



# NORTHWEST YESHIVA HIGH SCHOOL

presents

## Thoughts on the Parasha

By Rabbi Bernie Fox, Head of School

Upcoing NYHS Events:

Sunday, August 24, 2008 – New Student Orientation Barbecue at NYHS

### VaEtchanan 5768

#### ***The Authority of the Sages to Establish New Laws***

---

***You shall not add to that which I have commanded you today. And you shall not subtract from it. Observe the commandments of Hashem your G-d that I have commanded to you. (Devarim 4:2)***

---

Moshe commands the people not to add or subtract from the commandments that have been given by Hashem. Sefer HaChinuch explains the reason for these restrictions. The Torah is perfect. Because it is perfect it can only be damaged through additions or subtractions.<sup>1</sup> Maimonides explains that because of this prohibition the Sages and prophets may not create a new commandment or eliminate a commandment. Furthermore, they may not add a new element or component to an existing mitzvah or subtract an element or component.<sup>2</sup> For example, the number of Torah sections included in the tefilin cannot be increased or decreased.<sup>3</sup>

The Torah we observe today is composed of the Law given to Moshe at Sinai and many restrictions and obligations created by the Sages. How can the authority of the Sages to create new laws be reconciled with the restrictions against altering the Torah?

In order to answer this question it is essential to understand the nature of the laws created by the Sages. The Sages made two types of laws. The majority are gezeyrot – decrees. A decree is designed to assure or reinforce adherence to a Torah mitzvah. For example: The Torah forbids eating meat and milk that are cooked together. The Torah's prohibition does not include poultry. Therefore, on a Torah level it is permitted to eat poultry that is cooked in milk. However, the Sages recognized that allowing the consumption of poultry cooked in milk would engender confusion. Ultimately, forms of meat, such as beef, that are included in the Torah-level prohibition, would be cooked in milk and consumed. The Sages stepped in and prohibited poultry cooked in milk. Through this decree they

reinforced observance of the Torah-level mitzvah.<sup>4</sup>

The second type of laws created by the Sages are takanot – new institutions or commandments. Purim is an example of a takanah (singular of takanot). This celebration is an institution created by the Sages. Maimonides explains that also takanot are designed to reinforce a Torah mitzvah or theme.<sup>5</sup>

This discussion of gezeyrot and takanot provides a resolution to the question above: How can the Sages create new laws? The Torah is perfect; the creation of a new law implicitly denies the perfection of the Torah. Therefore, even the Sages are not authorized to add to or subtract from the mitzvot. However, that which is perfect must be persevered and protected. The Torah can be compared to a perfect painting. Any alteration of the painting will only detract from its perfect beauty. In order to assure that the painting is not altered, it must be protected. If it is displayed, precautions must be taken to assure that visitors do not touch it and thereby damage it. It must also be protected from the impact of environmental factors such as light. It would be wrong to fail to protect the painting from damage. The Sages have the authority and responsibility to provide this protection to the Torah. This requires that they create safeguards against the violation of the Torah. This authority and responsibility also require that the Sages create new institutions to reinforce Torah laws and themes.

#### ***The Meaning of Emunah***

---

***I am Hashem your G-d that has taken you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. (Devarim 5:6)***

---

In the course of his final address to Bnai Yisrael, Moshe reviews the Decalogue – the Aseret HaDibrot. Our passage is the first pasuk of the Aseret HaDibrot. Hashem declares that He is the G-d that redeemed Bnai Yisrael from Egypt. Maimonides maintains that this passage contains a positive commandment. What is the requirement engendered by this mitzvah?

1 Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 454.

2 Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 2:1.

3 Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 454.

4 Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 2:9.

5 Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Introduction.

In his Mishne Torah, Maimonides defines the commandment as an obligation to know that there is a G-d who is the cause of all that exists. It is clear from this formulation that blind faith in Hashem's existence does not satisfy this commandment. According to Maimonides, a person must have knowledge of Hashem's existence. Maimonides also discusses this commandment in his Sefer HaMitzvot. Maimonides wrote this work in Arabic. The standard translation of the Sefer HaMitzvot was composed by Moshe ibn Tibon. The first mitzvah in Sefer HaMitzvot is the commandment communicated by our passage – affirmation of Hashem. In Ibn Tibon's translation, the mitzvah obligates us to have faith in the existence of a G-d that is the cause of all that exists. This seems to contradict Maimonides' formulation in his Mishne Torah. There, Maimonides insists on knowledge. Here, Maimonides establishes a more general perimeter for the obligation. It seems that even blind faith is included within this broader perimeter and that knowledge of Hashem's existence is not absolutely necessary to fulfill this commandment.

Rav Yosef Kafih offers a simple resolution to this contradiction. He explains that the confusion is based in Ibn Tibon's interpretation of Maimonides' original Arabic. Rav Kafih studied the original Arabic text of Maimonides' Sefer HaMitzvot. He notes that in the original text, Maimonides uses an Arabic word that should more properly be translated as "knowledge". According to this rendering of the original Arabic text, there is no contradiction. Sefer HaMitzvot defines the mitzvah as knowing that there is a G-d who is the cause of all that exists.

Rav Kafih's resolution of this problem is certainly reasonable. However, it does assume that Moshe ibn Tibon's scholarship is flawed and that he mistranslates the original Arabic. Moshe ibn Tibon was a prolific writer and translator. He wrote translations of various philosophical works. He composed a commentary on the Torah. He wrote a commentary on a portion of Maimonides' Moreh Nevuchim. In short, he was an accomplished scholar and translator. He was well aware of Maimonides' outlook and position. It is likely that he felt his translation of Maimonides' Arabic was consistent with the author's intentions. It is appropriate to consider the possibility that Ibn Tibon's translation is accurate. If we accept this translation, how can we reconcile Maimonides' formulation in his Sefer HaMitzvot with his position in his Mishne Torah? Why does Maimonides insist on knowledge of Hashem's existence in his Mishne Torah and in Sefer HaMitzvot define the mitzvah as a requirement to have faith in His existence?

The Hebrew word that Ibn Tibon uses to describe the obligation engendered by the mitzvah is *emunah*. This word is commonly regarded as the Hebrew equivalent of "faith" or "belief". However, a simple analysis of the term's use in the Torah indicates that *emunah* indicates a firm conviction. In the Torah it does not refer to a conviction based upon faith or unfounded beliefs.

A few examples of the Torah's use of the term

*emunah* (אמונה) will illustrate this point. Yosef uses this term when speaking to his brothers. The brothers come to Egypt to purchase food. Yosef rules the land as Paroh's regent. He accuses the brothers of spying. The brothers deny the charge. Yosef devises a test to determine the truth. He asserts that through this test – *v'yaiamnu* (ויאמנו) – the truth of the brother's claim will be established.<sup>6</sup> Yosef uses a term that is a conjugation of *emunah*. Rashi confirms that the that the term used by Yosef means that the truth of the brothers claims will be established.<sup>7</sup>

Rashi provides a wonderful example to support his interpretation. The Sotah is a woman suspected of adultery. She denies these charges. She is required to drink a special potion. If she is guilty, this potion will kill her. The kohen administers the test. He first confirms that she maintains her innocence and that she understands the consequences of the test. The woman responds to the kohen's query, "amen, amen" (אמן אמן).<sup>8</sup> Rashi maintains that the Sotah is providing an affirmation. She affirms that she maintains her innocence and she affirms that she understands the consequences of the test. According to Rashi, the terms *amen* and *emunah* share the same root and both mean the affirmation of a truth.

Let us consider one final example. Bnai Yisrael are attacked by Amalek. As long as Moshe's arms are lifted in prayer to Hashem, Bnai Yisrael dominates the battle. Moshe keeps his arms lifted the entire battle and Amalek is vanquished. The Torah describes Moshe's arms as *emunah* (אמונה).<sup>9</sup> Nachmanides, Rashbam and others define this term as meaning firmly established. Moshe's arms were firmly established in their uplifted position. Although in this case the term *emunah* is not used to refer to a conviction, its use is consistent with the previous examples. Here too, it is used to communicate the firm and resolute behavior of Moshe. Therefore used to describe a conviction, it describes the firm and definite nature of the conviction. It does not communicate the idea of blind or unfounded faith.

All of these examples illustrate that the term *emunah* and its derivatives are not references to faith or unsubstantiated belief. Instead, the term refers to a conviction that is strongly established or affirmed as true. Ibn Tibon was an accomplished scholar of the Torah. He probably used the term *emunah* in the manner it is employed in the Torah. His rendering does not contradict Maimonides insistence on knowledge of Hashem's existence. Ibn Tibon is indicating that we are obligated to firmly establish our conviction in Hashem's existence. This is completely consistent with Maimonides' requirement to base the conviction on knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

6 Sefer Beresheit 42:20.

7 Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 42:20.

8 Sefer BeMidbar 5:20.

9 Sefer Shemot 17:12.

10 Based on comments of Rabbi Israel Chait.

## The Difference Between a Mother's and Father's Relationships with Their Children

**Honor you father and your mother as Hashem your G-d has commanded you, so that you will lengthen your days and so that it will be good for you on the land that Hashem your G-d has given to you.**  
(Devarim 5:16)

In this week's parasha, Moshe reviews the Decalogue. Our passage states the obligation to honor one's mother and father.

The Talmud in Tractate Kiddushin asks an interesting question. In order to understand this question, a brief introduction is needed. There are two commandments regarding our basic obligations toward our parents. The above passage is the source for the obligation to honor our parents. However, we are also obligated to fear our parents. The Torah tells us, "Every person must fear his mother and father."<sup>11</sup> What is the difference between these two commandments? How does the obligation to honor our parents differ from the obligation to fear our parents? Maimonides discusses this issue. He explains that the commandment to fear our parents prohibits us from sitting in our parent's place, from contradicting our parents, from referring to them by their first names, and similar behaviors. The commandment to honor our parents obligates us to care for our parents. We are obligated to make sure that our parents are provided with food and clothing. The mitzvah to honor our parents also creates a general obligation to serve our parents.<sup>12</sup> In short, the obligation to fear our parents requires that we treat our parents with reverence. The mitzvah to honor our parents requires that we care for their needs.

The Talmud's discussion begins with a simple observation. The commandment – in our parasha – to honor our parents places the father before the mother. In contrast, the obligation to fear our parents places the mother before the father. The Talmud asks: Why in discussing the commandment to fear our parents is the mother placed before the father; but, in discussing the commandment to honor our parents, the father is placed before the mother?

Before considering the Talmud's response, it is important to acknowledge that the Talmud's comments assume a family in which the father and mother have very specific and different roles. In our society, these roles are not as clearly demarcated as in the model assumed by the Sages. So, the observations of the Sages may need some adaptation for our times. But, they are still very relevant. The Talmud's comments will be more contemporary if we understand them as reference to parenting roles or models, rather than gender specific references. In other words, the role that the Talmud assigns to the mother should be understood as a parenting

role, which today we may find, is assumed by the father or shared by each parent. Similarly, the role that the Talmud associates with the father may today be assumed by either parent or shared by both.

The Sages observed that the child – in the family that they envisioned – typically experiences a different relationship with his/her mother and father. They comment that the Creator recognizes that the love that we feel for our mothers comes to us more easily and naturally than the love we should feel for our fathers. After all, it is typical for the mother to be more demonstrative in expressing affection. The child responds with a reciprocal, deep and enduring love for his/her mother. In turn, the child's love engenders a desire to care for his/her mother. As explained above, the obligation to honor our parents is essentially a requirement to assure that they receive proper care. It is an expression of our love. In short, the child has a natural desire to fulfill the duties that the Torah includes in the mitzvah to honor our parents. The desire to fulfill these duties in regard to one's father is not as natural.

The Sages also observed that the father is responsible to teach his son Torah. Therefore, fear and reverence for one's father is more natural than fear and reverence for one's mother. The reverence that is required by the commandment to fear our parents is a natural expression of our relationship with our fathers.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, the Torah recognizes a natural tendency for the child to honor his/her mother and to fear his/her father. We do not have the same natural inclination to honor our fathers and to fear our mothers. However, we are not permitted to follow this natural inclination. In order to communicate this message, the Torah specifically places the father before the mother in discussing the obligation to honor our parents and places the mother before the father when instructing us to fear our parents. The message is that we may not give-in to our natural inclination. We must honor our fathers and fear our mothers.

Rav Yosef Dov Soleveitchik Zt"l was fascinated with the Talmud's contention that the child's feeling of love develops more naturally for one's mother. Does the child not appreciate all of the efforts that his/her father makes on his/her behalf and the love they express? Why does the child not feel a reciprocal love for his/her father?

Rav Soloveitchik observed that this discussion in the Talmud follows a *briyta* – a teaching of the Sages – that delineates the obligations of a father towards his child. The Sages instruct us that among the father's responsibilities towards his son are the obligations to teach him Torah, to support him in finding a wife, to teach him a trade, and to teach him to swim.<sup>14</sup> Rav Soloveitchik observed that these elements of the father's obligation have a specific theme. He must teach his son Torah, a trade, and to swim. All of these areas of instruction are designed to instill within the

<sup>11</sup> Sefer VaYikra 19:3.

<sup>12</sup> Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 6:3.

<sup>13</sup> Mesechet Kiddushin 30b-31a.

<sup>14</sup> Mesechet Kiddushin 29a.

child the ability to achieve independence and self-reliance. Rav Soloveitchik concluded that the Sages regarded this as the primary role of the father in the raising of the child. It is the father's responsibility to foster in the child independence and self-reliance.

Rav Soloveitchik observed that this relationship between the father and his child inevitably communicates a mixed or confusing message to the child. The child does recognize and acknowledge the love of his/her father. But, at the same time, the father's role of fostering independence results in the father making demands and establishing expectations. The father often feels he cannot coattail or indulge his child. The child perceives a harshness or distance in his/her father that is difficult to reconcile with the love that the child knows the father feels.

This relationship is very different from the relationship that the child experiences with his/her mother or mother-figure. The mother's role is not to push the child toward adulthood and independence. Instead, the mother is more indulgent. Her love for her child is expressed more demonstratively and intensely. As a result, the child's feelings towards his/her mother are less ambivalent. The love that the child receives from the mother is unambiguous and unconditional. In this relationship, the child does not sense the harshness or demands that characterize the relationship with his/her father or father-figure. The child responds to the obvious love communicated by his/her mother with a sense of devotion and affection that is far less ambivalent than the child's feelings towards his/her father.

But, in truth, the father does not love the child less than the mother. Instead, this love finds expression in a different form. The mother's love may be more demonstrably communicated. But, it is the father's love that motivates him to take on the difficult task of teaching his child and making demands. It is only because of this love that the father figure is willing to endure the conflicts and friction that often result from the demands and the expectations that he places upon his child.

These feelings toward our parents develop during childhood. As we mature, to some extent, our understanding of the roles and efforts of our parents develops and matures. But, despite our more mature views and understanding, it is often difficult to completely alter the feelings we developed as children. So, even as we mature into adults, we may tend to more naturally feel affection for our mothers and reverence for our fathers.<sup>15</sup>

Let us reconsider the comments of the Talmud. As explained above, the message of the Torah is that we are not permitted to follow this natural inclination. We must honor our fathers and fear our mothers. It seems that according to Rav Soloveitchik, the Torah is telling us a profound and far-reaching idea. The feelings that we develop towards our parents do not dissipate as we mature into adults. We advance cognitively. But, many of the feelings that we develop as children remain with us into adulthood. As a result, as adults, we experience a sort of confusion. We cannot easily outgrow or abandon the feelings that we develop as children. But, as we become more mature and become parents ourselves, we recognize that these feelings are simplistic and based upon immature perceptions developed in childhood. We are trapped between the feelings developed in childhood, and the cognitive perceptions developed in adulthood.

Essentially, the commandments to honor our fathers as we do our mothers and to revere our mothers as we do our fathers admonish us to accept that our feelings are not based upon a mature and accurate appraisal of the roles that our parents have played in our development. In other words, we must recognize that although our feelings are intense and very real to us, these feelings do not reflect an accurate mature appraisal of the reality of our parents' love and concern for our well-being.

Sponsored by Dr. Saul and Joyce Rivkin  
to honor the yahrzeit of Saul's father,  
William H. Rivkin,  
Chaim Ziev Ben Yehuda Ha Kohen