

GROWTH

At The

SHABBAT TABLE

8th Edition
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BS"D

PARSHAT YITRO

Available

Why was the Torah given at Mount Sinai, a relatively small mountain, out of all the other enormous mountains?

Many of us already know the famous answer: Hashem specifically gave us the Torah at the smallest, "humblest" mountain, to teach us for eternity that the Torah will only rest and thrive in someone who is humble.

Why, though, was the Torah given to us in a desert? It would have seemingly been more logical to have had Matan Torah in our own homeland – Eretz Yisrael – in which the Jews could have made a tremendous *chanukat habayit* celebration. What "compelled" Boreh Olam to have commenced this grand ceremony in the desert?

R' Avraham Walkin gave a beautiful answer. A desert is *hefker* (ownerless). In a sense, a desert is a public domain – open, available, and accessible to all. Hashem specifically chose to have Matan Torah in the desert to convey a timeless message, that the Torah, too, is open for everyone to partake from. It's not limited to the biggest scholars or the top students. It's available and calling for every Jew to attach oneself to and grow from it, each on an individual level. Some have a special affinity or enjoyment towards learning Chumash; others Halachah; others Gemara; etc. There's something for everyone to connect themselves to on a deep level. Just as the desert is open to all, so is the Torah given to anyone who wants to reach out for it...

Unique

This week's Parshah hosts the *Aseret HaDibrot*, the 10 Commandments. What's fascinating is that most of these commandments aren't unique to Jews but fundamental to human society as a whole. The prohibition against stealing, killing, adultery, and idolatry are basic principles that are expected of everyone in the world! Why would Hashem give these as the "10 Commandments" when these are universal ideas? Shouldn't they be ideas that are unique to the Jewish People exclusively?

R' Avraham Stulberger shared a profound insight. Even the commandments which apply universally are still unique to us. "Don't kill" to a gentile means to not commit murder; to a Jew, from the lens of Torah and *Chazal*, it even means to not embarrass somebody in public. "Don't steal" to a *goy* means to not commit a robbery; for a Jew, it comes with a more sensitive definition and even applies to stealing another's time or money. Each *mitzvah* for a Jew is like a world unto itself. Through our unique perspective of the Commandments, our responsibilities reach a whole new level, as we were sent to be ambassadors of light for the world as G-d's Chosen People...

Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei Yisrael:

Ariel Ben Frida Frida Bat Yaffa Miriam Bat Bakol Esther Bat Frida
Rahamim Ben Shifra Yitzchak Ben Naama Yoel Ben Sara
Chaim Avraham Ben Shifra Zisel Noach Yisrael Ben Victoria Yaffa

"If he is enough of a Jew for the Nazis to hate him, he is enough of a Jew for me to love him."

(R' Shlomo Carlebach)

Origins

R' Yaakov Rahimi expressed an inspiring idea.

The Chatam Sofer raised an interesting question. One of, if not the holiest object in the whole world, is a *Sefer Torah*. When a *Sefer Torah* is carried into a room, everyone jumps out of their seats and arises to kiss it. As holy as a *Sefer Torah* is, it's fascinating as well as shocking that its origins are not really holy at all. In fact, animal skins, which is what the parchment is made from, is representative of physicality and indulgence, and is known to be of lowly stature. Why do we make the holiest thing in the world from something as abhorrent as animal skins?

The Chatam Sofer explains that this is to teach us a vital lesson in life: even when a person finds himself indulged in this world and stuck in sin or bad habits, with enough work and belief in oneself, one can grow tremendously and reach great heights. As unreal as it may sound, the holiest of the holy can even come from the most impure thing.

This week's Parshah is about a man who started out as a priest practicing idolatry, and in his life's journey, found the truth, converted to Judaism, got Moshe Rabbenu as his son-in-law, and even ended up with Matan Torah, the grandest event in history, being recorded in the Parsha named after him! He climbed his way from the very bottom and skyrocketed to levels beyond our imagination, so much so that the greatest prophet to ever live, a man that would go to Heaven and back, married his daughter.

Maybe, just maybe, that is why Matan Torah is in his Parshah, to convey this eternal message of transcending one's past and limitations in the journey of reaching greatness...

Let us take this lesson to heart. Don't get down because of a dirty rearview mirror. The windshield is clear, and the road ahead is paved with potential.