



Ohr Yerushalayim News

א"ר שבט תשפ"א – יתרו – 6th February 2021 - Volume 13 - Issue 30

News This Week

Chaim Aruchim

We wish Chaim Aruchim to the following who have Yahrzeit this week:

Monday, 26th Shevat - Michael Wilks for his father

Monday, 26th Shevat - Sidney Shields for his father

Friday, 30th Shevat - Malcolm Fagleman for his mother

Friday, 30th Shevat - Jonathan Grosskopf for his father

Leave Him Out Of It

Rabbi Yisroel Ciner (Torah.org)

This week we read the parsha of Yisro which contains the Aseres Hadibros. The third commandment states: "Lo sisa es shem Hashem Elokecha lashav {Do not utter the name of Hashem in vain}[20:7]."

The Ramban quotes the Talmud [Shavuos 21A] which teaches that this is a prohibition against senseless swearing using Hashem's name. However, the Ramban continues, the simple understanding forbids, even without an oath, the senseless mention of Hashem's name to leave our lips.

Why does this commandment follow immediately after the prohibition of idolatry? The Ramban explains that the same way that we show fear and respect to Hashem by not giving honor to any other forces (idolatry), we also show Him fear and respect by having reverence for His name.

The punishment for such nonchalant usage of something so holy is very severe. The verse continues: "Hashem will not cleanse one who utters His name in vain." The Even Ezra explains that a person adds credibility to his words by adding Hashem's name to whatever he might be saying. He's in effect saying, just as Hashem is true, so too are my words. If his words are untrue or are subsequently not fulfilled, he's in effect denying the validity and truth of Hashem. That is clearly very severe.

He writes that the custom of the Egyptians was that if a person swore in the name of the king and didn't fulfill his words, he was punished with death. No amount of gold could commute his sentence — he had publicly degraded the king. Certainly, when dealing with the King of kings, Hashem, the punishment for such degradation will be very severe.

Perhaps, that affords us a glimpse into the severity of this prohibition in a way that we can relate to and with tangible applications. We all do things that are wrong. We give in to temptations, we chose to ignore certain things that we accept as true, we act in a way that is unbecoming to and beneath us. "Lo sisa" is teaching us not to drag Hashem down with us. Don't implicate Him. Do what you do but leave Him out of it...

There is a general rule that Hashem may forgive a sin committed 'bein adam laMakom'. However, a sin 'bein adam la'adam' Hashem won't forgive until forgiveness is asked from the sinned-against man. The Aseres Hadibros are arranged that the first five commandments are between man and Hashem and the last five are between man and man. If so, why won't Hashem cleanse one who transgresses on "lo sisa", the third commandment, which is a sin between man and Hashem?

The Kli Yakar explains that the answer can be found in the words "lo sisa". We've translated it to mean 'don't utter'. However, it also means to 'raise up'.

The Talmud [Shavuos 39A] teaches that the entire world shook when Hashem commanded "lo sisa". When one lifts a tree, all of the branches attached to that tree shake. So too when one 'lifts' Hashem's name by swearing in His name, all that is attached and dependent on Hashem also 'shakes'. The entire universe, encompassing both the physical and spiritual realms, are affected and degraded by this person's flippant usage of something so holy. It wasn't simply between man and Hashem — it was between man and every detail of the creation. Hashem, therefore, won't cleanse.

Rabbi A. Twerski tells the story of a Rabbi Chajkel who shared the community leadership with the dayan, Rabbi Azriel. One time, Rabbi Azriel was in Rabbi Chajkel's study when a woman asked Rabbi Chajkel to hold 500 rubles for her. She would be away for a few days and was entrusting him to safe-keep her money.

Later that day, Rabbi Chajkel tried to locate the money but couldn't find it. He searched everywhere but the money seemed to be gone.

He made his way to Rabbi Azriel's house and asked him if he had noticed where he might have placed the woman's money. Rabbi Azriel said that as far as he remembered, the money had remained on the desk.

Rabbi Chajkel sighed painfully. "The money is gone — I've searched everywhere. You and I were the only ones present. I was entrusted with the money. According to halacha I must ask you to swear, even though I know you to be far above and beyond any hint of suspicion."

Rabbi Azriel was visibly shaken. "You want me to swear, Rabbi Chajkel?" he asked. "Can I have some time to think it over?"

Rabbi Chajkel agreed and returned home.

That evening Rabbi Azriel came to Rabbi Chajkel's house. "Here are 275 rubles, that's all I have," he said as he handed over the money.

Rabbi Chajkel was very distraught. He knew how poor Rabbi Azriel was. He knew that he didn't own 275 rubles. Where did Rabbi Azriel get this money, he wondered. He knew that Rabbi Azriel was under a lot of pressure to come up with a dowry for his daughter. Could he possibly have succumbed to temptation and taken the money? How else could he have gotten 275 rubles?

"I can't compromise," Rabbi Chajkel said to him. "Without the 500 rubles to return to the woman I must insist that you swear."

"Can I have one more day?" Rabbi Azriel pleaded.

The next day, Rabbi Azriel returned with an additional 125 rubles. "This is all I have."

Rabbi Chajkel was very stern. He was now convinced that Rabbi Azriel had taken the money. How else could he have come up with 400 rubles?

"500 rubles!" Rabbi Chajkel demanded. "Not one kopek less!"

"Please accept a promissory note for the remaining 100 rubles," said Rabbi Azriel. "I will pay it within 30 days."

Rabbi Chajkel accepted the note but couldn't accept what his friend and colleague, Rabbi Azriel, had done. He began to avoid him in the street. When their paths did cross, he wouldn't look him in the eye.

That Friday, Rabbi Chajkel noticed that a picture frame was hanging at an unusual slant on the wall of his study. When he moved it in order to straighten it, a bundle of 500 rubles fell from behind. He suddenly remembered that he had hid the money behind the frame! He let out a shriek and fell to the ground. He began to cry, "What have I done?! How did I accuse such a tzaddik of such an act?"

Rabbi Chajkel ran to Rabbi Azriel home, crying and begging forgiveness. Rabbi Azriel's wife explained that her husband had already left to shul.

Rabbi Chajkel ran crying to the shul. Pounding on the bimah he cried, "I am not

Davening Times

פרשת יתרו

Zman Shabbos & Lighting

Mincha

Shacharis - Hashkomo

2nd Shacharis

סוף זמן ק"ש

1st Mincha

2nd Mincha

Motzei Shabbos

Ovos uBonim

Sun

Mon / Thurs

Tues / Wed

Fri Rosh Chodesh

Mincha

Mincha & Maariv

Late Maariv

מברכין אדר

4.44pm

4.49pm

7.30am

9.30am

10.03m

1.30pm

4.44pm

5.54pm

6.54pm

7.15am / 8.20am / 9.30am

6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am

6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am

6.30am / 7.00am / 8.00am

1.15pm

4.55pm

8.00pm

worthy of being your Rabbi. I have accused Rabbi Azriel, an innocent man, a tzaddik."

Rabbi Azriel came forward to console Rabbi Chajkel. "Calm down, please. I'd gladly forgive you but there's nothing to forgive. You've done nothing wrong!"

"Nothing wrong?" Rabbi Chajkel cried out. "Please don't mock me!"

"Heaven forbid that I mock you, Rabbi Chajkel," Rabbi Azriel assured him. "There was no one else in the room besides me. You had to insist that I swear. But when I heard that I must swear, I trembled. Never before in my life had I sworn! I took the 250 rubles that I'd borrowed for my daughter's wedding and sold my wife's jewelry for another 25. That's how I approached you with 275 rubles. When that wasn't enough, I sold my library for an additional 125 rubles.

"I am so grateful to you, Rabbi Chajkel, that you accepted my promissory note for the remaining 100 rubles," Rabbi Azriel continued. "I am so grateful, for otherwise I don't know what I would have done. I would have been forced to swear. To swear, even when telling the truth, is incredibly frightening. You spared me, Rabbi Chajkel, and I'll never forget your kindness."

Yisro Connected the Dots **Rabbi Yissocher Frand (Torah.org)**

There is a famous pasuk and a famous Rashi at the beginning of Parshas Yisro. The pasuk says, "And Priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moshe heard all that Elo-kim did for Moshe and for Israel His nation, for Hashem took Israel out of Egypt." [Shemos 18:1] Rashi [based on Zevachim 116a] explains that Yisro heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the War with Amalek. When he heard about these great miracles, he thought to himself: "I need to check this out for myself and see what is going on with these miraculous people."

We have asked many times over the years: Why did only Yisro come? The Az Yashir song states "nations heard and they trembled; fear gripped those who dwell in Philistia." [Shemos 15:14]. The whole world heard about these events and shook in their collective boots. Why was there only one man who felt he had to show up and check this out for himself?

We can ask a second question: This man was known by seven names. (Rashi lists these seven names.) One of the seven names was Yeser (Yud-Taf-Reish). Rashi said they added a vov to his name (to make it Yisro) because a parsha was added to the Torah through him. Question #2: Why was specifically the letter Vov added to his name? Why not yud? Why not another letter? Why the letter Vov?

We can ask a third question: Why is the letter Vov called the letter of truth? What does that mean? There is an interesting Zohar that says the letter Vov is what is called the "os emes" (the letter of truth). What does that mean? We read in the Book of Yehoshua that when the spies came into Yericho, they went into the house of Rachav haZonah, who helped them out and hid them. She asked for something in return as a reward. She asked that when the Jews come into Canaan to conquer Eretz Yisrael, they should spare her and her family. The pasuk states, "And now swear to me in the Name of Hashem, for I have done a kindness for you. You should do a kindness for my family like I did for you, and you should give me an 'os emes' (true sign)." The Zohar says that the letter Vov is called the "os emes."

Ironically, we see an application of this principle, that the letter Vov is an "os emes," in a very incongruous location in Tanach. There is a chapter in Tehillim that is quite familiar to us because we say it Shabbos morning. "When David changed his behavior before Avimelech..." Dovid HaMelech feigned insanity when he was caught by the soldiers of Gath and brought before their king. He acted like a deranged person, so that the king would not believe that this was really Dovid Melech Yisroel, and would let him go. Dovid's plan worked. "Achish [Avimelech is the generic title given to the kings of Gath] said to his servants, 'Behold – you see the man is mad; why do you bring him to me? Do I lack madmen that you have brought this one to carry on madly before me? Should this person enter my house?'" [Shmuel I 21:15-16]. Achish-Avimelech let Dovid go free. This chapter in Tehillim is written as an alphabetic acrostic. Each of the pesukim of the Psalm begin with ascending letters of the Aleph-Beis. However, there is one letter of the Hebrew alphabet that does not begin a pasuk in that chapter – the letter Vov! The reason is that the letter Vov represents truth (it is the os emes). Since the whole chapter deals with Dovid HaMelech deceiving Avimelech by feigning insanity, the letter of truth does not begin any of those pesukim!

But still, we must analyze – what does the Zohar mean by saying that the letter Vov is the letter of truth?

To review, we have stated three questions: 1) Why did only Yisro show up? 2) Why was the letter Vov added to the name of Yeser. 3) We see in Chazal that Vov is called the letter of truth – why is that the case?

I saw in the sefer Darash Mordechai from Rav Mordechai Druk what I think is a very beautiful explanation. When the Ribono shel Olam came to Klal Yisrael to give them the Torah, something happened in the world that never happened before, and has not happened since: The world stopped...to the extent that there was not a peep heard in the world. No bird chirped. No dog barked. The world was silent. Something was happening. The Gemara states [Zevachim 116a] that the world's population was amazed at this phenomenon and could not figure out what was happening. They all gathered around the wicked Bilaam and asked him: "What is going on? Is this the beginning of another Flood?" It was like right before a Tsunami – all the animals were quiet. Everyone wanted to know what was about to occur.

Bilaam (citing another pasuk in Tehillim [29:10] "Hashem L'Mabul Yashav...")

assured them that Hashem promised He would never bring another Flood to the world. The nations were afraid and they asked Bilaam "Perhaps Hashem's oath was not to destroy the world by water, but He might yet destroy the world again by fire or earthquake." Bilaam again reassured them that the Divine Oath was a guarantee that the entire civilization of the world would never again be destroyed. They persisted: "What then is this great sound that we are hearing?" Bilaam told them "The Ribono shel Olam has this great treasure which He has kept hidden in His safe for 974 generations before the world was created. He now is preparing to give this great treasure to His People. That is what is happening! This is a momentous event, as it is written "Hashem gives power to His people..." [Tehillim 29:11].

What was the reaction of all the Nations of the World? They immediately responded "...Hashem should bless His people with Peace." [ibid.]. In other words, "Gezunte Heit!" – Fine and dandy, let Hashem give His people the Torah, He should just let us alone and we will be fine. As long as it is not going to affect us, we will go back along our merry way, doing what we were doing and not be concerned about this Torah.

In that reaction we find the difference between Yisro and the Nations of the World. They saw things happening, but as long as these events – as miraculous as they might have all been – didn't affect them, their reaction was "I don't want to know about it. It's none of my business!" No reaction.

Yisro's strength was that (in today's parlance we would say) he connected the dots. After 9/11 when everybody wondered: "Where was the CIA? Where was the FBI? Where was the Defense Intelligence Agency? Why didn't they see this coming? Everybody said, "Well they knew there was something called Al-Qaeda, they knew there was someone call Osama bin Laden, they knew there was this, they knew there was that... but they didn't connect the dots!" If you don't connect the dots you don't see the connection.

Yisro was a person who connected the dots. He saw the pattern. He saw an event and he saw another event and another event. He noticed something dramatic was happening. "The Ribono shel Olam is trying to tell us something here." That is why, out of all the letters of the alphabet, they gave him the Vov, because Vov (which is a prefix meaning AND) is the "Vov haChibur" – the letter that connects. Yisro's power was to look at things not in isolation, but to see the pattern and put all the pieces together to see and understand the big picture. That is why it was the Vov they added to his name.

That is also why Vov is the "letter of truth" (os haEmes). If one wants to find the truth, one must connect the dots. The way to find out the truth is not to look at incidents in isolation, but to see the pattern and put all kind of isolated incidents together into a big picture.

We are not that far away from Purim. The end of the Megilla states that Achashverosh placed a tax on the islands at sea. It is interesting to note that the name of the king in this verse is spelled differently than every other place in Megillas Esther. It is spelled without a Vov separating the last two letters! One would think that after the entire Megilla and all that happened and the irony of the whole story – Achashverosh would wake up and say "You know what? This was the Hand of G-d!"

Achashverosh doesn't do that. He is interested in one thing: Taxes! Things can happen. The world can be turning upside down. "Let me go back to my life. Business as usual!" Achashverosh followed in the footsteps of the Nations of the World. Earth shattering events made no impression on them or on him!

It struck me to connect this thought with an incident in the life of Rav Gifter, zt"l, about which I was not 100% clear. I called Rebbetzin Eisenberg, Rav Gifter's daughter, and she was a bit fuzzy on the details as well, so she called a couple of her brothers. They also could not swear to exactly what happened.

However, this is my recollection of the story: When Rav Gifter [1915-2001] went in the 1930s from the United States of America to Telshe in Lithuania to study in the famous European Yeshiva, he went by boat. He did not travel first class. He went steerage. Above him on one of the nights of the trip they were having a big dance, and everyone was having a good time. People were dancing, drinking, and enjoying themselves immensely. All of a sudden, the boat hit a storm. "And the boat was about to break apart." [Yonah 1:4]. You have to realize this is not all that many years after the sinking of the Titanic. People had that tragedy fresh in their minds. People were scared and frightened. But then the storm passed. The people went back to dancing.

This incident made a great impression on the young Mordechai Gifter. He said it was a moment when one's life flashes in front of him. One inevitably thinks "I could drown in the North Atlantic." And then in a moment, the danger passes and you are saved! What do people do? They go back to dancing!

This is a rerun of the story of the frightened Nations of the World who anxiously asked Bilaam to explain to them what was happening. Is it a Flood? Is it a Fire? Is the world coming to an end? "No! The Jews are being given the Torah!" "Fine. Let it be like that. I am going right back to doing my own thing!"

This is what separated Yisro from the rest of the Nations of the World, and that is what separates thinking people from people who just go on with their life after experiencing earth-shattering events as if nothing happened. There are such events that occur in everybody's life. The trick is to utilize the "Vov haChibur" – to connect the dots and try to figure out "What is G-d telling us" (Vos zotg der Ribono shel Olam?)