

A PARASHA THOUGHT

Together As One

Parshas Yisro recounts the climax of Yetzias Mitzrayim: Matan Torah, when the Jewish people received the Torah at Har Sinai. Before the Torah was given, the *passuk* (19:2) tells us that *Klal Yisrael* encamped around Har Sinai; “*vayichan shum Yisrael neged hahar*.” The word the Torah uses to describe this, “*vayichan*,” is in the singular. This is puzzling, since at that point in time, the Jewish people already numbered in the millions. Why then does the Torah describe their gathering around Har Sinai in the singular, as if only one person was there? Rashi addresses this question by quoting the *Mechilta*, which says that the Jews gathered “*K’ish echad b’lev echad*,” as one person with one heart. “*Vayichan*” is therefore an appropriate way of describing *Klal Yisrael* before Matan Torah, as they were in a state of complete unity, as if they were all one person. The *Kli Yakar* adds that it was no coincidence that we only received the Torah after becoming unified. Rather, writes the *Kli Yakar*, this unity was a prerequisite for us to receive the Torah – without being together, we would be unable to receive it.

The Torah is not the only thing that comes only if we are unified. The *Gemara* (*Menachos* 27a) tells us that when there is a communal fast to avert tragedy, we are answered only if we join as one group. A variant text in the *Gemara* reads that we will not merit to return to our Land unless we are united as one group. Even more than this, the *Sifri* (quoted by Rashi, *Devarim* 33:5) writes that when the Jewish people are united, then Hashem is their King, but if there is discord amongst us, it’s as if we are causing Hashem to no longer be our King. These

are among the many sources that make it clear that Jewish unity is more than a slogan. It is crucial. Receiving the Torah, being saved from tragedy, re-entering *Eretz Yisrael* – good things happen when we are united. More importantly, they can only happen when we are united.

But as we all know, achieving this unity is hard. Obviously, many factors contribute to this. One factor is that even Torah Jewry is made up of countless communities, each with its own culture and outlook, and each with its own *mesorah* in *avodas Hashem*. Sometimes, the many different streams of Jewry can almost make one wonder whether we are all part of the same nation. There is a beautiful thought found in the *sefer Gesher haChaim* (2:26, fn.1) that can be helpful in providing perspective on this.

The last *Gemara* in *Taanis* writes, “in the future Hashem will form a circle of all the *tzaddikim*, and Hashem will sit in the middle, and each *tzaddik* will point at Him.” What does this mean? The *Gesher haChaim* explains that when people are standing in a circle, everyone is opposite the other, seemingly opposed to the other. However, if everyone in the circle is focused on one central point, then they are all really doing the same thing – they are all sharing the same goal, just approaching it from different angles. So too, writes the *Gesher haChaim*, it is with the many different groups within *Klal Yisrael* – each one is different, with seemingly diametrically differences approaches from the other – but provided that we share the focus of serving Hashem, we will

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RABBI
MORDECHAI
BERNSTEIN



THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI YITZCHAK PREIS

Q. The first five of the Ten Commandments have many more words than the second five. How do we know that they then were split into two groups of five, which would have a huge disparity in the amount of text on each? Isn’t it possible that the division was done differently and more symmetrically?

A. First, we should note that there is an opinion in the *Medrash* and in *Yerushalmi* (*Shekolim* 6:1) that all ten (or even multiples of all ten) were on each of the tablets. And, the “all ten” approach seems to be the majority opinion! That said, the other opinion stated in both of these sources – that there were five on each tablet – has become the standard assumption of the commentaries.

Some point to the fact that the two groups have distinct themes and tones. Note for example that Hashem’s Name appears in each of the first five and in none of the latter five. And each of the first five include a “reason,” which is not the case for the latter five.

Building on the split into two groups of five, Rashi in *Shir Hashirim* (4:5)

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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describes a “twinning” of the commandments. As Rashi elucidates, each commandment in the first set of five is interconnected with the corresponding commandment in the second set.

It is also interesting to note that the Mabit (*Beis Elokim, Shaar Hayesodos* 12) shares a fascinating theory about the size of the lettering. He posits that the “font” used for the second set was much larger and the amount of stone hewed out for each set was actually the same! 🤖

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! Submit a question on the parasha by Monday at noon by emailing parasha@cincynkollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.



PROMINENT TORAH PERSONALITIES

RABBI YAAKOV SAKLAD

Harav Dovid Halevi Segal Part 3:

Not long after Rav Dovid Halevi Segal settled in Poltitsa, he had to move to a different town. He decided to move to Posen, Prussia. In Posen, he was able to spread his Torah teachings to the greater Posen area before he moved again, this time to the city of Ostrog in the province of Volhynia, Ukraine. The reason for this move was to take over for his father-in-law, Rav Yoel Sirkis (author of the classic work on the Tur, *Bais Chodosh*, or *Bach*) as *Av Beis Din* (head of Jewish Court) and *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Ostrog. When word spread that he had become *Rosh Hayeshiva*, many flocked to his yeshiva to become his *talmidim* (disciples), among them were established *Talmidei Chachamim* (Torah scholars) who came to hear his profound insights and intensive *halachic* discussion. (Dembitzer, 1888)

Rav Dovid's *talmidim* implored him to publish his life's work, *Turei Zahav* or *Taz*, which is a commentary on *Shulchan Aruch* (code of Jewish Law). Rav Dovid acquiesced, and the *Taz* was printed in Lublin in 1646. (Dembitzer, 1888) In 1648, the Cossack insurrection led by Bogdan Chmielnicki, y"sh, started and the Cossacks savagely murdered Jews in pogroms throughout Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine. Many tried to escape and several communal leaders ended up in Lublin. Many Torah luminaries and scholars, among them Rav Dovid, also came to Lublin. During this period many women weren't sure if their husbands were still alive and were asking the various *Poskim* (*halachic* authorities) residing in Lublin if they could remarry. Rav Dovid, although he was on the constant move and was worn out from all of the tedious traveling, was determined to analyze a woman's case to allow her to remarry. Because of all the hysteria, not many *halachic* works were available at the time, yet Rav Dovid was able to allow her to remarry regardless based on his encyclopedic knowledge of the subject. (Dembitzer, 1888) 🤖

Works Cited

Dembitzer, C. N. (1888). *Kelilas Yofi*. Krakow.

A PARASHA THOUGHT

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eventually realize that we are all traveling to the same destination. Everyone will meet at the top of the mountain, after traveling up different sides.

Perhaps the unprecedented connectivity of today's world affords us the opportunity to gain from the strong points of others. Not to lose our own

mesorah, but rather to be cognizant of other authentic approaches in *avodas Hashem*, and to learn from the unique contributions made by Torah communities that differ from our own. From some we can learn about greatness in Torah, from others, devotion to *tefillah*, and from yet others we have witnessed truly remarkable self-sacrifice while engaged in the defense of *Am Yisrael*. Perhaps this is one little step in coming together, and may we reap all the *bracha* which will result. Have a great Shabbos! 🤖

PARSHAH RIDDLE

RABBI MOSHE STEINER

Q. What names seem to be out of order in this week's *parasha* (they were not born in this *parasha* but make a reappearance)? What is the reason for this?

A. The third verse in this week's *parasha* (18:3;4) states that Yisro took “her (Tzipporah's) two sons—of whom one was named Gershom, that is to say, ‘I have been a stranger in a foreign land;’ and the other was named Eliezer, meaning, ‘The God of my father's [house] was my help, delivering me from the sword of Pharaoh.’” Seemingly, the reason for these names should have been reversed since Moshe first was saved from the sword of Pharaoh and only after was a stranger in a foreign land. If so, why was Gershom the first name given and Eliezer the second?

The Ohr HaChaim (18:4) suggest two possible reasons for the seemingly out-of-order names. Either Moshe wanted to thank Hashem for his present situation before going to past events, or the “stranger in a foreign land” was really a reference to being a stranger in this world. Meaning Moshe viewed this world as only a temporary place and not his “home” or final stop. 🤖