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TRANSFORMING THE WORLD

ARE 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 Sedra¹ 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...

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

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 Divine².

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

HIERARCHY

“Good morning girls. We are pleased to announce that our annual production is coming up.” Mrs Jacobs, the head teacher in Debbie’s school announced to the girls sitting in the big school hall. Debbie caught her friend Leah’s eyes and they both smiled at each other. Everyone loved to be in the production. Debbie turned her attention back to the head teacher to hear more details.

The head teacher went on to explain the story of their production and then instructed the girls with some rules.

“Every choir, dance and act will have a head that is in charge. If a girl has any questions they will go to their head. If the head cannot answer it, they will go to Miss Smith, the head of production, and if Miss Smith cannot answer it, they will come to me. Try-outs will begin in ten minutes, please make your way to the Lunchroom where try outs will be taking place.”

Everyone gave a clap as Mrs Jacobs gracefully walked down from the podium and then all started talking together.

“I really want to be in dance,” Debbie said to Leah, with a sparkle in her eyes. She could already imagine herself dancing in a sharp, dramatic dance in front of a large audience.

“I would love to be in choir,” said Esther, joining in their conversation.

“You know what I was wondering, Mrs Jacob’s said if we

have a question we should first go to our heads, and if they can't answer it we should go to Miss Smith, and if she can't answer it we should go to Mrs Jacobs. But why can't we just go straight to Mrs Jacobs? Leah asked.

"Yeah," Esther agreed, "Like, we know for sure Mrs Jacobs can answer our question, so why should we bother going to our heads or Miss Smith?"

Debbie thought about that. "Well," she slowly said with a thoughtful look in her eyes. "I think we can actually learn about it from this week's Sedra, Yitro. You see, Yitro advises Moses that he should set up a system that there should be the lower judges, higher judges and then Moses himself. A kind of hierarchy. That way if someone had a simple question they didn't have to waste Moses's time because Moses had so many people asking him questions."

"Oh that makes sense! So if everyone went straight to Moses then he wouldn't have enough time for everyone, that's why they set up a system that if a person had a question they would ask the lower judges, and see if they were able to answer it." Leah, said.

"Oh I get it! That's why we shouldn't go straight to Mrs Jacobs, because she would be bombarded by questions that could really be answered by those lower down the hierarchy." Esther explained.

"Well, on that note, let's go to try-outs so we don't miss anything and then we won't have any questions!" Leah said happily.

The girls laughed, and started to walk to the lunchroom for try-outs. As they walked, Debbie smiled and said, "This is going to be one awesome production, get ready!"

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