the thick of the cloud, while the Israelites stood at a distance. Some final instructions were given to Moses that deal specifically with avoiding making idols of precious metals and constructing a proper altar with uncut stones for various sacrifices. Moses did not exhibit any of the trepidation of the Lord, because by this point in time Moses had endured so much intimacy with the Lord, that he realized his position as a mediator for the people was secure.

What about the blind faith declarations of the Israelites a few days earlier? Had this close encounter with the Holy One changed their minds, as they had decided it would be better to let an intermediary act as a go-between with the Holy One?

Blind Faith

It is difficult with certainty to determine what made the Ancient Israelites want a mediator, rather than have direct communication from the Almighty. Perhaps it was simply a fear of physical life, because of the dangers posed by wandering too close to the mountain or the difficulty of being in the presence of holiness. On the

other hand, is it possible that the pure vocal declaration of the Ten Commandments from the Holy One of Israel, reverberated with such a strong chord in their hearts, that there was literally a physical manifestation experiencing heart palpitations and other threatening actions?

The significance of the giving of the Ten Commandments has allowed me to realize that this formal delivery to Ancient Israel—may just well be a codification of a wide number of instructions that have already been impressed onto the human conscience/mind/heart, as all people are made in God’s image. In his letter to the Romans, Paul mentioned how the nations can do things of God’s Torah, even if they do not formally have God’s Torah:

“For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Messiah Yeshua” (Romans 2:14-16).

Every person, in some form or fashion, is going to be held accountable for keeping or violating God’s Law.

When you consider the giving of the Ten Commandments, are you at all complying with them? When you think about breaking an ordinance etched in stone with God’s finger, do you at all think about the scene of fire and smoke in which it was given to Ancient Israel? Even if you do not think about disregarding or disobeying any of Ten Commandments, are you ever caught minimally obeying them?

While you are considering this week’s Torah portion, try placing yourself at the base of Mount Sinai, and imagine the Ten Words of God coming forth from a fire-belching, smoking, and trembling mountain top. Pray through each of the commands, reading them out loud so that you hear them (cf. Romans 10:17), and ascertain just where you presently may be in your heart of hearts when it comes to following them.

Will you discover that there is another god in your life, or that an idol is taking up your time? Will you find that you have been profaning the name of the Lord in some of your thoughts or statements? Could you be approaching the Sabbath in ways that need improvement? Have you ever dishonored your parents or your ancestors? Have you been harboring some thoughts about murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, or coveting something—which needs to be confessed and terminated?

Remember that the Ancient Israelites, who seemingly through a “blind faith,” initially had great intentions to do all that the Holy One spoke. But when the Lord did speak the Ten Commandments, the people rapidly turned to Moses because of their mortal fear, rather than press into the voice of God for their own benefit. Thankfully today, with the benefit of the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah onto the

scene of history, all people can know that the penalty for breaking the instructions given to Moses and Ancient Israel has been remitted by His sacrifice! We simply have to acknowledge His sacrifice by faith, and receive permanent atonement and forgiveness for our violation of the Father's commandments. Additionally, rather than being mortally afraid of the bellowing voice of the Holy One, those who are in Yeshua have the privilege of listening to the quiet still voice of the Spirit, as they seek Him in prayer, supplication, and worship.

I consider it a great blessing to be a part of the redeemed in Messiah, having the opportunity to learn more and more about my Creator and His ways, by studying the Torah. The Holy One *still desires* a people for His own possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9). *May we each be found faithful to be a part of this company of Believers!*

Mishpatim Rulings "Faithfully Do"

Exodus 21:1-24:18
Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25-26

Last week, our Torah reading *Yitro* (Exodus 18:1-20:23[26]) centered on the dramatic events surrounding the appearance of the Almighty Creator God at Mount Sinai, as He conveyed the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel through His servant Moses. The original recipients of these foundational building blocks of faith were primed for embracing them, after they witnessed and participated in their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. So magnificent were the miracles and display of God's power, that even before Moses went up on the mountain, the Ancient Israelites unanimously proclaimed a desire to faithfully do whatever He would proclaim:

"And all the people answered together and said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do!' And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever.' Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD" (Exodus 19:8-9).

After given the opportunity to hear the voice of the Lord proclaim His Instruction to the multitude stationed at the base of Mount Sinai, we find that the Israelites were terrified about their physical survival. So, they implored Moses to maintain his role as an intermediary between the Lord and them: