יִתְרוֹ YITRO

DEVASH

Because learning Torah is sweet

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מָה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- Moshe's father-in-law, Yitro, comes to meet בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Benei Yisrael, the Israelites) in the wilderness. Yitro brings Moshe's wife, Tzipporah, and their two sons.
- Yitro watches Moshe serve as the only judge for all of Benei Yisrael, and he thinks this is too much work for Moshe alone. Yitro helps Moshe set up a better system with more judges.
- Benei Yisrael set up camp at הַר סִינַי (Har Sinai, Mount Sinai). For three days, they prepare to receive the Torah.
- On the third day, there is thunder, lightning, heavy clouds, and a very strong sound of the shofar, and Har Sinai fills with smoke because God came down in fire. Awesome!
- God declares the עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדִּבְּרוֹת (Aseret Ha-Dibrot, Ten Commandments). These include God-oriented mitzvot (like not worshiping idols and keeping Shabbat), and people-oriented mitzvot (like not killing or stealing).
- Benei Yisrael are scared of what they see at Har Sinai. They ask Moshe to teach them instead of hearing directly from God. Moshe tells them not to be afraid.
- God gives Moshe rules for making a מִזְבֵּחַ (mizbe'ah, altar for sacrifices).



מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash



Midrashim are ideas or stories that explain the Torah. They often come from listening very carefully to what the Torah says and how it says it. Here, we will look for what clues this midrash sees in the Torah's words, and try to understand its messages.

Shemot 19:2

They traveled from Refidim, and they came to the wilderness of Sinai, and they camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there opposite the mountain.

שמות יט:ב

וַיִּסְעוּ מֵרְפִידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הָהָר׃

The beginning of this pasuk uses plural language: וַיִּסְעוּ (va-yis'u, **they** traveled), וַיָּבֹאוּ (va-yavo'u, **they** came), וַיַּחֲנוּ (va-yahanu, **they** camped). This makes sense, since the pasuk is describing the entire nation of Israel doing all those things.

However, the end of the pasuk switches to singular language: וַיִּחַן (va-yihan, **he/it** camped). Why does the Torah use this word when describing how the Israelites camped next to הַר סִינַי (Har Sinai, Mount Sinai)?

Mekhilta Massekhta de-Vahodesh 1

Any time that it says "they" traveled or "they" camped, it describes how they traveled or camped while not united. But here (at Har Sinai), the people were united with a single heart. Therefore it says "Israel camped there opposite the mountain" (using singular language).

מכילתא מסכתא דבחדש א

כָּל מָקוֹם שֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר וַיִּסְעוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ, נוֹסְעִים בְּמַחֲלֹקֶת וְחוֹנִים בְּמַחֲלֹקֶת. אֲבָל כָּאן הִשְׁוּוּ כֻּלָּם לֵב אֶחָד, לְכָךְ נֶאֱמַר "וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הָהָר."



- What was it about Har Sinai that helped Benei Yisrael to unite together?
- Why is being united an important part of the story of receiving the Torah?

פֵּרוּשִׁנוּת • Commentary

We usually translate עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדִּבְּרוֹת (Aseret Ha-Dibrot) as the "Ten Commandments," even though it literally means "Ten Statements." But take a look at the first of the dibrot:

Shemot 20:2

I am the Lord, your God, Who brought you out of the Land of Egypt from the house of slavery.

שמות כ:ב

אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:

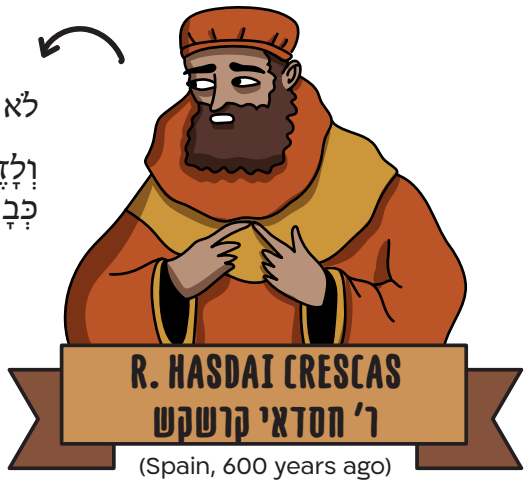
Is anything actually being commanded here?



(Spain and Egypt, 850 years ago)

מִצְוָה רִאשׁוֹן הִיא הַצִּוּוּי אֲשֶׁר צִוָּנוּ
בְּהַאֲמָנַת הָאֱלוֹקוּת, וְהוּא שֶׁנַּאֲמִין שֶׁיֵּשׁ
שָׁם עִלָּה וְסִבָּה הוּא פּוֹעֵל לְכָל הַנִּמְצָאִים,
וְהוּא אֱמָרוֹ "אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ".

The first mitzvah is the command to believe in God; to believe that there is an Origin and Cause, that God is the power of all that exists. And the source is, "I am the Lord your God."



(Spain, 600 years ago)

לֹא יִצַּיֵּר מִצְוָה בִּזְוּלַת מְצַוֶּה יָדוּעַ.

וְלָזֶה, כַּאֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה אֱמוּנַת מְצִיאוּת הָאֵ-ל מִצְוָה,
כְּבָר נִבְיחַ אֱמוּנַת מְצִיאוּת הָאֵ-ל יִתְבָּרַךְ...

It is not possible to have a mitzvah without God commanding it.

So you can't have a mitzvah to believe in God, because if you think there is a mitzvah, it means you already believe in God beforehand. (If not, then who gave that mitzvah?!)

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Rambam argues that the first דִּבּוּר (dibbur, statement) really is a mitzvah, and a very important one at that. Rabbi Crescas, however, believes that this dibbur is a statement, perhaps an introduction, but it isn't actually commanding anything. Both of these positions raise some very deep questions!

- When you think about Rambam, ask yourself: Can faith be commanded? Why?
- When you think about Rabbi Crescas, ask yourself: Is it logical for God to command that people believe in God, if they already do? Does doing a mitzvah always mean that a person already believes in God? Why?
- Does one of these interpretations seem more logical to you? Which one do you think is more convincing when you look at the Aseret Ha-Dibrot?





הֲלָכָה • Halakhah

Just as Benei Yisrael have an experience of God in our parashah, the haftarah this week describes Yeshayahu's vision of God. He sees God's throne, and angels next to it calling out in praise:

Yeshayahu 6:3

And one would call to the other, "Holy, holy, holy is God! God's presence fills all the earth!"

ישעיהו ו:ג

וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל זֶה וְאָמַר קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ
ה' צְבָאוֹת מְלֹא כָל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ:



This line might sound familiar, because it is part of קְדוּשָּׁה (Kedushah), one of our most important prayers. Kedushah is recited when a minyan is present, as part of the repetition of the עֲמִידָה (Amidah, the quiet prayer that is central to every tefillah).

Because Kedushah is considered so special, there are some rules for how to treat it with proper respect:



- Some people have the custom to rise up on their toes while saying each "kadosh," and for the beginning of each of the next lines in Kedushah (Rema Orah Hayyim 125:1).

- The Shulhan Arukh says that people should stand with their feet together during Kedushah (Orah Hayyim 125:2). This is because, in Kedushah, we are mimicking angels, who are described by Yehezkel as standing with a single straight leg (1:7). If you enter shul while Kedushah is being recited, you should pause and stand near the entrance with your feet together until Kedushah is finished, and then come in and find your spot.





- It is extra important not to speak during Kedushah (Rema Orah Hayyim 125:1).



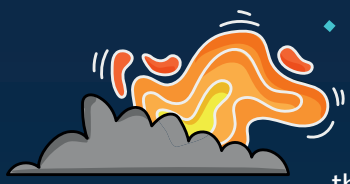
- If you are saying a different part of tefillah (like if you come to shul late and are catching up), and the rest of the community reaches Kedushah, you should stop what you are saying and join everyone else to say Kedushah. However, if you are in the middle of the quiet Amidah, you cannot make any interruptions. In this case, the Shulhan Arukh says to pause and focus on listening to Kedushah without saying the words (Orah Hayyim 104:7).

מָה זֶה • What's Going On Here?

During God's revelation at הַר סִינַי (Har Sinai, Mount Sinai), the Torah says that "the people saw the thunder and the lightning" (Shemot 20:15). Thunder isn't something that we normally can see. What does this pasuk mean?



- **Sforno** says it means they concentrated on the thunder.



- **Rashi** says it was a miracle, and they actually saw the sound of thunder, even though this is normally impossible.



- **Rashbam** says that they saw hail and stones falling.

- On a basic level, the word "see" could really mean "perceive." In this case, the pasuk means that the people saw the lightning and heard the thunder.



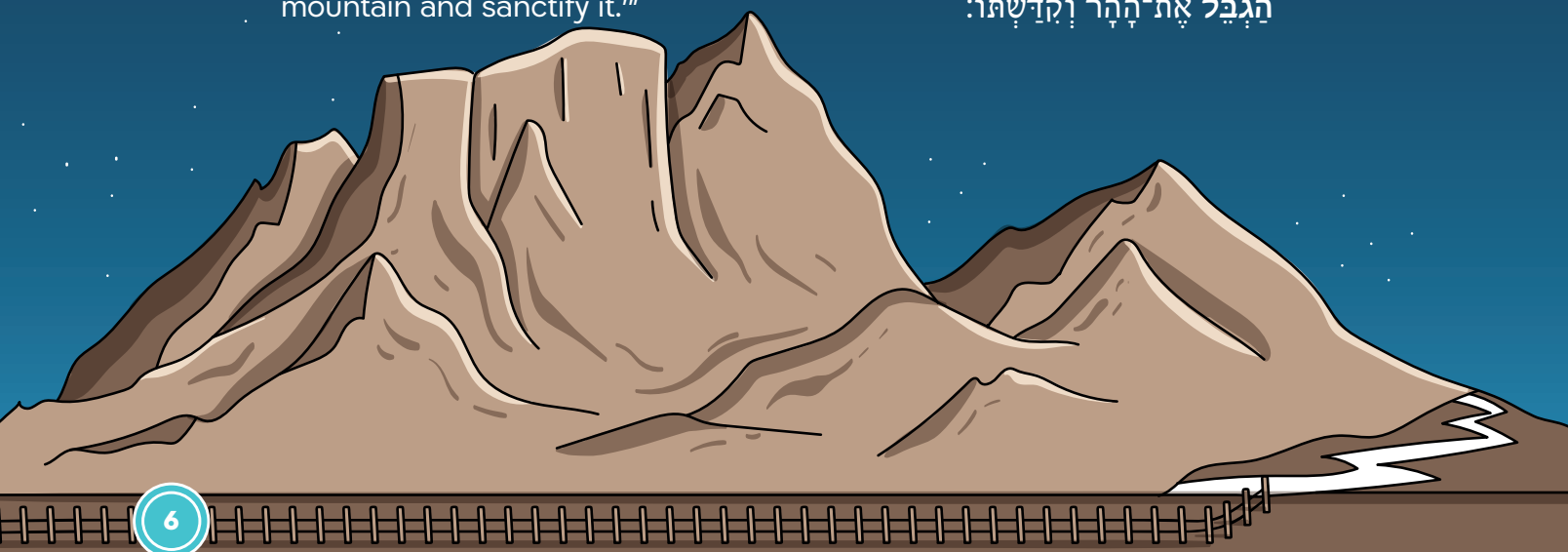
רֶגַע שֶׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Shemot 19:23

But Moshe said to God, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us saying, '**Set bounds** around the mountain and sanctify it.'"

שמות יט:כג

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' לֹא־יוּכַל הָעָם לַעֲלֹת אֶל־הַר סִינָי כִּי־אַתָּה הַעֵדֹתָה בָּנוּ לֵאמֹר הַגְבֵּל אֶת־הָהָר וְקִדַּשְׁתּוֹ׃



לְהַגְבִּיל (שֹׁרֶשׁ ג.ב.ל)

To set a limit or a border, to restrict (le-hagbil)

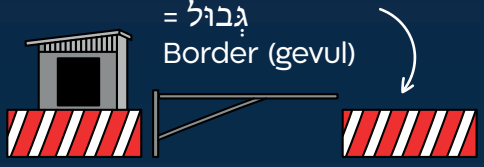




= מִגְבָּלָה
Restriction (migbalah)

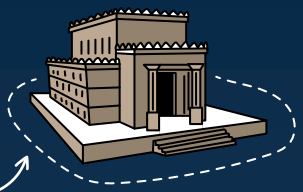
= לַעֲבֹר אֶת הַגְּבוּל
To cross the line, usually by saying or doing something inappropriate (la-avor et ha-gevul)





= גְּבוּל
Border (gevul)

= גְּבוּלִין
A term in the Talmud that describes space outside of the Beit Ha-Mikdash (Mishnah Shabbat 1:11) (gevulin)



Find the Word!

During the 10 plagues in מִצְרַיִם (Mitzrayim, Egypt) this שֹׁרֶשׁ (shoresh, root) was used a number of times to show that a plague covered the entire country. Can you find the shoresh in the plague of locusts? (Hint: Look at Shemot 10:14.)



דַּקָּה שֶׁל דִּיוּן • One-Minute Debate

How to play:

- Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!
- For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.

Debate: It's better to have one leader than a bunch of people in charge.





Agree!

- When you have multiple leaders, you never know who is really in charge or who to go to when you have a problem.

Disagree!

- One person just can't ever do it all.
- Teamwork makes the dream work.

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שְׁאֵלוֹת הַשָּׁבוּעַ • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. **The answers to the last three are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah.**

aliyot:

1) Shemot 18:1 to 18:12
2) 18:13 to 18:23
3) 18:24 to 18:27
4) 19:1 to 19:6
5) 19:7 to 19:19
6) 19:20 to 20:14
7) 20:15 to 20:23

Good luck!

1. What was the name of Tzipporah's second son?

2. Yitro says to choose leaders who hate something. What?



3. Moshe, following Yitro's advice, creates four different sizes of groups of people. What are they?

4. God's carrying of the people is described in connection with what kind of animal?

5. What is the people's one-word answer when they hear God's plan for them?

6. How many times does the Hebrew word לֹא (lo, don't) appear in the Ten Commandments?

7. What tool are you not allowed to use to build a מִזְבֵּחַ (mizbe'ah, altar)?

8. Which mitzvah in our parashah is connected to living a long life?



9. A word connected to Rosh Hashanah appears three times in the parashah. What word and where?

* Look for the answers on page 12!

10. What religious role, mostly associated until now in the Torah with Egypt and Midian, apparently also exists among Benei Yisrael?

קְרִיאַת הַתּוֹרָה • Torah Reading

Look closely at the following words and the notes on them from this week's Torah reading. Notice anything strange?

Shemot 20:8

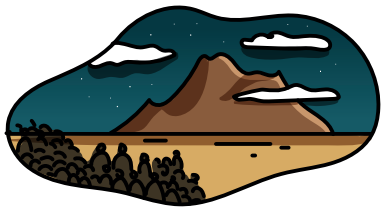
Remember the Shabbat day to make it holy.

שמות כ:ח

זָכ֖וֹר אֶת־י֣וֹם הַשַּׁבָּ֑ת לְקַדְּשֽׁוֹ׃

There are actually two sets of notes on these words! One set belongs to what's called טַעַם עֶלְיוֹן (ta'am elyon), a "higher" and more stretched out version of the usual Torah notes. The other set is part of טַעַם תַּחְתּוֹן (ta'am tahton)—the "lower," simpler, usual notes.

If you look at the עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָּרוֹת (Aseret Ha-Dibrot, Ten Commandments) in a humash, you will see the regular notes, the ta'am tahton. The special notes usually appear on the side of the page or somewhere at the back of the humash. A tikkun will show you both.



You'll notice that in ta'am tahton, the usual trop, phrases don't go on too long, and paragraphs get divided up into lots of verses. But ta'am elyon turns entire paragraphs into long sentences! Why?

Well, ta'am elyon is special for when we read the Aseret Ha-Dibrot, and it treats each דִּבּוּר (dibbur, statement) as one long sentence. When we read the Aseret Ha-Dibrot in public, **we are reenacting being at Mount Sinai**, when the Aseret Ha-Dibrot were spoken by God. Ta'am elyon makes them feel like 10 distinct statements, not just a bunch of verses.

But if you aren't at a public reading of the Aseret Ha-Dibrot, it's still a good idea to read the verses to yourself at home, and then you should use the "lower" set of notes if you know how to chant. This reminds us how important community is for really reenacting and experiencing things.

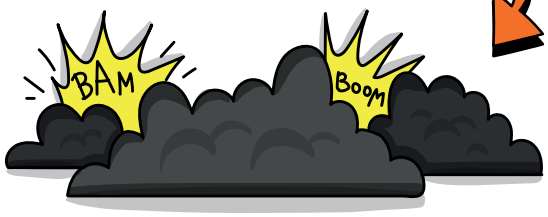
Ta'am elyon is used in three places in the Torah: Shemot 20:2-14, Devarim 5:6-18, and Bereishit 35:22.



בּוֹאוּ נְדַבֵּר עַל זֶה • Tell Me More About This!

The מָה זֶּה/What's Going On Here? section this week (p. 6) draws our attention to the word קוֹל (kol). This word has a bunch of meanings, for example:

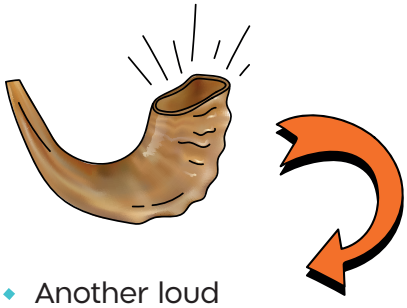
- Thunder (Shemot 20:15, Tehillim 29)



- A voice with words (Shemot 18:24, Bereishit 21:12)



- Another loud sound like a shofar (Shemot 20:15, Shemot 19:19, Yehoshua 6:5) or shouting (Tehillim 118:15)



Sometimes it could mean any of these things, like here:

Shemot 19:19 **שמות יט:יט**

Moshe spoke, and God answered him **with a kol**. מֹשֶׁה יְדַבֵּר וְהָאֱלֹקִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְקוֹל׃

What does "kol" mean here? Could it mean "thunder" like it does in the next chapter? Does it relate to the "kol" of the shofar mentioned earlier in the verse? Is it a voice with words? Does your answer to this question change how you imagine the scene at הַר סִינַי (Har Sinai, Mount Sinai)?

This word appears a lot of times in our parashah. As you see examples, think about which definition of "kol" makes more sense.

(BONUS: How many times can you find it in total?)





מִי הָיוּ חֲכָמֵינוּ • Who Were Our Sages?

This week's parashah is named for **Moshe's father-in-law**, a priest of Midian. But what actually was his name? Sometimes he is called **Yitro** (Shemot 18:1), **Yeter** (4:18), **Re'uel** (2:18), or possibly **Hovav** (Bemidbar 10:29). Yitro and Yeter might really be a title, like "his excellence," with his actual name being Re'uel (maybe meaning "God's friend").

Either way, Yitro was one of Moshe's closest friends. In the opening scene of our parashah, he sees that Moshe is exhausted by his responsibilities leading Benei Yisrael. Yitro gives him some advice: Don't try to do everything yourself. He tells Moshe to gather a group of trusted people to be judges to deal with all the minor stuff. Anything major can be sent to Moshe. This helps Moshe get some rest and it also helps the people be judged fairly and efficiently. Yitro's model of a system with lower and higher courts is still the model in our own justice systems in the US and Israel today!

We can learn a lot from Yitro's ideas and also from Moshe's willingness to take his advice. Yitro came from Midian; he wasn't part of Benei Yisrael. Sometimes an "outside" perspective can be really helpful!





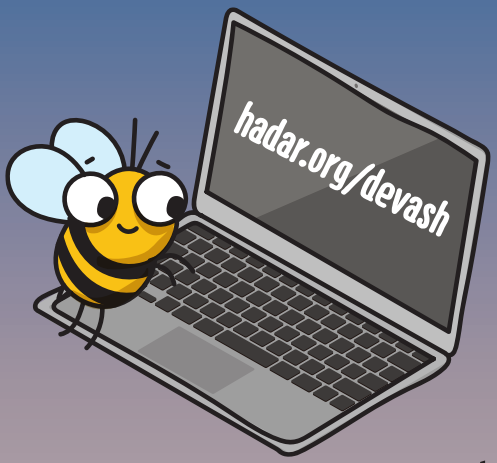
Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Eliezer (18:4)
2. בֶּצַע (betza, using power to steal things—for grammatical reasons, it appears in this verse as בָּצַע/vatza) (18:21)
3. 1000s, 100s, 50s, and 10s (18:25)
4. נְשָׁרִים (nesharim, eagles) (19:4)
5. נַעֲשֶׂה (na'aseh, we will do it!) (19:8)
6. 13 (20:1–14)
7. A metal blade (20:22)
8. Honoring parents (20:12)
9. שׁוֹפָר (shofar) (19:16, 19:19, 20:15)
10. כֹּהֲנִים (kohanim, priests)—and it is unclear in our parashah who exactly they are! (19:22, 19:24—and see 19:6)



Shabbat Shalom!

~ שבת שלום ~



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