

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**PARSHAS YISRO**

And Yisro heard... (Ex. 18:1). Rashi explains: What did he “hear”? He heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the battle with Amalek. Rashi’s source for this explanation is the Gemara (*Zevachim* 116a). Tosafos (to *Avodah Zarah* 24b) explains the juxtaposition of the story of Yisro to the end of last week’s Parshah which dealt with the war against Amalek by writing that both episodes were “firsts” of their kind, because Amalek was the first foreign nation to do bad to the Jewish People by attacking them, and Yisro was the first person to do good to the Jewish People by giving Moshe sound advice. With this in mind, we can add another layer to Rashi’s comment. Rashi does not simply mean that Yisro heard about the war with Amalek and that prompted him to join the Jewish People. Rather, Rashi means that because Yisro saw that the Amalekites did something bad to the Jews, Yisro decided to counter that evil by doing something good, so he came to give Moshe good advice. We also find Chazal look at Amalek and Yisro as opposites of each other, for the Midrash (*Tanchuma Yisro* 3) expounds on the verse “Hit the cynic, and a simpleton becomes wise” (Prov. 19:25) as referring to both of these characters. The “cynic” is Amalek, while the “simpleton” refers to Yisro. Additionally, we find that when the Pharaoh was first considering what actions to take against the, he consulted with three advisors: Bilaam, Iyov and Yisro (*Sotah* 11a). According to the version of this tradition cited in *Shemos Rabbah* (27:6), the last of the three was Amalek (the progenitor of the Amalekite nation), not Yisro. Rabbi Chanoch Zundel of Bialystok (*Eitz Yosef* there) explains that after Yisro ran away to avoid being party to harsh decrees against the Jews, Pharaoh replaced Yisro with Amalek in order ensure that he'd still have three advisor. From this we again see that Amalek is the opposite of Yisro, and even served to replace Yisro’s positive role with a negative role. We also find that when King Shaul went to kill out Amalek, he made a point of telling the descendants of Yisro—known as the Kenites—to separate themselves from the Amalekites (I Sam. 15:6).

And Yisro heard... (Ex. 18:1). Rashi explains that Yisro had seven names: Reuel, Yeser, Yisro, Chovav, Chever, Keini, Putiel. Yeser (יתר) because through him an extra Parshah was added (יתר) to the Torah. Yisro because when he converted to Judaism, he added a letter *vav* to his name Yeser to become Yisro (יתרו). Chovav because he treated the Torah dearly (חבב). Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kallischer (*Sefer HaBris*, beginning of *Parshas Yisro*) notes that Rashi does not explain the meaning behind Yisro’s other names. He explains those names himself: Yisro was Reuel because his thoughts (רעיונות) were always focused on Hashem and how to come closer to Him, but he didn’t know how to. He was also called Chovav because he appreciated the Torah which helped him understand Hashem’s ways and how to truly serve Him. Then he was called Chever because we wanted to join (מחבר) to the Jewish People. He was also called Putiel, which implies that he used to fatten (מפטים) cows to be used for idolatrous sacrifices, because even as he was worshipping idolatry, his thoughts and focus were towards Hashem, but that he made the same mistake as the people of Enosh’s

generation who mistakenly thought that it to be a proper way to worship Hashem by worship via intermediaries.

...that God had done for Moshe and His nation Israel... (Gen. 18:1). Rabbi Yonasan Shteif (*Amaros*, 8) cites the *Kanfei Nesharim* explains that “that God had done (עשה) for Moshe” could be read as “[on the level of] “God” [He] made Moshe”, meaning that Hashem elevated Moshe to a god-like status when He said “say that I have given you as a god (*elohim*) to Pharaoh” (Ex. 7:1). See also Midrash Tanchuma (*Vaera* 8) and *Shemos Rabbah* (8:1). Rabbi Shteif also writes (*Parshas Vaera, Limudei Hashem* 48) that Hashem had, so to speak, given from His own glory to Moshe by using His name (*elohim*) to describe Moshe’s role vis-à-vis the Pharaoh.

...Tzipporah... (Ex. 18:2). Rabbenu Efraim (p. 246) writes that the name Tzipporah (צפרה = 375) in *gematria* equals the phrase “for Moshe” (למשה = 375). This teaches us that she was intended to be Moshe’s wife from Above, for when Moshe sat at the well and prayed to merit a suitable wife on par with the wives of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, Tzipporah immediately came and showed her zeal and modesty. Rabbi Chaim Vital (*Eitz HaDaas Tov*, in the new section published through a manuscript 415) elaborates on this idea that *shidduchim* are “made in Heaven” and derives this from Moshe and Tzipporah, whose *shidduch* doesn’t really make sense to us. He writes that we are forced to say that Hashem Himself takes care of pairing up such matches, and if He did so for Moshe and Tzipporah, certainly He does so for the rest of the Jewish People who are the people of Moshe (as Hashem describes the Jewish People in Ex. 32:5 as “your [Moshe’s] people).

...in a foreign land... (Ex. 18:3). Rabbenu Efraim (pg. 247) asks why the Torah mentions “a foreign land” specifically regarding the birth of Gershom? He explains that originally, Yisro did not agree to allow Moshe to marry his daughter unless they stipulated that their firstborn son will be dedicated to *avodah zarah*. Indeed, he says, the phrase “that the name of the one was Gershom” (אשר שם האחד גרשם = 1402) in *gematria* equals “He [Moshe] accepted upon himself that his [firstborn’s] beginning will be for *avodah zarah* (קבל עליו שיהיה תחילה לעבודה זרה = 1360¹). Because Moshe accepted this condition, he was punished in that Yehonasan, the priest of Micah’s idol, was a descendant of Moshe through his son Gershom and he ended up worshipping *avodah zarah* (see Jud. 18:30, although see also *Bava Kama* 110 which implies that ultimately he did *teshuvah*). Rabbi Yonasan Shteif (*Amaros*, 12) cites the commentators’ question as to why Moshe named his second Eliezer to commemorate being saved from Pharaoh’s sword, if that incident happened before he was a stranger in Midian, so he should have given that name to his first son, not his second son (see *Ohr HaChaim* and

¹ I am uncertain how this gematria works out.

others ask this question). Rabbi Shteif answers in the name of his father-in-law Rabbi Yoel Ungar of Pacs that in light of the above tradition, Moshe knew that his first son would be associated with idolatry. Because of that, he wanted to name his first son Gershom which would serve to somewhat justify why he accepted such a condition for marrying Tziporah and that is because he was a foreigner in a strange land, he was forced to accept whatever conditions Yisro would impose on him. Then, he named his second son Eliezer with an allusion to Hashem's name and prayer that He help Moshe raise this child according to the Torah. Rabbi Shteif adds to this another reason as to why Moshe did not name his first son Eliezer. The name "Eliezer" has a reference to Hashem's name El, yet Moshe Rabbeinu was forced to accept Yisro's stipulation that his first son be dedicated to *avodah zarah*, so Moshe Rabbeinu did not want his son dedicated to idolatry to bear a name that refers to Hashem; or perhaps Yisro did not even let him give his son such a name because that would violate the terms of their agreement. Nonetheless, Rabbi Shteif notes that Moshe only accepted these terms because he saw the trajectory in which Yisro was headed and realized that inevitably Yisro would end up converting to Judaism, so there was no threat in accepting Yisro's demand to allow the firstborn to be dedicated to idolatry, because he understood the personality of Yisro and deeply devoted to honest appreciation of Truth, and was certain that by the time it was relevant Yisro would back down from that demand.

And Moshe told to his father-in-law... (Ex. 18:8). Rashi explains that Moshe did this in order to bring Yisro closer to Torah. Rabbi Yonasan Shteif explains (*Amaros* 20) that even though it is evident from the Talmud that we do not proselytize by trying to convince non-Jews to convert to Judaism (see *Yevamos* 47a–b), still once Moshe was already married to Yisro's daughter who herself converted, it was okay for him to try and bring Yisro closer to the family. See *Bris Avraham (Parshas Yisro)* who notes that the last letters of each word in the phrase "And Moshe told his father-in-law all" (ויספר משה לחותנו את כל) spell out the word "to the Torah" (לתורה), because Moshe was trying to draw in Yisro's heart closer to the Torah. He also notes that "...all that" (את כל אשר = 952) equals in *gematria* the exact phrase used by Rashi "to bring him closer to Torah" (לקרבו בתורה = 951) (including the *kollel*.)

And Israel camped there across the mountain (Ex. 19:2). Rabbi Nosson Adler (*Toras Emes to Parshas Yisro*) explains that the Evil Inclination is called a mountain, as the Gemara says (*Sukkah* 42a) that in Messianic Times the Evil Inclination will be finally vanquished, and it will appear to the *tzadikim* as a great mountain. Rashi explains that when it says the Jews camped, it is written in singular form (ויחן instead of ויחנו) because all the Jews camped together like one person. This means that all the Jews joined together in their opposition ("across" can also mean "against") to the Evil Inclination (the "mountain") who was trying his best to create separations and ruptures amongst the Jewish People. The Gerrer Rebbe

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(*Pnei Menachem*, Yisro p. 105) explains that when the Talmud says that Hashem held the mountain above the Jews like a barrel, this means that the Jews were able to transcend beyond the “mountain” (Evil Inclination) who tried to create factions and differences amongst the Nation. See *Avodah Berurah* (to *Avodah Zarah* 2b) who cites one of the letters of Rabbi Yosef Teomim (author of the *Pri Megadim*) as explaining that the Gemara specifically likens the threat of the mountain to a barrel because the Jews were only forced to accept the Oral Torah, while the Written Torah they accepted of their own volition (see *Midrash Tanchuma, Noach*) The Oral Torah is compared to wine, so the tool used to force the Jews to accept it was fittingly a wine barrel.

And Moshe went up to the God... (Ex. 19:3). The Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 28:1) relates: At that moment, the ministering angels wanted to hurt Moshe, so Hashem made the glow of Moshe’s face resemble that of Avraham Avinu. Hashem then said to him, “Are you not embarrassed of him that you went down to eat at his house?” in reference to the three angels who visited Avraham and ate in his house. Then Hashem told Moshe that the Torah is only given in the merit of Avraham Avinu, as it says “To take presents through man” (Tehillim 68:19) and “man” in this context refers to Avraham Avinu who is called the “Greatest man among giants” (Josh. 14). The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh* to Gen. 46:10) writes that when is *forced* to convert to Judaism, like the Jewish people were at Mount Sinai, then the Halachic principle that “a newly converted proselyte is like a newly born child” which means that the newly converted person does not retain his former familial relations, does not apply. He explains that for this reason, the Jews in *Parshas Behaaloscha* began to cry “according to their families” which means they cried about “family matters” which our sages tell us means they were disappointed that they could not marry close relatives. Under normal circumstances, if a non-Jew converts to Judaism, then he loses all former familial relations and is technically (by Biblical law) allowed to marry, say, his biological sister or aunt. However, when the Jews converted at Sinai, they did not lose their former familial relations like a regular convert does (as the Maharal explains because they were forced to convert), so they were still prohibited from marrying their biological sister or aunt. This was the catalyst for the Jews’ crying in *Parshas Behaaloscha*.² However, this begs the obvious question: What is the connection between losing one’s former familial connections and converting under duress? Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried writes in his work *Apiryon* (Parshas Bamidbar) that the answer is simple. The truth is that a forced conversion cannot really be Halachically effective since one needs to convert under a certain frame of mind where he or she clearly and willingly accepts the commandments, and that degree of intent is lost if they are being forced. Nonetheless, he explains as follows: When a regular non-Jew converts to Judaism, he

² See also *Shav Shmaatsa* (introduction, letter Tes).

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has decided that he is going to break off from his biological destiny in order to throw in his lot with the Jewish People and becomes grafted onto the genealogical family tree of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Such a person loses his old family and gains a new family. On the other hand, when the Jewish People at Mount Sinai were forced to accept the Torah, this acceptance was only able to take effect because they were *already* attached to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. By accepting the Torah, they were just showing what their true nature already was. According to this, the Jews did not lose their familial connections at Sinai because they were already part of the genealogy of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov and did not have to reject their original genealogical destiny in order to join the Jewish people. This dovetails quite nicely with the abovementioned Midrash in which Hashem reveals to Moshe that we all merited to receive the Torah in the merit of Avraham Avinu—meaning; because we are all his spiritual and genealogical heirs.³

³ In the end of *Parshas Behaaloscha*, it says that Miriam became a leper. However, the Gemara (*Zevachim* 101b) asks how she could have become a leper if there was no Kohen to pronounce her impure, because Moshe did not have the Halachic status of a Kohen, and Aharon was her brother and could not rule on her status. This passage implies that had Moshe been a Kohen, then he would have been allowed to rule on the matter of Miriam's leprosy, even though he was actually her brother. Why would Moshe being Miriam's brother not be a problem, but Aharon being her brother is a problem? This question is especially poignant in light of the Maharal's understanding that at *Matan Torah*, the Jews retained their former familial connections, so both Moshe and Aharon would still be considered Miriam's brothers. So why does the Talmud seem to imply that if Moshe was a Kohen, then he would have been allowed to rule on his sister's leprosy? The Ostroitzzer Gaon (*Meir Eini Chachamim* vol. 3, 18:3) answers that the Maharal's idea is predicated on the fact that the Jewish people were *forced* to accept the Torah with the mountain standing over their head. However, Moshe himself was actually not underneath the mountain, because he was on top of the mountain at the time. Therefore, though all the other Jews were *forced* to accept the Torah, Moshe was not *forced* to accept, rather he accepted it of his own volition. According to this, while the familial connection between Aharon and Miriam remained after *Matan Torah*, the familial connection between Moshe and Miriam was broken by *Matan Torah* and Moshe no longer had the Halachic status of Miriam's brother because he was considered like a new person. For this reason, the only reason why Moshe could not rule on Miriam's leprosy was that he was not a Kohen, but if he was a Kohen, he could have ruled on it, even though the same passage says that Aharon—who was a Kohen—could not rule on her leprosy because he was Miriam's brother. With this in mind, we can explain another perplexing issue: the Tosafists (*Daas Zekanim* to Num. 11:27) reveal to us the identity of Eldad and Medad as being the sons of Amram with another wife besides Yocheved (who became forbidden to him at *Matan Torah* because she was his aunt). They bolster this claim by citing a notebook written by Rabbi Amram ben Rabbi Hillel who lived in the Holy Land and wrote that he saw the tombstone of Eldad and Medad and it said that they were paternal brothers of Aharon, but not maternal brothers of his. In the *Sefer Teshuos Chein* (to Num. 26:59) R. Yochanan Rudansky asks 'why did their tombstone speak about their relationship to Aharon, and not Moshe'? In light of the above, the answer

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So shall you say to the House of Yaakov... (Ex. 19:3). Rabbenu Bechaya writes that Hashem commanded Moshe to speak to the women first because righteous women are the main ingredient for the perpetuation of Torah study because she has a unique role in encouraging her children to succeed in their Torah study while they are still young (because the woman is generally at home with the children, while the father is expected to be outside the house earning a livelihood). He also writes that this is why it is fitting for a woman to pray to Hashem that her children succeed in Torah studies at the time that she is lighting candles on Shabbos because it is her special commandment to make sure that her kids enlighten the world with their Torah, and prayers are especially heeded to if done while performing a *mitzvah*. While we are on the topic, we should address the question of how it is permitted for women to make these requests in their prayers on Shabbos, if it is forbidden to make prayers of requests on Shabbos? Rabbi Efrayim Greenblatt (*Rivevos Efrayim* vol. 6 130) answers that that she should stipulate that she does not accept Shabbos immediately with her lighting the candles, until after she finishes the prayer. Alternatively, he explains in the name of Rabbi Chaim Berlin that anything that is a formulaic prayer that everybody says, it is not a private prayer of request, then it is permitted to say on Shabbos.

'And you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation', these are the words that you shall say to the Children of Israel (Ex. 19:6). In Chazal, we find an expression *Melech Malchei HaMelachim* "king of the kings of kings" which comes from a similar Aramaic phrase that appears in Daniel 2:36. What is the meaning of this term? Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano (*Asara Maamaros, Maamar Eim Kol Chai* 2:15) explains that the reason why God is called *Melech Malchei HaMelachim* is that he rules over all the different Heavenly kings" under whose dominion the different earthly kings fall. Accordingly, he explains that each member of the Jewish nation is considered like a king, and Hashem provides His influx of good to the Jews through His *sefiros*, which means that the ultimately, Hashem Himself is the

is clear! Moshe, who was not forced to accept the Torah, lost all of his familial connections when he converted at Mount Sinai, so Eldad and Medad who may have been his biologically his paternal brothers, were no longer considered his brothers at all. On the other hand, Aharon who was under the mountain and thus forced to accept the Torah, was still related to his father's sons, so the tombs of Eldad and Meidad state that they were Aharon's paternal brothers, but not his maternal brothers. Nonetheless, when all of this is said and done, Rabbi Baruch Shimon Schneersohn, the late Rosh Yeshiva of Techebin, writes in *Birkas Shimon* (p. 177) that all of this was only said in a *pilpulistic* way, but is not technically true according to Halacha. He explains that we find in the Talmud Yerushalmi (cited by Tosafos to *Sanhedrin* 28a) a question about what sort of relatives are disqualified from testifying, which is phrased as "Is Moshe fit for testifying about the wife of Pinchas" (because Moshe's brother was Pinchas' grandfather), which shows that even Moshe's familial connections remained intact. (He rejects the possibility that the Talmud was only using the names Pinchas and Moshe as placeholders to express the idea of a great-uncle.)

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“king” over the *sefiros* which are the “kings” over the Jewish People who themselves are a nations of “kings.” Rabbeinu Bechaya (to *Avos* 3:1) similarly writes that Hashem is the “King” over all the angelic “kings” above, and the phrase *Melech Malchei HaMelachim* does not even begin to describe His sovereignty over *humans*. The Chasam Sofer (*Parshas Bamidbar*) takes a different spin on this. He explains that the Jewish People themselves are a nation of kings, but that because of their sins, He gives over control of them to other gentile nations, but ultimately He is the king of even those nations. Accordingly, *Melech Malchei HaMelachim* means that Hashem is the king over the nations whose “kings” lord over the Jewish People who themselves are “kings”.

And the sound of the Shofar became much stronger and stronger, Moshe would speak and the God would answer in a voice (Ex. 19:19). The Gemara (Brachos 45a) says that we derive from this passage the Halacha that he who is translating the Torah Reading (which used to be the custom in synagogues, and *is still practiced* in the Yemenite community) may not raise his voice louder than the person who reading the Torah himself reads. The Maharam Schick (*Maharam Schick Al HaTorah*, Yisro p. 90 in the Bnei Moshe edition) writes about preachers in his time whose would preach in the synagogue in the local gentile language by saying that doing so in that language would arouse the masses to do *teshuvah* more so than speaking normally. He discounts this argument by noting that these preachers have never gotten anybody to do *teshuvah*. He explains that a Rav can only convince somebody to do *teshuvah* if Hashem gives that Rav certain Divine assistance to be successful, but if the Rav himself is not acting properly, such as if he speaks in German from the pulpit, then he loses that Divine assistance and will not be able to positively affect others. He exegetically applies this idea to the Gemara cited above that contrasts the translator (i.e. a preacher in the non-Jewish vernacular) to the Torah reader (who speaks in the regular language), and says that the former cannot be louder than the latter, meaning that his reach in getting across his message will not be more successful than the latter. In his Halachic responsa, Maharim Schick (*Teshuvos Maharam Schick Orach Chaim* 70) however, he writes that even though it is forbidden to preach in the vernacular, still, if the community demands a Rabbi who will speak in German and if all the suitable Rabbis refuse to do so, the community will hire an unsuitable Rabbi, it is better for a suitable Rabbi to speak in German than for the community to hire an inferior Rabbi. Nonetheless, he concludes that his colleagues gathered against this ruling and decided in opposition to what he ruled, so he therefore defers to their decision and does not dare deviate from their consensus position. What is the Maharam Schick talking about here? In the year 1866, 80 rabbinic leaders from the Hungary gathered in Heimlewitz and many important figures like the *Divrei Chaim* and the Ziditchover Rebbe signed a proclamation declaring that “it is forbidden to offer a *drasha* in the non-Jewish language, and it is forbidden to listen to a *drasha* given in the language of

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the gentiles. If any Jew hears a Rabbi or anybody else start publicly speaking in the strange language, then he should leave the synagogue and forthwith go outside. Any public *drasha* must be given in the Jewish language (i.e. Yiddish)⁴ which all *kosher* Jews in the region speak.” They also mention in their decision that the great leader of Hungarian Jewry, Rabbi Moshe Sofer, author of *Chasam Sofer*, instructed his community that they not allow anybody to give a *drasha* in the gentiles’ language. The *Chasam Sofer* repeated this decision in *Teshuvos Chasam Sofer*, (*Choshen Mishpat* 197). See also what the Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe to Parshas Naso*) writes that when a preacher speaks in a foreign language, then the Torah dresses in sackcloth and ashes and even if he says the most amazing words for the proper reasons, still the Torah is dressed in sackcloth and cannot enter the hearts of his audience. This is because it says about one who studies Torah from another “For Torah you shall seek from his mouth, for he is an angel of Hashem of the Legions”. This means that a teacher of Torah must act like an angel, and just like the angels do not speak Aramaic, they only speak *Lashon HaKodesh*, so must he who teaches Torah only speak in Yiddish and not in the vernacular. The problem is that if indeed the Maharam Shik accepted this decision as he writes in his responsum, then why does Rabbi Pinchas Miller write in *Olam shel Sabba* (p. 85) about the Maharam Schick that he himself gave *drashos* to the community of Jergen (near Pressburg) in German? We must say that he only did so before his colleagues decided together to outlaw such a thing. Indeed, the Maharam Schick was the Rav of Jergen from 1838 until 1868, and the aforementioned consensus was only reached in 1866. It seems that for most of his career in Jergen, the Maharam Schick spoke in German, but for his last two years there (i.e. the two years he was there after the consensus had already been reached), he refrained from doing so. It should be noted that the *Chasam Sofer’s* own son, the *Ksav Sofer* as the Rabbi of Pressburg/Bratislava accepted Rabbi Shraga Fayish Fishman as the Maggid of the city, even though he spoke in Classic German, because he felt that times had changed, and the proverbial battlefield had moved. He explained that he was feircely loyal to his father’s position, and felt that if his father were still alive, he’d have agreed.

And you shall see from the entire nation, men of valor, fearers of God, men of truth, haters of graft, and you shall put them as officers of thousands, officers of hundreds, officers of fifties, and officers of tens (Ex. 19:21). Rabbi Chaim Palagi (*Tenufah Chaim* 9) writes that according to the Maharsha (in the first chapter of Sotah) it comes out that the appointment of *dayanim* on the court system is done through the decisions of the *chachamim* of the city, the masses do not get to choose. This is why the Gemara says that that *Chachimim*

⁴ For more about the sanctity of Yiddish and the battle over whether Yiddish or Hebrew would be the dominant language in the nascent State of Israel, see Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein’s work *Lashon HaKodesh: History, Holiness, & Hebrew* (Mosaica Press, 2015).

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where going to chose one *tanna* as a *dayan*, but ended up choosing somebody else because he was poor and needed the job. However, Rabbi Palagi notes that in many later sources like the *Teshuvos* of Maharam of Rottenberg (968) and Kolbo and Tashbetz (vol. 1, 159) it is evident that the *dayanim* were not chosen by the other wise men of the city, but were chosen by the homeowners of the locale. Indeed, Rabbi Palagi noted that in his city of Izmir Turkey, the custom was that they originally chose the *dayanim* in a forum in which all the tax-paying homeowners could vote, but then they instituted that there be a council of twelve men who had the authority to decide who was fitting to be appointed as a *dayan*. See also *Chikrei Lev* (*Yoreh Deah*, vol 2 49; 52) and *Sfas Emes* (*Yoreh Deah*, 21; 23), and *Chikrei Lev* (*Choshen Mishpat*, vol. 2, 24). They point to the verse at hand as percent for this ruling, for Yisro told Moshe “see from the entire nation” which means that Moshe should look around and see who they people wanted appointed as judges and then pick the qualified judges from that pool of people. This shows that it was the people who also had a say in nominating judges to the bench.

Do not make an idol—any image—of that which in the Heavens Above and that which is in the Earth Below, and that which is in Water underneath the Earth (Ex. 20:4). When discussing this passage, the *Zohar* (vol 2, 87a) elaborates upon the great punishment which shall befall those who say things that they did not hear from their teacher. See *Brachos* 27b which says that one who says something that he did not hear from his teacher causes the Holy Presence of Hashem to leave from the Jewish People. The *Rosh* and Rabbenu Yonah explain that this means that he says something in teacher’s name that he didn’t hear from his teacher, or he says something without attribution but those listening will assume he means that his teacher said it (see also *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah* 242:24). The Gemara (*Yoma* 66b) praises Rabbi Eliezer for never saying anything that he did not hear from his teacher. The Meiri (*Beis HaBechirah* there) explains that such is the way of the wise, to only cite their teacher’s teachings and not rely too much on their own comprehension.⁵ Nonetheless, the *Maharsha* writes that if somebody came to an idea through logic, then he is allowed to say it over even if he did not hear it from his teacher. Similarly, Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner said in the name of the Vilna Gaon (*Keser Rosh*, 66) that the problem of saying things that one didn’t hear from his teacher only applies to an assumption or fundamental principle upon which an idea is built, but one is allowed to suggest and interpretation in scriptures or in Gemara, Rashi, and Tosafos even if he did not hear that understanding from his teachers.

Remember the day of Sabbath to sanctify it (Ex. 20:8). The Mechillta (cited by Rashi to Ex. 20:1) explains that for every commandment of the Ten Commandments, if it was a

⁵ The word that Meiri uses is *binah* which is the ability to extrapolate information for one context to use elsewhere.

positive commandment, they responded “Yes” and if it was a negative commandment, they affirmed, “No”. The problem is that the Gemara (*Shevuos* 20b) says that when it comes to the commandment of Shabbos, Hashem said both “remember” (זכור) and “guard” (שמור) at the same time, so what did the Jews answer?? The Gerrer Rebbe the *Imrei Emes* (cited in *Likutei Yebuda, Yisro* p. 265 in the 2010 ed.) that this is why the song *Yom Shabason* says that the Jews’ reaction to the commandment of Shabbos was “and they opened [their mouth] and said, ‘Hashem is One’.” Instead of saying “yes” or “no”, they simply asserted that Hashem is One and that Unity is reflected in Shabbos (which consists of two otherwise contradictory types of commandments, a positive commandment and a negative commandment).

Six days shall you labor, and do all your work (Ex. 20:9). *Dorshei Reshumos* writes that the first letters in the phrase “six days shall you labor and do...” (ששת ימים תעבוד ועשית) spell out the name Vashti. This alludes to the fact that Vashti used to strip the Jewish girls naked and make them work on Shabbos (*Megillah* 12b). See Maharal’s *Ohr Chodosh* to *Megillas Esther* who discusses this at length, and explains that stripping them naked was an affront to the honor of Shabbos because one is supposed to wear especially nice clothes in order to honor the Holy Day.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be lengthened (Ex. 20:12). The *Rokeach (Parshas Bechukosai)* writes that that the reason why non-Jewish nations have historically been granted dominion over the Jewish People is generally because of their adherence to the precept of honoring their parents or lords. For example, the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 96a) says that Nebuchadnezzar merited to subjugate the Jewish people because he himself previously honored his (Assyrian) masters. The same is true of Nevuzadran, and of the Medians, Greeks, and Persians all of whom who were granted sovereignty over the Jewish People because they descend from Yefes, who gave honor to his father Noah. The hegemony of Esav continues on account of Esav honoring his father Yitzchak with all his might. However, ultimately because when Esav wanted to kill Yaakov, he insulted his father’s honor by saying to himself, “The days of my father’s mourning will come soon [i.e. he will die soon]...”, then Esav will end up falling to the descendants of Yosef, his father, and Hashem (i.e. the Jewish People who are followers of Yosef, Yaakov, and Hashem). Rabbi Yonasan Eyebchutz (*Yaaros Dvash* vol. 2, *Drush* 2) writes about Esther that the Talmud says (*Kiddushin* 31b) “fortunate is the one who never saw his parents” because it is near-impossible to properly fulfill the commandment of honoring them. But a person who never grew up with their parents and feels bad their entire life for not having had the opportunity to fulfill this great *mitzvah* gets reward above as though he properly fulfilled it. Accordingly, since the only way to counteract Esav’s merits of honoring his father would be to have somebody else who honors their father, there would be nobody who can really save the Jews from Esav, because it is near impossible to properly follow this commandment.

However, since Esther grew up as an orphan and never met her parents, she could have the merit of this *mitzvah* because she agonized over her inability to honor her parents, such that she received reward as though she successfully did honor her parents. This is why the redemption in the story of Purim could only happen through somebody like Esther, and not through anybody else.

Do not commit adultery (Ex. 20:13). Targum translates the Hebrew word *tinaf* (תנאף) in Aramaic as *tigof* (תגוף). Perhaps word *tigof* is derived from the same root as *negifab* (“pushing”, see Ps. 91:12), which is, in turn, derived from the word *mageifab* (מגפה, plague). This is in consonance with that Chazal tells us (*Bereshis Rabbah* 26:5, cited by Rashi to Gen. 6:13) that anytime who finds sexual promiscuity, an *androlimusia* comes to the world and kills good and bad people indiscriminately. The *Sefer HaAruch* (s.v. אנדרולימוס) explains that *androlimus* is a Greek term which refers to a plague of pestilence. For this reason, perhaps Targum translates the word for adultery as related to a plague. Alternatively, we can explain that the word *tigof* is related to “body” (גוף), as the adulterer and adulteress give primacy to their bodily pleasures (see *Kerem HaChssidus* vol. 5, p. 78 and *Neimas Chaim* p. 493). For this reason, these are respectively called a גיפא and גיפתא by Targum to Lev. 20:10.

And in any place where I mention My name, I will come to you and I will bless you (Ex. 20:21). The Targum renders this verse into Aramaic as: “And in any place where I rest My presence to there, I will send My blessing to you and I will bless you”. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (*Chochmas Hatorah, Yisro* p. 628) asks why the Targum uses a double expression of “I will send My blessing to you” and “I will bless you”? What is the difference between “sending a blessing” and “blessing”? He explains this based on what Chazal say (*Brachos* 55a) that Hashem only gives wisdom to one who already has wisdom, as it says, “In the hearts of every wise-hearted person, I gave wisdom” (Ex. 31:6). What does it mean that He only gives wisdom to those who already have wisdom, how can they first have wisdom before He gives it if the only way to have wisdom is getting it from Hashem? Rather, there are people to whom Hashem Himself gives wisdom, and there are people to whom Hashem only grants wisdom indirectly. So it is with blessing as well. Hashem only gives blessings to those who already have blessings, meaning that first He gives them a blessing through an agent, and afterwards, He Himself gives them a blessing. This is why it says, “I will bless you, and I will make great your name, and there will be a blessing” (Gen. 12:2), first Hashem sends forth His blessings through an intermediary, and only afterwards does He give the blessings Himself.