

**YITRO: Exodus 18:1-20:23**

**HAFTARAH: Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:5-6**

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**Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

*... MOUNT SINAI, the site of Revelation, is not considered a holy place in Judaism. Its exact location was never verified. No attempt by Jews was ever made to reclaim or redeem the Mount either as a sacred spot or as an historical monument. The mount's role was momentary. As long as it served as the scene of the granting of Torah, the mount, crowned with majesty, was distinct. The rules of kedusha--separateness and remoteness--in regard to the mount, were the people's gestures of reverence and awe, not toward the mount itself, but toward the impenetrable mystery of God's presence (Shekhina). Once the Divine Revelation was concluded, the mount was dethroned. Applying this observation to the human situation, the Rabbis expressed the relation between man and place (Ta'anit 21b): "It is not the place that honors the man; it is the man who honors the place."*

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## **Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

THE SINAI REVELATION (Ex. 19-20) is a national, public experience. Shared and witnessed by the entire people and verified by their own first-hand testimony, it is not dependent on faith only, nor on reliance on a revered leader or his miraculous acts. So says Maimonides: "The Israelites did not believe in Moses on account of the wonders he performed; for a believer on the basis of wonders still harbors in his heart an uncertainty, since any wonder can be performed by trickery or witchcraft. Indeed, all the wonders of Moses in the desert were performed by him because of need, and not as proof for his prophecy: In need to destroy the Egyptian army, he divided the sea and drowned them; to provide food, he brought down the manna; to supply water, he split the rock....What then was the ground for trusting him? The open-to-all drama on Mount Sinai! For we all saw it with our own eyes, not of a stranger, and heard it with our own ears, not of somebody else." In Judaism, true faith ("emuna") is not reliance on super-heros nor enchantment by ultra-natural phenomenon. "Emuna" is a personal confirmed conviction, based on self-realization and understanding: It neither suspends reason nor supresses inquiry; rather it enhances both. True "emuna," nourished by man's sensitivity to the Divinity permeating life, develops his awareness and openness to reality.

**YITRO Exodus 18:1-20:23**  
**HAFTARAH: Isaiah 6:1-7:6, 9:5-6**

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**THOUGHT OF THE WEEK**

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**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

*INTACT STONES: The Temple's altar was built with unhewn stones; "once you wield your sword upon the stone you defile it (Ex. 20:22)." The tool of iron, symbolizing violence, destruction and bloodshed, is utterly contemptible and prohibited from the Temple's sphere: "No sound of hammer or axe or any iron tool was heard in the Temple during its construction (I Kings 6:7)." The Temple of Jerusalem, devoid of any sculptures or graven images, conveyed a message of peace and perfection through its mute, massive, intact stones. Contrasting with the monumentalism and artistry of other temples, the stones of the Temple presented and evoked respect for the integrity of nature and sanctity of life.*

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**INTACT STONES:** The Altar in the ancient Jewish Temple was built with unhewn stones (Exodus 20:22): "Once you wield your sword upon the stone -- you defile it!" The sword, or any similar iron tool, symbolizes weaponry, violence, destruction, bloodshed; thus it is utterly contemptible and defiling.

Devoid of any symbol of violence, the Jewish Temple was meant to convey a message of peace and perfection. Iron tools were forbidden within the Temple's domain (I Kings 6:7):

*No sound of hammer or axe or any iron tool was heard in the Temple during its construction!*

Stones touched by any iron tool, symbol of war, become unfit for the Altar of worship which, in Judaism, expresses the human quest for peace and completeness.

**RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

**THE TEMPLE AND WEAPONRY:** The two are incompatible. The shrine of peace is inhospitable to tools of war. All iron tools were forbidden within the Temple's domain. At its construction, "only finished stones cut at the quarry were used, so that no sound of hammer or axe or any iron tool was heard in the house (even) while it was built" (I Kings 6:7). The altar in the Temple was built with uncut, flawless stones, fashioned naturally by flowing water. "For once you wield your sword upon the stone, you defile it!" (Exodus 20:22). The sword, symbol of violence, is considered despicable and abominable for a sacred arena.

The altar's stones must be *shelemot* (Deut. 27:6). The term means, intact, complete, whole, exquisite; thus conveying a message of peace and perfection (*shalem/shalom*). Although in antiquity animal sacrifices were practiced, the ideal and enduring purpose of the Temple is to promote pure devotion to God, untainted by violence or bloodshed. No weaponry is allowed within the Temple whose aim is to enhance life of peace and wholeness (*shelemut*).

# THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

**THE TEMPLE AND WEAPONRY:** The two are incompatible. The shrine of peace is inhospitable to tools of war. All iron tools were forbidden within the Temple's domain. At its construction, "only finished stones cut at the quarry were used, so that no sound of hammer or axe or any iron tool was heard in the House (even) while it was built" (I Kings 6:7).

The altar in the Temple was built with uncut, "flawless" stones (fashioned naturally by flowing water): "For once you wield your sword upon the stone, you defile it!" (Exodus 20:22). The sword, symbol of violence, is considered unfit for a sacred arena.

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## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

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According to rabbinic tradition, Solomon used a superb non-metallic tool, the *shamir* – a firm mineral or piercing worm– to gently contour

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the rocks for the Temple (see Mishna Avot 5:6; Talmud Bavli Sota 48b). The altar in the Temple, in particular, was built with entirely unhewn, "flawless" stones fashioned naturally by flowing water. "For once you wield your sword upon the stone, you defile it!" (Exodus 20:22). The sword, symbol of violence, is considered despicable and abominable – unfit for a sacred arena.

The altar's stones must be *shelemot* (Deut. 27:6). The term means, intact, complete, exquisite, thus conveying a message of peace and perfection (*shalem/shalom*). Although in antiquity animal sacrifices were practiced, the ideal and enduring purpose of the Temple is to promote pure devotion to God, untainted by violence or bloodshed. No weaponry is allowed within the Temple, whose aim is to enhance life of peace and wholeness (*shelemut*).

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / FEBRUARY 5, 1999

### **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

*THE ALTAR* in the ancient Jewish Temple was built with uncut stones (Exodus 20:22): "Once you wield your sword upon the stone – you defile it!" The sword, or any similar iron tool, symbolizes weaponry, violence, destruction, bloodshed; thus, it is utterly contemptible and defiling. The Jewish Temple, devoid of any symbol of violence, was meant to convey a message of peace and perfection. Stones touched by any iron tool, symbol of war, become unfit for the altar of worship, which in Judaism expresses the human request for peace and completeness.

The sages explain: The altar aims to prolong human life and the sword to shorten it. It is not befitting that the tool for extinguishing life be lifted against the instrument of sustaining life. Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkhai applied the hermeneutic logic of "inference from the slight to the weighty" (*kal vahomer*). The altar stones do not see, hear or speak. Yet, since they serve to make peace between the people and God, Torah protects them, forbidding harm to them by any iron tool. How much more so will be your reward when you make peace among people! When

you bring reconciliation between one another, between husband and wife, family and family, city and city, nation and nation – you will surely be protected from harm.

In addition, Torah requires that one ascend the altar by a slanted ramp, and not by steps, so that one's "nakedness not be exposed." This "exposure" is metaphoric. It refers not to nudity of flesh but baldness of character: Show respect for the sacred domain. Tread it gently. Trample not on it haughtily with "broad" steps. Expose not your "nakedness" of rudeness and impudence.

Applying the same deductive method of *kal vahomer*, our sages reason: These sacred stones have no sensitivity and, thus, feel neither hurt nor pleasure. Torah, nonetheless, insists that we treat them with respect. How much more so with regard to human beings! For, unlike these stones, human beings are sensitive. Moreover, each person is created in the Divine image. Clearly, we must treat our fellow people with respect and not "step over" them in arrogance or derogation. A human being is infinitely more precious and more sacred than any altar.

## Thought of the Week

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By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**THE TEMPLE AND WEAPONRY:** The Altar in the ancient Jewish Temple was built with unhewn stones (Exodus 20:22): "Once you wield your sword upon the stone, you defile it!" Also, iron tools were forbidden within the Temple's domain (I Kings 6:7): "No sound of hammer or axe or any iron tool was heard in the Temple (even) during its construction!"

The Temple in Jerusalem was devoid not only of any sign of idolatry, sculpture or graven images, but also of any symbol of homicide, such as tools of war and violence. The Altar's stones must be "*shelemot*" (intact, complete), conveying a message of peace and perfection. Although the Altar in antiquity was used for animal sacrifices, the ideal purpose of the Jewish Temple is the devotion of one's heart to God in completeness.

**YITRO: Exodus 18:1-20:23**

**HAFTARAH: Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:5-6**

**Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

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Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, Feb. 9:

YITRO: Exodus 18:1-20:23

HAFTARAH: Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:5-6

### *Thought of the Week*

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE TEN WORDS (aseret ha-devarim), unwarrantedly termed "Commandments," were engraved on two separate tablets of stone, five on each. Another opinion is that all 10 were on two duplicated copies. (Mekh. on Ex. 20:13). These Two Tablets of the Covenant correspond to its two parties: God and Israel. All 10 Words are conclusive statements addressed to the people in the second person. The first five Words, unlike the second, mention God, and are more elaborate. In the First (v. 2) and the Second Words (v. 3-6), God appears in the first person: in the First, by His name and role in the Exodus; in the Second, by His absolute Oneness and incorporeality, utterly renouncing icon worship. The subsequent three Words refer to God in the third person: The Third Word (v. 7) prohibits vain invocation of the Divine name. The Fourth Word (v. 8-11) establishes the sanctity of Shabbat, tying it with Creation. The Fifth (v. 12) calls on children to care for their parents. "Kaved" (commonly, "honor") actually means concrete concern, provision and sustenance. The theme of the Decalogue's first half is ritual; its second, social. The Fifth Word, focusing on the family, links the two: revering the father and mother also embraces the third partner—God.

(The second half will be discussed next week.)

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## ***Thought of the Week***

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**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

THE SECOND HALF of the Ten Words (Decalogue)— from the 6th to the 10th—corresponds to the second party to the Sinaitic covenant—the people—stating its human terms. Thus, the final five Words envision the outcome of accepting the Covenant and adhering to it's precepts: It is a vision of a civilized society, refined and enlightened by Torah, in which man learns to master his destructive impulses and to cherish the rights of his fellow man, not kill him, defile him, kidnap him, besmear him, or even covet his belongings. This is offered not as legislation but as a prospective scheme of living. It is accepted by the people of Israel as their ideal. This level of social morality, outlined in absolute and general terms in the Decalogue, is an outgrowth of legal system, set forth in concrete and real-life terms in *Mishpatim* (the Laws, Ex. 21:1-23:19).

(Enumeration of the last Five Words, next week.)

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

... *THE FINAL FIVE WORDS* of the Decalogue, unlike the first, are all laconic--the 6th, 7th and 8th each have only two words and three syllables--all start alike--with "lo" ("don't"), evoking man's sense of self-control; none mentions God. These five words--all dealing with the human-social dimension of the Sinaitic Covenant--treat five basic rights of man: existence, dignity, freedom, reputation, and property. They tell what will become of a man--"you"--as a result of accepting the Torah. You will not destroy your fellow's life (6th); nor will you sexually degrade him (7th); nor will you physically abduct his body ("stealing" means here kidnapping and ransoming) (8th); nor will you falsely accuse him (9th); nor will you even harbor a desire to unjustly deprive him of what is his (10th). The last word ("You will not covet") touches on the purity of one's heart, the real temple of God (Ex. 25:8). It teaches man to appreciate his limits as well as his abilities; to take delight in his own joys as well as in the joys of others. Rather than a commandment to be simply obeyed, this word is a high moral goal to be ardently sought. (This concludes the three thoughts on the Decalogue)

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**DIVERSITY AND UNITY:** These rhythmic lines describe Israel's arrival at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:1-2):

They came to Sinai Desert:

They departed from Rephidim and came to Sinai Desert.

They encamped (*vayahanu*) in the Desert:

There Israel encamped (*vayihan*) in front of the Mount.

The first three lines are in the plural: They came, they departed, they encamped (*vayahanu*). The final line, however, is in the singular: "Israel encamped" (*vayihan*); Israel confronts Mount Sinai as one entity. The people comprises many individuals; they operate dynamically in a pluralistic context. Each perceives the gift of Torah in his own way. But at the supreme moment of standing still before Mt. Sinai, Israel acted as one: Peaceful unity is based on dynamic diversity.

# Thought of the Week

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By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

**DYNAMIC DIVERSITY AND PEACEFUL UNITY:** Torah reports Israel's arrival at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:1-2):

*They came to Sinai Desert:*

*They departed from Rephidim and came to Sinai Desert.*

*They encamped in the Desert:*

*There, Israel encamped in front of the Mount.*

In these rhythmic lines the people's acts are in the plural – they came, departed, encamped – except the final one: “They encamped” (*vayahanu*) is contrastingly reiterated in the singular, “Israel encamped” (*vayihan*): Israel confronted Mount Sinai as a singular entity. The people is composed of individuals; they operate dynamically in pluralistic terms. Each perceives Torah in his own way. But at the supreme moment of standing still to receive the Gift of Torah, Israel acted as one – their dynamic diversity contained in peaceful unity.

## Thought of the Week

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By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

“A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS” (*mamlekhet kohanim*; Ex. 19:6) is the destined nature of the Jewish people, consecrated as a whole for a holy task: To be God’s ministers and envoys in the world, to serve Him and proclaim His name. Except for the sacrificial ritual in the ancient Temple (performed exclusively by the Aaronite priests), all the people, not just a selected few of them, are privileged to participate and officiate in all living forms of Jewish ritual and liturgy.

This realization adds a dimension of nobility and sanctity to the daily experience of every individual Jew. For each and every Jew is divinely ordained to be a *royal priest*.

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MATTAN TORAH is the Hebrew term for Israel's experience at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19-20): The Giving of Torah. Torah is perceived as a divine gift; God, as the Giver of Torah. The counterpart of this giving is *kabbalah*—the receiving of Torah. The entire people are the recipients of the precious gift. The current term, "revelation," conveys only one aspect of the Sinaitic experience, the unveiling in part of the mystery of the divine presence and wisdom (*hitgalut*). The Hebrew term *mattan Torah*, on the other hand, expresses the traditional attitude of Judaism to Torah: Torah is a divine gift of life and love. From the Jewish prayerbook: "You, O God, love Your people Israel with enormous and everlasting love; therefore You teach us Torah and Mitzvot . . ." Judaism sees in the divine Law the highest manifestation of divine Love.

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

DESIRING AND COVETING are perfectly normal human emotions. They can hardly be regulated by legislation or "prohibited" by law. Aiming, however, to refine human nature, Torah recognizes two levels of forbidden lust. The first level, *ta'awa*, is the harboring of base desires for what belongs to others. Thus, "Do not desire!" (Deut. 5:18) means: do not nourish your misplaced urges; try to overcome them. The second level, *hemda*, involves scheming and plotting to acquire, by seduction or pressure, that which is wrongly desired. Thus, "Do not covet!" (Ex. 20:14) means: Do not pursue your illicit desires. Even as passion and lust are natural and positive emotions, they must always be directed and controlled. As we learn to enjoy what we have, we are spared the torment and indignity of craving what belongs to others. "Do not desire . . ." and "Do not covet . . ." are Torah's ideals of human refinement.

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## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

IS COVETING FORBIDDEN? Only when it is put into illicit scheme or practice, but not if properly contained or expressed. The Tenth Word (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18a; "Do not covet!" ("lo tahmod")), is interpreted by rabbinic tradition as behavioral: Do not acquire, by plot or undue persistence, property which its owner prefers to retain for himself. Do not carry out your passion for a woman in unlawful imposition. "Hamod" in Hebrew means to hold dear, to desire; in itself — morally neutral. There is nothing reproachable in feeling attraction for a person or object, even someone else's, or even admitting it in words. To be fascinated by beauty or value, even by the charm of idolatry, is quite natural. To feel the urge to obtain idolatrous items is perfectly permissible; to carry this urge through, to actually "get" them, is prohibited (Deut. 7:25). Heartfelt "coveting" ("himud"), without "getting" the coveted object, is not sinful. "Lusting" ("ta'ava"), however, denounced in the Deuteronomic version (5:18b), means a more intense infatuation: Inordinate and obsessive craving for another's belongings is by itself wrong. Human desire is unavoidable; but it is controllable.

## **Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

**THE MYSTERY OF PROPHECY** – the prophet's persistence in face of the people's resistance – is dramatically explained in Isaiah's dedication to his mission (6:9-10). The people are at first adamant and unmoved, but the prophet urges them to listen nevertheless: "Hear and keep on hearing, though you do not yet understand! See and keep on seeing, though you do not yet perceive!" The people's initial refusal is not a result of indifference or antagonism, but rather of fear that if they give heed, they will inevitably have to amend their ways, for which they are not yet ready. Precisely because they recognize the persuasive sway of prophecy, they struggle to ignore and reject it: "Blunted are the minds of this people, their ears dulled, their eyes dimmed; for they fear if they look with their eyes, and with their ears they listen, their minds will comprehend, and they will improve and be healed." Since the reason for their outward stubbornness is not negative – apathy or hostility – but one of appreciation tempered by apprehension. There is the hope that once the defenses drop, the message will be heard, understood and embraced.

# THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**BLIND OBEDIENCE VERSUS ENLIGHTENED COMMITMENT:** The people's affirmative response to the Divine call of Torah, proclaiming (Exodus 24:7), "We will *do* and we will *understand* ('hear')" - "*Na'aseh ve-Nishma!*" - is not a pledge of blind obedience. It does not mean "We will first do (even before we understand), and only then (after we do) we will (endeavor to) understand." The Hebrew conjunctive phrase, linking the two verbs - we will do (*na'aseh*) and we will understand (*nishma*) - conveys one integrated idea: "We will do with understanding!" This semantic phenomenon is known in classic literary analysis as *hendiadys*; namely, a figure of speech in which two words connected by a conjunction are used to express a single notion.

For example, the biblical phrase "kindness and truth" comes in the sense of "true kindness." The core idea of the phrase is enlightened commitment, the "doing" being based on "understanding." The *Shemah* ("Hear O Israel), too, calls for insightful comprehension, hearing and adhering with understanding, not blind submission.

According to *Midrash ha-Gadol* (by Yemenite David Adani; 13th c.): At first the Israelites said, "We will *do!*" God rebuffed this pledge of blind compliance: "To act without (a quest for) understanding is wrong; acting must be enriched by understanding!" Then the Israelites added, "and we will *understand!*" This revised, completed, response expresses the people's aspiration for enlightened adherence to God's will.

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / JANUARY 31, 1997

### RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

ENLIGHTENED OBEDIENCE – “doing with understanding” – is the essence of the people’s affirmative response to the Sinai covenant. The terse Hebrew phrase, “*na’aseh ve-nishma*” (Exodus 24:7), makes a twofold statement: “We will do *and* we will listen.” The two verbs convey one idea. To “do” means more than perform, to “listen” more than heed. True “doing” entails purposeful action, creative observance; intelligent “listening” involves attentive learning and understanding. The *Shema* (“Hear O Israel”) calls for insightful perception and appreciation, not blind or thoughtless obedience.

Applauding the people’s enthusiasm to adhere to God’s will, our sages remarked that the people had devoutly mentioned “doing” (*na’ase*) before “listening” (*nishma*). This praise is double-edged. It blends appreciation with sarcasm and scorn. What a hasty response, what an impetuous promise! Only “angels” (Divine messengers) and

all natural phenomena do God’s will promptly and irresistibly. We humans, on the other hand, have choice and moral responsibility. Our “yes” has value only because we can also say “no!” Human “doing” is deliberate, not instantaneous.

The binary phrase *na’aseh ve-nishma* expresses one complete idea; “We will do with understanding.”

This novel interpretation is found in an ancient rabbinic source, *Midrash ha-Gadol* (compiled by R. David of Aden in the 13th century). This midrash points to the evolutionary nature of the people’s reply. At first, the Israelites uttered one word only, *na’aseh*, “We will do!” (Exodus 24:3). God rebuffed this impulsive, thoughtless pledge. “Do you mean to do without understanding? You must aim to understand what you do!” Then, the Israelites said, *na’aseh ve-nishma* (25:7), augmenting “doing” with “understanding.” Thus, the people expressed their aspiration for enlightened adherence to God’s will.

Thought of the Week  
Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

YITRO

January 30, 1997

ENLIGHTENED OBEDIENCE -- "doing with understanding" -- is the essence of the people's affirmative response to the Sinai covenant. Literally, the laconic Hebrew phrase, "*na'aseh ve-nishma*" (Exodus 24:7), makes a twofold statement: "We will *do* (practice, obey) *and* we will *listen* (hear, understand)." The two verbs convey one idea. To "do" means more than perform, to "listen" more than heed. True "doing" entails purposeful action, creative observance; intelligent "listening" involves attentive learning and understanding. The *Shema* ("Hear O Israel") calls for insightful perception and appreciation, not blind or thoughtless obedience.

Applauding and marveling at the people's enthusiasm to adhere to God's will, our Sages remarked that the people had devoutly mentioned "doing" (*na'ase*) before "listening" (*nishma*). This praise is double-edged. Ironically, it blends appreciation with sarcasm and scorn. What a hasty response, what an impetuous promise! Only "angels" (Divine messengers), all natural phenomena, do God's will promptly and irresistibly. We humans, on the other hand, have choice and moral responsibility. Our "Yes" has value only because we can also say "No!" Human "doing" is deliberate, not instantaneous.

Our Sages well understood the phrase *na'aseh ve-nishma* as a hendiadys, namely an idiom expressing one idea by two connected words, one modifying the other ("and" as "with"). This binary phrase expresses one complete idea of intelligent compliance, based on appreciation and reason. It means, "We will do with understanding!"

This novel interpretation is found in an ancient rabbinic source, *Midrash ha-Gadol* (compiled by R. David of Aden, in the 13th century; first printed in our century). This Midrash points to the evolutionary nature of the people's reply. At first the Israelites uttered one word only, *na'aseh*, "We will do!" (Exodus 24:3). God rebuffed this impulsive, thoughtless pledge. "Do you mean to do without understanding? You must aim to understand what you do!" Then, the Israelites said, *na'aseh ve-nishma* (25:7), augmenting "doing" with "understanding." Thus the people expressed their aspiration for enlightened adherence to God's Will.

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

**TESTING AND ENHANCING:** Witnessing Sinai Revelation, the people of Israel fearfully recoiled and trembled, begging that Moses, not God, speak to them, "lest we die." Moses responded (Ex. 20:17): "Fear not; for in order to challenge you God has appeared." What does this mean? The Hebrew for "to challenge you" is "nasot etchem — a problematic, intriguing phrase. The King James Version renders it "to prove you;" recent translations, in more modern English, "to test you." But what sort of "test" is the Sinai Revelation? Rashi understands "nasot" (from "nes," banner) in the positive sense of exaltation: God has appeared to Israel in order "to dignify" them—refine their nature, enhance their glory, raise them high. Even so, the double meaning of the Hebrew verb "nasot" — as testing and as enhancing — is not lost in Rashi's interpretation: The true enhancement of the people is achieved through constant testing, through an eternal divine challenge — which both proves and improves the people — always expecting of them greatness.

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

KEDUSHA AND KAVOD (sanctity and glory) are two Biblical attributes of God; the first pointing to His transcendence, the latter to His imminence. That God is kadosh means that He is above the material world; kedusha means separation and distinction—He is apart from his creation not a part of it. The kavod of God refers to His indwelling presence, His impact and revelation in this world (the related word “kaved” means heavy and substantial). In essence, God is kadosh, above any human comprehension and expression. Nonetheless, “All the earth is filled with His kavod (“melo kol ha-aretz kevodo”). This aspect of divinity, kavod—the reflection of the infinite in the finite world and its perception by the finite, human mind—is also called “shekhinah.” These two attributes, kedusha and kavod, are poetically dramatized in Prophet Isaiah’s vision 6:3): The heavenly seraphim call to one another: “Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh is the Lord of hosts; his kavod permeates the fullness of the entire world!” Whatever we perceive of the Divine is only His glory—His impact and revelation. But this we may perceive only when we are totally aware of His absolute transcendence, namely his holiness. When we admit his kedusha, we may merit his kavod.

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CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / MAY 25, 2001

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

WHY WAS THE TORAH GIVEN IN THE DESERT, AND NOT IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL? The Rabbinic answer is: "Had the Torah been given in the land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: 'You have no share in it!' The Torah was given in a democratic fashion (demos) – in a public, ownerless domain (the Sinai desert) – in order to demonstrate its universality. Whoever wishes to receive the Torah is welcome to come and receive it!" (Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, on Exodus 19:2).

Another Talmudic interpretation sees in the desert (*midbar*) a symbol of humility and non-presumptuousness. The Torah was given in the desert to teach us that it is given only to those who deport themselves, metaphorically speaking, like a "desert," namely, with no traits of arrogance and boastfulness. A true scholar of Torah is distinguished by modesty. Only such a person earns the gift of Torah (Talmud Bavli Eruvin 54a; Nedarim 55a).

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

WHY WAS THE TORAH GIVEN IN THE DESERT, AND NOT IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL? The Rabbinic answer is: “Had the Torah been given in the land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: ‘You have no share in it!’ The Torah was given in a democratic fashion (demos) – in a public, ownerless domain (the Sinai desert) – in order to demonstrate its universality. Whoever wishes to receive the Torah is welcome to come and receive it!” (Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, on Exodus 19:2).

Another Talmudic interpretation sees in the desert (*midbar*) a symbol of humility and non-presumptuousness. The Torah was given in the desert to teach us that it is given only to those who deport themselves, metaphorically speaking, like a “desert,” namely, with no traits of arrogance and boastfulness. A true scholar of Torah is distinguished by modesty. Only such a person earns the gift of Torah (Talmud Bavli Eruvin 54a; Nedarim 55a).

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## TORAH

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### RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

NOT TO COVET the property or spouse of another person is the content of the Decalogue's Tenth Word (Exodus 20:14). The Word means that ideally when one lives by the light of Torah, one would "rejoice in one's lot" (Avot 4:1), and be grateful for one's assets and prospects, and not be envious of others nor harbor designs to obtain improperly what belongs to others. To aspire to attain even more than one already has is no sin in Judaism; it is a virtue, the source of social progress and personal self-fulfillment. Forbidden by Jewish law is not "lust" *per se*, but the actual scheming and harassment to get illicitly what belongs to others. For example, it is forbidden to apply undue pressure to make the owner give away or sell the coveted property or to plot to make a husband divorce his wife so that the individual lusting after her can then marry her.

A person's desires are controllable and must not overpower reason nor mar moral integrity. Lust must not be suppressed nor avoided, but properly directed.

The Tenth Word is the climax of the Decalogue projecting Torah's aim to elevate our deeds and ennoble our feelings.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK  
Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

**Yitro**

January 28, 1994

**NOT TO COVET** the property or spouse of another person is the content of the Decalogue's Tenth Word (Exodus 20:14). The Word means that ideally, when one lives by the light of Torah, one would "rejoice in one's lot" (Avot 4:1), be grateful for one's assets and prospects, derive satisfaction from what one has acquired and for what one is still able to continue to acquire by lawful means, and not be envious of others nor harbor designs to obtain improperly what belongs to others. To have desire and aspiration to attain even more than one already has, and enjoy what one has not yet enjoyed, is no sin in Judaism; it is rather a virtue; it is the source of social progress and personal self-fulfillment. What is forbidden by Jewish law is not "lust" per se, but the actual scheming and harassment to get illicitly what belongs to others; for example when one applies undue pressure to make the owner give away or sell the coveted property; or, in case of a man lusting a married woman, when he practically plots to make the husband divorce his wife so that he can then marry her, or, when he tries to seduce the coveted woman to submit to him in adultery (Maimonides).

**Ibn Ezra** (12th century Spain) comments: "Many are puzzled by this prohibition (not to covet). Is it conceivable that there should exist a person who does not at some time or another covet a beautiful object? Let me now give you an analogy: A country peasant in his right senses will not covet in his heart to possess a beautiful princess since he knows that this is impossible just the same as he will not seriously desire to have wings like a bird. For the same reason the rational person will neither lust nor covet. Since a man knows that the Almighty has forbidden him his neighbor's wife such a course of action will be even further from his mind than from that of the country peasant in regard to the princess." Ibn Ezra's analogy surely reflects his medieval, feudal society, long bygone; but his psychological insight remains valid even today. A person's desires are controllable and must not overpower reason nor mar moral integrity. Lust must not be suppressed nor avoided but properly directed.

The Tenth Word is the climax of the Decalogue projecting Torah's aim to elevate our deeds and ennoble our feelings.

## **By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

**TWO ZEALOTS** appear in Scripture, Phinehas and Elijah. Both were led by their unbridled zeal to horrible acts of violence: Phinehas the priest stabbed a couple engaged in exhibitionistic harlotry, by piercing his spear through their interlocked bodies (Nu. 25:8). Elijah the prophet captured in a frenzy hundreds of Baal prophets and slit their throats into brook Kishon (I Kings 18:40).

Their impulsiveness was hailed at the time as reflecting noble motives and yielding constructive results. Their acts, however, were never endorsed as normative models in Judaism. The Midrash claims that Phinehas and Elijah are one and the same person. Thus we have only one biblical zealot. One zealot in Scripture is enough!

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## Thought of the Week

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By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

IS GOD A "JEALOUS" GOD? God describes Himself as "El-kanna" (Ex. 20:5). The old Jewish translation of 1917 still retains the King James translation, "a jealous God;" but the 1964 translation has altered it to "an impassioned God." All the same, modern Christian translations still insist on "a jealous God," as in the Catholic New American Bible of 1917. The Evangelical Good News Bible (1976) is more explicit, making God Himself say in the text: "I tolerate no rivals." But in Torah's view God has no rivals; and as for rebels and offenders, God largely tolerates them. Surely God expects of us wholehearted loyalty; not because He is "jealous" but because He cares. In Hebrew, "kin'ah" (as a synonym of "ahava"), means zeal, dedication, and passionate love. God is "El-kanna"—namely: demanding, devoted, and loving.

## **Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

HOW TO TREAT PARENTS is outlined by the Torah in terms of two mitzvot: "kavod" (Ex. 20:12) Deut. 5:16) and "morah" (Lev. 19:3). The mitzva of "kavod" is a part of the Decalogue; that of "morah" of the Holiness Code. "Kavod:" "Honor your father and your mother." This means more than just external gestures of honor and homage; it means actual deeds of support and help, real catering to parents' needs. "Morah;" "You shall each fear your mother and father." This means genuine reverence and respect expressed in actual behavior. It is this attitude between generations that keeps the living heritage viable.

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

LEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / JANUARY 28, 2000

### RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

HOW DO YOU TREAT YOUR PARENTS? Torah teaches two complementary concepts of proper regard for parents: One rule – in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16) – requires that you honor your parents (*kavod*) by substantive support and provision for them. The other rule – in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 19:3) – commands that you revere your parents (*mora*) by displaying venerational conduct toward them. The *kavod* precept – commonly rendered “Honor your father and your mother” – means more than showing external gestures of honor and homage; it includes helping, catering and attending to your parents’ needs. The *mora* precept – literally, “You shall revere your mother and father” – calls for genuine adoration and respect. This balanced attitude – of

tenderness in providing for parents’ needs (*kavod*) and of sensitivity in respecting their dignity and seniority (*mora*) – keeps our generational link and cultural heritage alive.

“A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS” (*Memlekheth Kohanim*; Exodus 19:6) is the destined nature of the Jewish people, consecrated for a holy task: to be God’s ministers and envoys in the world, to serve God and proclaim His name. Except for the sacrificial ritual in the ancient Temple, all the people are privileged to participate in almost all forms of Jewish ritual and liturgy.

This adds a dimension of nobility and sanctity to the daily experience of every individual Jew. Each is Divinely ordained to be a royal prince, a holy priest, in the marvelous, sacred kingdom of life.

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## Thought of the Week

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By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

HOW TO TREAT YOUR PARENTS? Torah teaches two concepts: One, *kavod*, in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:12; Det. 5:16), and the other, *morah*, in the Holiness Code (Lev. 19:3). The *kavod* precept, commonly rendered "Honor your father and your mother," truly means more than external gestures of honor and homage; it includes actual deeds of support and help, catering and attending to parents' needs. The *morah* precept, literally, "You shall each fear your mother and father," refers to genuine reverence and respect, expressed in behavioral terms. This balanced attitude—of tenderness in providing for parents' needs (*kavod*) and dignity in respecting their seniority (*morah*)—keeps our generational link and cultural heritage alive.

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