



### TRANSFORMING THE WORLD

**A**RE NUMBERS SIGNIFICANT? AT THE BEGINNING OF CREATION the world came into being through Ten Statements of G-d: 'let there be light', 'let there be a firmament', and so on. In our Sedra<sup>1</sup> there is an extraordinary Divine revelation, experienced by the entire nation: men, women and children. This revelation included fire burning on Mount Sinai, thunder, lightning, the mysterious increasing sound of the Shofar - and the Ten Commandments defining G-d's law.

As one might imagine, the similarity of number is no coincidence!

When we consider 'the world' created with Ten Statements, its physical reality is most obviously apparent. What it looks like, how much it weighs, how much it costs, how much we want it and are therefore prepared to pay, whether or not we can afford it. We understand the reality of the world in simple material terms, relating to our own desire, needs and power.

In a world seen in this way, rules operate primarily by convenience. We accept them as we do a rule against double parking in a narrow street: it is a rule generally for our benefit, which we therefore keep. However, sometimes, when we just want to dart in to a shop for a moment...

When the Ten Commandments were revealed at Mount Sinai, we came face to face with a completely different level of existence and of consciousness.

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G-d, the creator of the universe and the inner essence of all being, declared His Will to us. The Commandments which we all heard, and the elaboration in the 613 laws which Moses later taught us, are absolutes. They are important whether or not they seem convenient, and whether or not we understand them. At the Giving of the Torah we declared “We will do” before we said “We will understand”. We affirmed our dedication to G-d as the prerequisite for receiving His laws.

Now let us go back to the similarity of numbers: the Ten Statements creating the world, and the Ten Commandments from Sinai. What does this similarity teach us?

Perhaps you can guess! It is hinting to us that our task as Jews is to draw the Divine quality of the Ten Commandments into our lives lived in the practical, material world. Even into its most worldly or even earthy aspects...

Our relationship with G-d is not reserved to the time we might be in the Synagogue. The laws of the Torah concern every aspect of life, whether business ethics or cooking. By trying to keep them, individually and as a family, step by step, applying them to our mundane, materialistic areas of activity we are actually achieving something quite remarkable. We are changing the world on its deepest level.

G-d created the world to be a ‘dwelling’ for His Shechinah, His sacred Presence. However this ultimate purpose has been hidden by an overlay of materialistic concern. By dedicating ourselves to observing the laws from Sinai in every aspect of life we elevate the world in all its details, so that it becomes a true dwelling for G-d. What was ordinary becomes holy; what was selfish, becomes altruistic; what seemed merely physical is disclosed as something Divine<sup>2</sup>.

1. Exodus chs. 18-20. 2. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 1 p.148.

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SEDRA YITRO

**BEYOND UNDERSTANDING**

Leah was taking her younger brother Yoni for a walk, they were going to the park, and Yoni would have a good time on the swings and sandbox.

Yoni was three years old. He was very cute, asking a lot of questions, and most of all, would run, throw balls, and keep the adults around him on their toes.

They were approaching a large and busy street. "You know, Yoni" said Leah "we are approaching a big street with a lot of cars"

"I love cars," replied Yoni. "I have one in my room, a BIG red one". "How beautiful" said Leah. "Well you know that a car in the street is very dangerous. You have to be very careful when we cross the road."

"I don't think a car could hurt me. I am very strong" retorted Yoni.

"Well, because it is dangerous, you need to hold my hand when we cross the road" said Leah. Yoni looked up with a tough look and said "well I don't think I am going to hold your hand, no car could hurt me".

Now Leah started getting nervous. 'Yoni is very difficult to manage,' she thought to herself. 'Maybe I shouldn't have taken him for this walk'. She began wondering how she could get Yoni to hold her hand while they crossed the road.

She suddenly remembered what her teacher had told them in school the week before.

“Some laws in the Torah we understand. But there are other laws which we do not understand and even so, we still have to keep them,” Mrs Siegel had said.

“The Sages tell us that G-d offered the Torah to many different nations, and each nation asked what is written in the Torah. In each case, and they didn’t agree with what it said, so they told G-d that they don’t want it. But when G-d came to the Jews the Jewish people didn’t even ask what was inside of it, they just accepted the Torah as it was.”

“Does anybody know why they just accepted the Torah without asking what is inside it?” Mrs Spiegel asked the class. One of Leah’s friends had answered. “Because they knew that G-d is much greater than any person, so of course if He gives us a law, even if we don’t understand it or agree with it, we trust G-d and know that it is true and for our benefit.”

“Yoni” said Leah in a sweet but firm voice. “You must hold my hand when we cross the road”.

“No, I don’t want to” answered Yoni.

“Yoni darling, sometimes you have to do things you don’t like,” said Leah. “When I was your age I am sure I also wanted to run by myself. But trust me, hold my hand, and then you will be safe. You know, when you are older you will understand that cars could hurt people. For now, just hold my hand because I love you and I want you to be safe.”

By now they had reached the big, busy road, with cars, buses, whizzing bikes and lorries. Yoni stretched out his hand to Leah’s, and held on tight....

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