"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"

נט"ד

Wonders

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of HaRav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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שַׁבָּת יִתְרוֹ ❁ יט-כ שְׁבַט תשפ"ו



The Ba'al Shem Tov descended from the wagon, approached the hooligan, struck him on the shoulder and said to him in Polish: "Bendz Zhidem!" He then returned to the wagon and continued on his way. The hooligan chased after the wagon but did not catch up with it until they reached the village of Asavin.

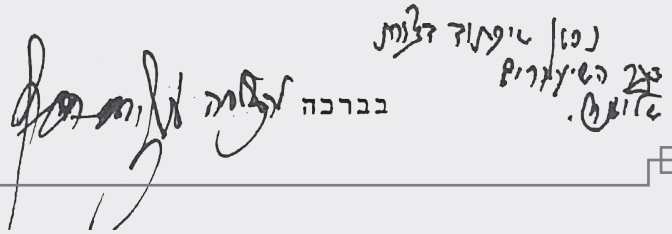
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

"…It would be proper to publish your classes in book form. With blessings for success…"



Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens
of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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CLASS
KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH

Parashat Beshalach, which we read last week, is all about faith. From the faith exhibited by the Israelites on the Red Sea as Pharaoh and his army were chasing them, to the faith required to eat the manna that fed them for 40 years in the wilderness, to the faith that supported them in the first war with Amalek. Parashat Yitro takes a sharp turn to knowledge: Knowledge of God through the Torah. The highlight of the parashah is the description of the preparations for the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai and then the revelation of the Ten Commandments.

This transition from faith to knowledge of God's will through the Torah is the subject of the following class given by HaRav Ginsburgh on Friday evening, the 11th of Shevat 5785.

A partial transcript of this class was first published in Nifla'ot for Yitro 5785 and here we bring the complete class.

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

The Ten Commandments begin with the words, "I am *Havayah* your God."[1] From these words, Maimonides derives the commandment to believe in God, the first commandment in his enumeration of the Torah's 613 commandments as they appear in his "Book of Commandments" (*Sefer HaMitzvot*). This tome was written in Arabic and the common translation of his words on the first commandment are that we are commanded to believe in God who took us out of Egypt, etc. However, in his halachic work the *Mishneh Torah*, which was written originally in Hebrew, he writes that the commandment is to know the existence of God who took us out of Egypt, etc.

The explanation given for the discrepancy[2] is that the commandment is to internalize faith and transform it into knowledge (*da'at*). Faith should not remain merely hovering above our mind, unintegrated into our consciousness. When something remains in this state relative to our consciousness, it is known as a *makif*, literally, "surrounding." The sages[3] provide us with an example that captures this state. Even when going out to steal, a thief will call out to God to help him succeed and not get caught. If faith in God and faith in the Torah and its commandments, which prohibit theft would have integrated into the thief's consciousness, he would not steal in the first place, let alone call out to God for help in doing something that God Himself has forbidden. This dissonance

1. Exodus 20:2.

2. See *Derech Mitzvotecha*, *Mitzvat Ha'amanat Elokut*, and the introduction to our book *Emunah VeMuda'ut* (specifically footnotes 1-4).

3. *Berachot* 63b (according to the reading in *Ein Yaakov*). See also *Derech Mitzvotecha, ibid*, ch. 2 (46a).

between what the thief believes in (God) and what he knows (that he needs help stealing) demonstrates how faith can remain in a *makif* state.

Though normally faith is meant to be integrated and become part of our consciousness (*da'at*), there is also a reverse path detailed in Chasidut,[4] where one proceeds from one's conscious mind to develop faith. By deep contemplation of what one knows, one ascends to a state of faith that is completely beyond reason and consciousness. Regarding this, it is said that "the ultimate purpose of knowledge is to not know,"[5] or more precisely, "the ultimate purpose of knowledge is to know that we do not know." The first statement implies that even when we reach the limits of what can be known by the rational mind, it is still possible to make a leap that transcends the rational mind and arrives at that which cannot be known at all. The more precise version of this statement, that "the ultimate purpose of knowledge is **to know** that we do not know" implies that even the realm of that which we do not know, is accessible by a certain type of knowledge. This knowledge is what Chasidut describes as an inner recognition or sense about that which we do not know.[6]

All faith that is hovering above consciousness, which is beyond reason and knowledge, can also be described as offering inspiration. However, in the first mode (the leap beyond the rational mind), it is inspiration from without, hovering from above. In the second mode (knowing that we do not know), faith inspires from within.[7]

Actually, with careful consideration, we can identify a process that guides faith until it can inspire us from within:

The first stage involves faith—which is natural to the Jewish soul—being drawn down into consciousness from Above. This happens because of an "arousal from Above" (אִתְעָרוּתָא דִלְעֵילָּא), which is also affected by the power of the *tzaddik*, the faithful shepherd (*Ra'aya Meheimna*), who feeds and sustains the faith within the inner *da'at* of the souls of Israel[8]—this precedes the "arousal from below" (אִתְעָרוּתָא דִלְתַתָּא). In the **second stage**, the individual invests and contemplates the conscious aspects of faith, those that can be understood through the mind. This constitutes an arousal from below and is meant to deepen until one merits transcending the conscious mind (*da'at*) and reaches faith, which hovers above. Finally, in the **third stage**, faith descends from its perch above reason and integrates into the conscious mind. This is known as the arousal from above that follows

4. "*VeHaIsh Moshe Anav Me'od*" 5680.

5. *Bechinat Olam* 13:33.

6. To illustrate the difference between the two version the Ba'al Shem Tov contrasts two subjects of a king who are told they cannot meet the king himself but are given permission to roam his palace at will. Since there will be no meeting with the king himself, one subject does not bother to enter the palace in the first place. The other subject, out of his longing for the king, enters the king's palace and roams through the chambers and treasure rooms. Roaming through the palace despite not having a meeting with the king demonstrates what it means to know despite not being able to know (*Keter Shem Tov* [*Kehot* edition], §3).

7. Regarding the difference between the two types of inspiration, see *Chasdei David HaNe'emanim*, vol. 6, p. 201.

8. See *Tanya*, ch. 42 (and elsewhere).

an effort from below; this arousal from above originates from a level of faith that the arousal from below cannot reach on its own.[9] The full process can be described as a descent that triggers an ascent that triggers a descent. This description can also be used to describe the ideal relationship between the masculine, which descends with the purpose of subsequently ascending, and the feminine, which ascends with the goal of subsequently descending.[10]

CONSUMMATE FAITH

An important principle for learning Torah is to search for the first appearance of a word or concept.[11] The word "faith" (אֱמוּנָה) first appears in the Torah at the end of *parashat Beshalach*, in context of the war with Amalek. The Torah describes Moses holding up his arms and states, "And his hands gave faith"[12] (וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֱמוּנָה). One of the word analysis techniques is to write out a word by filling out each of its letters. The filling of "faith" is **אלף מם ו נון הא**, whose value is 315, which surprisingly is equivalent to the value of "heresy" (**כְּפִירָה**). How can this be? We call this a state in which two opposites that stand face to face,[13] just as Mashiach and the primordial snake stand face to face, meaning that Mashiach is the antidote to the primordial snake (both words have the same value in Hebrew, **מָשִׁיחַ** and **נָחָשׁ**). Likewise, faith is the antidote to heresy. More specifically, the heresy caused by Amalek is "doubt" (**סָפֵק**), whose value is the same as "Amalek" (**עֲמָלֵק**),[14] revealing it as their essence. By casting doubt on the Israelites' faith that God is with them, Amalek weakened and cooled their trust that God was leading them to the Promised Land.[15] Indeed, the Hebrew word for "heresy" (כְּפִירָה) is related to the word for "frost" (כְּפוֹר).

But there is another way to see the relationship between faith and heresy in a more complementary way. Everything God created in the world has a time and a place, and even disbelief—i.e., the heresy that is the opposite of faith—has its place as is known from Chasidic sources.[16] A specific example of heresy or disbelief serving the greater good is that when a poor man comes asking for charity of me. If I exercise my faith, I may conclude that it is better for me to not give him so much charity that he would no longer be poor. Faith would have me trust God that poverty befits this individual, and who am I to interfere with the Divine plan!? In such cases, one should heretically doubt the Divine plan and do all in their power to help the poor man change their situation and alter their destiny. Disbelief in this case supports faith. Incredibly, this entire situation and its analysis is alluded to in the verse, "He [Abraham] believed in God, and He [God]

9. *Likkutei Torah*, *Shir HaShirim*, *s.v. Lehavin Inyan HaTa'am* (22b, and specifically see 24, end of column 1 and onwards).

10. See our Hebrew volume, *Teshuvat HaShanah*, *Na'utz Sofan BeTchilatan*, ch. 1.

11. This is based on the principle that all follows the inception (הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אַחַר הַפְּתִיחָה); see *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*, ch. 42.

12. Exodus 17:12.

13. See Ecclesiastes 7:14.

14. See Addendums to *Keter Shem Tov* (*Kehot* ed.), §118.

15. Deuteronomy 25:18 and *Rashi* there. See *Tanchuma Teitzei*, 9 (quoted in *Rashi* on Exodus 17:16).

16. *Esser Tzachtzachot*, *machlakah bet*, §29.

considered it a charity."[17]

More deeply, by suspending my faith in God [as I currently understand His conduct] and embracing disbelief, I can transcend my image of God as the possessor of a monolithic, one-dimensional plan and emerge into the realm of accepting that God not only sustains paradox—faith and disbelief can both be used to serve Him—He is also no less coherent for doing so. In fact, without the ability to serve God by transcending our limited beliefs (in the example, the belief that poverty is part of the Divine plan for the poor man is a limited belief), we lack the psychological fortitude to act with free will to become partners in redeeming reality; instead we continue to slumber with a false sense of security that we are people of faith. Another way to say this is that free will, which includes the freedom to embrace what seems to be antithetical to faith, is what purifies and evolves true faith; it is the process of taking faith and integrating it into our conscious mind.

The Masoretic sages used the phrase, "hand of faith" (**יִד אֱמוּנָה**) to indicate the number of verses in *parashat Beshalach* (116), suggesting that it captures the essence of the entire *parashah*. This phrase is also reminiscent of the words that appear in the *parashah*, "with an upraised hand"[18] (בְּיָד רָמָה), which Onkelos translates as "with a revealed head" (בְּרֵישׁ גְּלֵי), a phrase that in Kabbalah alludes to the highest "head" (or part) of the *sefirah* of crown, known as *Radla* (the Unknowable Head), the mystery of faith in the soul. The Exodus from Egypt mentions three "hands": the great hand (הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה), the strong hand (הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה), and the raised hand (יָד רָמָה). The last is like a middle hand protruding from between the right and left hands—the great hand and the strong hand, respectively—which rises above the body, through the mind, higher and higher until it reaches the crown, where faith resides. One might say that giving the "raised hand" the power to reach above the mind and access faith is the equivalent of filling the word "faith" so that it can serve as the antidote to "heresy." Thus, Moses was lifting all three hands while the Israelites were battling the doubt injected by Amalek, giving them the power needed to manifest their faith in an active and practical way.

THE PARTZUF OF FAITH

In the Pentateuch, the word "faith" appears only once more in the Song of *Ha'azinu*, "A God of faith, there is no prejudice"[19] (אֵ-ל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין עָוֶל). In the rest of the *Tanach*, the word appears in its basic form (without prefix letters, etc.) another 7 times in the phrases, "steadfast faith"[20] (אֱמוּנָה אֹמֵן), "seeks faith"[21] (מְבַקֵּשׁ אֱמוּנָה), "and shepherd faith"[22] (וּרְעֵה אֱמוּנָה), "way of faith"[23] (דֶּרֶךְ אֱמוּנָה), "all your commandments are faith"[24] (כָּל מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֱמוּנָה), "speaks faith"[25] (יָפִיחַ אֱמוּנָה), "He wants those who act with faith"[26] (וְעֹשֵׂי אֱמוּנָה רְצוֹנוֹ).

17. Genesis 15:6.
18. Exodus 14:8.
19. Deuteronomy 32:4.
20. Isaiah 25:1.
21. Jeremiah 5:1.
22. Psalms 37:3.
23. Ibid. 119:30.
24. Ibid. v. 86.
25. Proverbs 12:17.
26. Ibid. v. 22.

Let us arrange all 9 instances of "faith" in the *Tanach* as they correspond to the *sefirot* in a *partzuf* (model), as follows:

The crown corresponds to the "steadfast faith," which in the full verse is described as faith that comes from the most distant place, alluding to the crown, the most distant *sefirah* from our conscious mind, absolutely above the rational mind. This is where the steadfast aspect of faith lies.

In the phrase, "a God of faith," the Name of God used is *Kel* (אֵ-ל), which is associated at times with wisdom as in the Zohar's statement, "*Kel* is the light of wisdom,"[27] which appears as part of the Zohar's analysis of the verse, "The Heavens tell of the honor of God [*Kel*]," alluding to the 32 (the value of "honor" **כָּבוֹד**) pathways of wisdom.

"Seeks faith" corresponds to understanding because the act of seeking God, "Those who seek God will understand all" is the act of contemplating, or meditating with the conscious mind upon the Divine, which cannot be comprehended at all, eventually leading to the revelation of the higher part of the crown, *Atik*, in the *sefirah* of understanding. Incidentally, the value of the complete phrase, "If there is anyone who acts justly, seeks faith, I would pardon her" (**אִם יֵשׁ עֹשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט מְבַקֵּשׁ אֱמוּנָה וְאֶסְלַח לָהּ**) is 1839, the value of "Open my eyes so that I may see the wonders of Your Torah"[28] (**גַּל עֵינַי וְאַבִּיטָה נִפְלָאוֹת מִתּוֹרָתֶךָ**), which is also 3 times 613, as well as the value of "*teshuvah*, Torah, prayer" (**תְּשׁוּבָה תּוֹרָה תְּפִלָּה**), etc.

Corresponding to the *sefirah* of knowledge (*da'at*) is "shepherd faith," a connotation for Moses, God's shepherd of faith. Moses is the knowledge or consciousness of the entire Jewish people who integrates faith into the conscious mind. Moses shepherds our faith until it is integrated into our conscious mind.

The phrase, "And his hands gave faith" corresponds in a very straightforward way to both loving-kindness and might, the two hands.

"All your commandments are faith reflects the *sefirah* of beauty (*tiferet*), since all the commandments are likened to the body of the Torah and the body is the *sefirah* of beauty.

"He wants those who act with faith" corresponds to both victory and acknowledgment, the two faculties of action. The "wants" that is revealed through them refers to will, the lowest part of the crown, that is revealed through action. The Hebrew word for "will" (רָצוֹן) is also cognate with "running" (רָץ), capturing the image of the two feet—victory and acknowledgment correspond to the feet in the human form—running to perform some action that the person deeply wants.

Foundation represents the procreative organs, and the marital union is known as "the way of a man with a maiden."[29] Thus "way of faith" corresponds to foundation. Foundation indicates a state of connection and embracing a way or path of faith means choosing to perform commandments that create a rectified way of life.

Finally, the phrase, "speaks faith," corresponds to the *sefirah* of kingdom, which is the secret of the mouth, the secret of speech.

27. *Zohar* 3:31a.
28. Psalms 119:18.
29. Proverbs 30:19.

To summarize our *partzuf*:

crown-keter כֶּתֶר
steadfast faith אֱמוּנָה אֹמֶן

understanding-binah בִּינָה
seeks faith מְבַקֵּשׁ אֱמוּנָה

wisdom-chochmah חָכְמָה
God [Kel] of faith אֵ-ל אֱמוּנָה

knowledge-da'at דַּעַת
shepherd faith וְרֹעֵה אֱמוּנָה

loving-kindness-chessed and might-gevurah חֶסֶד וּגְבוּרָה
And his hands were faith וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֱמוּנָה

beauty-tiferet תִּפְאֶרֶת
all your commandments are faith כָּל מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֱמוּנָה

victory-netzach and acknowledgment-hod נֶצַח וְהוֹד
those who act with faith וְעֹשֵׂי אֱמוּנָה

foundation-yesod יְסוֹד
the way of faith דֶּרֶךְ אֱמוּנָה

kingdom-malchut מַלְכוּת
speaks faith יָפִיחַ אֱמוּנָה

CREATION AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

In this article we will focus on the intrinsic connection between Creation and the Ten Commandments in general, and specifically, on how the Kabbalistic concept of *tzimtzum*, or contraction of God's light, i.e., His revelation, plays a crucial role in both.

We begin with a profound *Rashi* that links Creation with the Ten Commandments. At the conclusion of the sixth day of creation, the Torah writes, "And it was evening and it was morning the sixth day."[1] At the conclusion of the account of what happened on each of the other days of Creation, the Torah also declares that "it was evening and it was morning" and mentions that it was the "second," "third," "fourth," or "fifth" day, respectively. But on none of the other days is the definite article "the" used. *Rashi* explains the unique use of the definite article only on the sixth day of Creation by citing the sages' explanation that "the sixth day" is a reference to the well-known sixth day, i.e., the sixth day of the month of Sivan, the day on which God gave the Torah on Mt. Sinai. More importantly, this was also the day the Israelites agreed to receive the Torah by committing to follow its commandments. The sages use this explanation to reveal that when God created reality, He made its continued existence contingent on the Jewish people's acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai on that sixth day of Sivan. On that day, Creation was validated and given justification, for the Torah and man fulfilling its commandments, reflecting God's will, are the true purpose of Creation.

But the connection between Creation and the Ten Commandments is multidimensional. It is also reflected in the structure of the Torah verses introducing each. The Torah's first verse, "In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the earth"[2] (בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱ־לֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ), is regarded as an introductory verse. *Rashi* writes that we should read it as if says, "In the beginning, when God created the Heavens and the earth." The Ten Commandments, as they are in *parashat Yitro* have a clear introductory verse, "God spoke all these things, saying"[3] (וַיְדַבֵּר אֱ־לֹהִים אֵת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר). Structurally, both verses have 28 letters and 7 words.

CONTRACTION AND REVELATION

What the two verses also have in common is the Name of God, *Elokim*, that appears in them, and which is the Name used exclusively throughout the initial account of Creation. It is surprising that the Torah would use the Name so strongly associated with Creation

1. Genesis 1:31.

2. Genesis 1:1.

3. Exodus 20:1; see *913: The Secret Wisdom of Genesis* pp. 3-8 for an in-depth analysis of the correspondence between these two verses with an identical structure.

to introduce the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments begin, "I am *Havayah* your God" (אָנֹכִי י-הוה אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ), referring to God with His essential four-letter Name, *Havayah*.

Furthermore, one of the most well-known *gematriot* is that the value of *Elokim* (**אֱ־לֹהִים**) is equivalent to "nature" (**הַטֶּבַע**) indicating that God as the Creator, as Master of the Universe, is concealed within (the laws of) nature. The Giving of the Torah represents a graduation from knowing God through nature alone—understanding God as the force behind nature—to knowing God's will, to seeing beyond nature. Why then would the Ten Commandments be introduced by a verse that refers to God as *Elokim*, the Name associated with nature?

Chasidic thought answers this deep question with the insight that the name *Elokim* acts to conceal God within nature through the mystical act of Divine contraction (*tzimtzum*). When the thought of Creation arose in God's mind, a foundational problem needed to be addressed. No reality can exist beyond (or outside) the all-encompassing infinite limitlessness of God, so where could a finite, independent world possibly exist? To make (conceptual) space, as it were, for reality, God contracted His revelation concealing it so that a womb-like space, seemingly void of His Presence would be revealed, in which a finite world could then be created. Although Creation is an expression of Divine revelation and Divine beneficence, it simultaneously depends on God contracting His infinite revelation to make space for a finite reality to exist.

The revelation of the Ten Commandments requires a similar paradoxical contraction. To give the Torah, beginning with the Ten Commandments, to the Jewish people and ultimately to the entire world, God had to contract, in the sense of condense, His infinite will into the finite letters of the Ten Commandments so that they could serve as vessels for it. Whereas the contraction of Creation concealed God within nature, the Giving of the Torah condensed God, as it were, into the letters of the Ten Commandments. The contraction associated with Creation conceals God and the other, associated with the Ten Commandments, condenses Him. But ultimately, they function similarly, allowing God's limitlessness to become part of a finite reality. In giving the Ten Commandments, God transformed the creative energy of Creation into a specific moral code for humanity by contracting and condensing His will into concrete and finite letters and commands.

CONSTANT RENEWAL

In the Morning Service each day, we declare that God "renews in His goodness every day perpetually, the Act of Creation." Kabbalah and Chasidut teach that creation is renewed not just every day but at every moment. Likewise, new insights into Torah are constantly being revealed as well. One of the sources for the Torah's constant renewal is found in the description of the Israelites arriving at Sinai. The Torah states that, "On the [first day of the] third month from when the Children of Israel left Egypt, on *this day*

they came to the desert of Sinai."[4] Noting that it would have been more appropriate grammatically for the verse to read "on *that day*," Rashi comments that "on this day" teaches us that the Torah's words should always be experienced anew as if they were just given today.

When contemplating the above sources, a potent underlying theme emerges. By connecting to God, Torah, and *mitzvot*, we essentially plug ourselves into the very act of constant re-creation. This realization alone (along with its integration) should suffuse our lives with an abiding newness. However, even more profoundly, this connection to God, Torah, and *mitzvot* promotes renewal and rejuvenation because it provides human beings with something they often lack: purpose. The overall lack of purpose in life is one of the greatest contributors to boredom and destructive behavior. When human beings have purpose and direction in life, every moment is a unique opportunity to fulfill those aspirations. This then is the Jewish people's mission in the world—to receive, act upon, and ultimately reveal this message contained in the Torah to the world so that the world continues to be worthy of existing.

As mentioned above, both the Ten Commandments and Creation were predicated on God contracting His infinite being in order to first create a finite reality (the act of Creation) and to then reveal His will to mankind (the Giving of the Torah).[5] A deeper understanding of the parallels between the two is arrived at by comparing the ways in which various commentaries explain how this process of contraction manifests itself.

TZIMTZUM IN CREATION

According to a tradition cited by *Rashi*, all that would ever be created was created in potential on the first day.[6] Each succeeding day of creation revealed that which had already been created in potential on the first day. The notion of all creation being contained in, and emanating from, an initial starting point has been reflected in modern physics in the Standard Model of the Universe, which begins with the Big Bang. According to this model, the entire universe composed of tens of billions of galaxies, was contained in an almost infinitely small and condensed speck of quasi-matter that "exploded" and to this day is still expanding—a scientific equivalent of the rabbinic tradition that all that would ever be created existed in potential on the first day of Creation, described as "one day" in the Torah because it was a singular and self-perpetuating day, which included all the other days as well. This tradition thus applies contraction-as-condensing to Creation.

The Torah's first verse, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," contains all that was created on the first day in archetypal form. The heavens are an archetype for everything spiritual that

4. Exodus 19:1.

5. The Talmud speaks of two essential parts to the Torah's concealed tradition, "the Action of Creation" (מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית) and "the Action of the Chariot" (מַעֲשֵׂה מֶרְכָּבָה). The source of the first is the Torah's account of the act of Creation, while the source of the second is the Torah's account of the Giving of the Torah.

6. *Rashi* on Genesis 1:14 based on the opinion of Rabbi Nechemiah in *Bereishit Rabbah* 12:4.

would ever come into existence, and the earth is an archetype for all things material that would ever emerge.

The opening verse of the Torah contains the letter *alef* six times, which according to the sages alludes to the six thousand years of our current state of reality[7] before the coming of the Messianic era because the name of the letter *alef* can also be read as *elef*, which means "a thousand."

Another example of contraction-as-condensing is evident in the Torah's first word, בְּרֵאשִׁית (pronounced *Bereishit*), which can also be read as the phrase, "He created six"[8] (בָּרָא שִׁית), referring to the six days of creation that in potential already exist in the first day.

One final insight regarding contraction-as-condensing relates to the unusually large letter *beit* found in a Torah scroll as the Torah's very first letter, the first letter of *Bereishit* (**בְּ**רֵאשִׁית). The *gematria* of the letter *beit* is 2, which symbolizes the transition from the absolute oneness of God pre-creation to the apparent world of duality and opposites that is found everywhere in our finite reality. Our task is to reveal the oneness of God that still permeates all apparent duality.[9]

TZIMTZUM IN THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Having seen examples of contraction (as a condensed state) in Creation, we turn our attention to contraction as it appears in the Ten Commandments.

First, there are 620 letters in the Ten Commandments. These 620 letters correspond to the 613 commandments mandated by the Written Torah (the Pentateuch) and the 7 rabbinic commandments mandated by the rabbis).[10] In fact, the Komarna Rebbe wrote an entire book[11] dedicated to explicitly explaining the correspondence between each of the letters of the Ten Commandments and its corresponding *mitzvah*. Thus, the entire Torah, as it were, is contracted into the Ten Commandments. For this reason, we refer to the day the Ten Commandments were given as the day on which the Torah was given.

Since the Ten Commandments, like the rest of the Torah, are comprised of both positive commandments and negative prohibitions, all the *mitzvot* in the Torah are condensed into the first two of the Ten Commandments.[12] All the positive commandments are encapsulated in the first commandment, to believe in God,[13] and all the prohibitions in the Torah are rooted in the second commandment: "You shall not have any other gods before Me."[14] This tradition is supported by the sages' statement that stresses the uniqueness of the first two commandments; it was only these two commandments that the people heard directly from God.[15] The Midrash

7. *Sanhedrin* 97a; *Avodah Zarah* 9a; *Rosh Hashanah* 31a.
8. *Tikkunei Zohar* 11. *The Hebrew Letters*, p.103.
9. See the letter *beit* in *The Hebrew Letters* for an in-depth understanding.
10. *Yain Yitzchak*, *Yitro*, p. 342.
11. *Otzar HaChaim*, printed with *Heichal HaBerachah*, following the order of the *mitzvot* in the Torah.
12. *Shnei Luchot HaBerit*, *Torah SheBiChtav*, *Yitro*, *Torah Or*. *Tanya*, ch. 20.
13. Exodus 20:2.
14. Ibid. v. 3. See *Tanya*, *loc. cit.* for more on the concentrated nature of these first two commandments.
15. *Makot* 24b.

teaches that the people, petrified by God's awesome revelation, asked that the other eight be transmitted to them by Moses.[16]

Next, the second commandment, prohibiting the worship of any other gods, is obviously predicated on the first commandment commanding belief in one God. Therefore, not only are all positive commandments encapsulated in the first of the Ten Commandments, in a certain sense, so are all the negative prohibitions. Since the prohibitions in the Torah serve as stepping-stones to building a positive relationship with God, other human beings, and the world, from a certain perspective, they can be classified as positive commandments. Thus, all the prohibitions relating to the second commandment are in essence included in the first commandment.

Further, Kabbalah teaches that the Ten Commandments and even God Himself, as it were, are condensed into the opening word *Anochi* (**אָנֹכִי**), which the sages explain is an acronym for the phrase (אָנֹא נַפְשִׁי כָּתַבְתִּי יְהֹבִית), "I have written Myself down and given Myself to you."[17] This is not merely another instance of contraction in the Ten Commandments, it parallels the epic event discussed above wherein God contracted and condensed His infinite Being to allow creation to come into being. At the Giving of the Torah, God in a manner of speaking, contracts His infinite Being and will into the finite Hebrew letters that are subsequently learned and transmitted from generation to generation. This is why whenever we learn Torah, we find that every word contains infinite depths, because every word reflects (in a miraculous way) the infinite nature of the Giver of the Torah. Just as God is limitless, so every word of His Torah is limitless.[18]

Finally, just as the *beit*, the first letter of the Torah, contains all of creation in embryonic form, so too the *alef*, the first letter of the first word in the Ten Commandments, *Anochi* (**אָנֹכִי**), in essence contains the entire Torah. Furthermore, the Torah's first letter, *beit*, whose numerical value is two, symbolizes the revealed duality that structures nature, whereas the first letter of the Ten Commandments, *alef*, whose numerical value is one, represents the essential oneness of all reality that is revealed through the Torah.[19]

Having described the Divine process of contraction as manifest in both Creation and in the Giving of the Torah, we can now ask: How can we apply this understanding into our own lives? One possible answer is that we too should view ourselves as an example of God's contraction, through God's choice to create us in His image. Hence, understanding the dynamics of Creation and the expression of God's will through the Ten Commandments provides us with tools to actualize our own potential as well as function on a higher spiritual plane when interacting with the world around us.

16. *Mechilta*.
17. *Shabbat* 105a.
18. The Ba'al Shem Tov was fond of connecting this idea to the verse, "The Torah of *Havayah* is whole" (Psalms 19:8), explaining that it means that regardless of how much one has delved into the Torah, the Torah remains whole, i.e., wholly untouched, because it is limitless.
19. For an in-depth study of the process of *tzimtzum* regarding the Ten Commandments discussed in this article, see *Sha'ashuim Yom Yom* on *Yitro*.

STORY

REBBE SHMUEL OF SLONIM: THE EXTORTIONIST AND THE FOURTH REVOLUTION

Rebbe Shmuel Weinberg of Slonim was born in 5610 (1850) to Rabbi Yechiel Michel Aharon, son of Rebbe Avraham, the founder of Slonim Chasidism. He acquired most of his approach and teachings from his grandfather but often travelled to other Chasidic rebbes of his generation. He led extensive public activities and worked on several matters together with the Rebbe Rashab [about whom he remarked that he was the tzaddik of the generation] and with other great figures of his time such as Rabbi Chaim of Brisk, the Chofetz Chaim, and many others. In his connections with the rabbis of his generation, he was served by his nephew Rebbe Avraham Weinberg (the third), who later became the Rebbe of Slonim. Following the way of the Slonim Rebbes, he maintained close ties with the Chasidic settlements in the Land of Israel and supported them, visiting the Land twice in his youth. In 5660 (1900), he worked to establish the Or Torah Yeshivah in Tiberias, through his chasid Rabbi Moshe Kliers, the Ashkenazi rabbi of the city. He passed away on the 19th of Shevat, 5676 (1916), during World War I, while receiving medical treatment in Warsaw. Due to travel difficulties during the war, he was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw. His discourses and Torah teachings that survived were published in Tishrei 5729 (1968) by Rebbe Shalom Noach Berzovsky (the Netivot Shalom), in the book Divrei Shmuel.

During the time of the *Saba Kadisha* [the Holy Grandfather] of Slonim, Rebbe Shmuel's grandfather, there was a minister who caused the Jews great trouble. Each time, to resolve the matter, the Jews had to collect a large sum of money and bribe him. The rebbe himself would collect money from wealthy local Jews and send it to the minister so he would not harass them.

After the passing of the *Saba Kadisha*, Rebbe Shmuel succeeded him. The wicked minister came to Rebbe Shmuel and declared, "If you do not pay me, I will turn you in to the authorities!" Instead of bribing him as his grandfather had done, Rebbe Shmuel rebuked him and said: "Get out of here. If you do not stop with your informing, I will turn you in to the authorities for extortion. I know very well that you are extorting money, and I will report you to the authorities."

The minister left, and after some time appeared again with a loaded gun and said to the Rebbe: "Either you convert me, or I will shoot myself. Life as a non-Jew is not worth living."

The *tzaddik* immediately sent him to Brod, outside the country, and said to him: "Flee from here as quickly as possible, and there they will convert you. Here you cannot convert." The minister fled to Brod and converted there. In Brod, he lived as a simple Jew and would distribute sweets to small children in the synagogue so they would answer, "Amen, may His great Name be blessed."

In his first years as Rebbe, Rebbe Shmuel would travel to several *tzaddikim* of the generation such as Rebbe Chaim of Sanz and Rebbe Dovid Moshe of Chortkov. Once, on one of his journeys, he passed through Brod, where that righteous convert was living. When he met him, the *tzaddik* invited him to come with him to the rebbe he was planning to visit. In response, the righteous convert prostrated himself on the ground, crying, "How can I atone for the trouble I caused the Jews?" Rebbe Shmuel calmed him and said: "Rise. Your repentance has already been accepted." The convert rose and travelled together with Rebbe Shmuel.

To complete the picture painted by the story, let us begin with a saying from Rebbe Shmuel of Slonim: "There are people in the capital Petersburg who spend the entire night deliberating on how to harm the Jews. If they knew that in a distant place there is a slight Jew who nullifies all their decrees, they would lose their will to live." It seems that Rebbe Shmuel had the ability to make the Jew-hating gentile despise his own life. But in our story, it appears this was a non-Jew with a spark of holiness. Once he despised his life as a non-Jew, he immediately wanted to convert and become a Jew.

Interestingly, contrary to what is usually customary, the Rebbe did not reject him or recommend that he keep the seven Noahide laws and remain a son of Noah. The Rebbe correctly identified that the transformation the convert underwent was absolute; life as a non-Jew, even if righteous and observant of commandments, no longer interested him at all. This is an early spark of what we call the Fourth Revolution [in Torah learning], in which all the scattered sparks will gather to the people of Israel. Through them, the verse, "For then I will transform the peoples to a pure language, all of them calling in the Name of God, serving Him with one shoulder" (Zephaniah 3:9).

Similarly, it is told about the Ba'al Shem Tov when he spent Shabbat in the city of Homel:

On Sunday, the Ba'al Shem Tov left the city, and on his way out three Polish hooligans began to mock him and even threw stones at him. One of them laughed more than his friends and also derided the Ba'al Shem Tov in Polish: "This Jew's beard is like a goat's beard."

The Ba'al Shem Tov descended from the wagon, approached the hooligan, struck him on the shoulder and said to him in Polish: "*Bendz Zhidem*!" [meaning, "Be a Jew"]. The Ba'al Shem Tov returned to the wagon and continued on his way. The hooligan chased after the wagon but did not catch up with it until they reached the village of Asavin (about ten kilometers from Homel). The gentile fell at the Ba'al Shem Tov's feet and begged him to cut off his foreskin. And there in the village they circumcised him according to Jewish law.

As long as the gentile world can tolerate its current life, it cannot open up to something completely different. It might agree, perhaps, to season its life with Jewish spirituality, and even to a power struggle in which sometimes it is defeated and sometimes victorious, but not to a transformation from one essence to another. But today, as the Lubavitcher Rebbe said, "Esau is ready for redemption" and many already feel the meaninglessness of life without Godliness.

Regarding this phenomenon, it is said to Israel and to the future converted Jews, those sparks coming to join in the inheritance of God, "And I will bring you out from under the burdens of Mitzrayim (Egypt, which also means "straits"). When the Overseer God desires to redeem us, He first removes the "burdens of Egypt," the ability to tolerate the constraints of exile. When we merit this, we too will be redeemed, as the verse states "And I will redeem you from their bondage."

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