

PARASHAT YITRO

Exodus 18:1–20:23

Parashat Yitro continues the journey of the Israelites across the Sinai desert. Before returning to Egypt, Moses had left his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, with his father-in-law, Jethro. Hearing that Moses has freed the Israelites from Egypt, Jethro brings Zipporah and her children to the Israelite camp. Moses tells his father-in-law about the Israelite liberation, and they offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to God. The next day Jethro observes that the people are bringing all their problems to Moses. He suggests that the burden is too great for one person to bear and advises Moses to choose trustworthy people to share leadership with him. Moses takes his advice. Three months after entering the Sinai desert, Moses and the Israelites camp at Mount Sinai. Moses goes up to the top of the mountain, and God speaks to him, giving him the Ten Commandments. Below, the people hear thunder and see lightning. They remain at a distance while Moses communes with God.

OUR TARGUM

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Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, hears that the Israelites have escaped from Egypt. He takes Zipporah, Moses' wife, and his grandsons, Gershom and Eliezer, to where Moses and the Israelites are camping in the Sinai desert. Moses tells Jethro about the wondrous liberation from Egypt. Jethro is delighted and says: "Blessed be the Lord who delivered you from the Egyptians

and from Pharaoh. . . . Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods."

During the next day Jethro sees large numbers of people bringing their disputes to Moses. "Why do you act alone?" he asks him. Moses explains that the people need a judge to deal with their disagreements and a teacher to instruct them in God's laws.

"What you are doing is wrong," Jethro tells him. "The task should not be done by one person." Jethro urges Moses to find "trustworthy people who will not take bribes" and appoint them as

"chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Let them . . . decide every minor dispute themselves. Make it easier for yourself, and let them share the burden with you."

Moses follows Jethro's advice. Later Jethro returns to Midian.

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Three months after departing from Egypt, Moses leads the people to the wilderness of Sinai. They camp before Mount Sinai, and God tells Moses to say to the people: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. . . . You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Hearing God's words, the Israelites respond: "All that God has spoken we will do!"

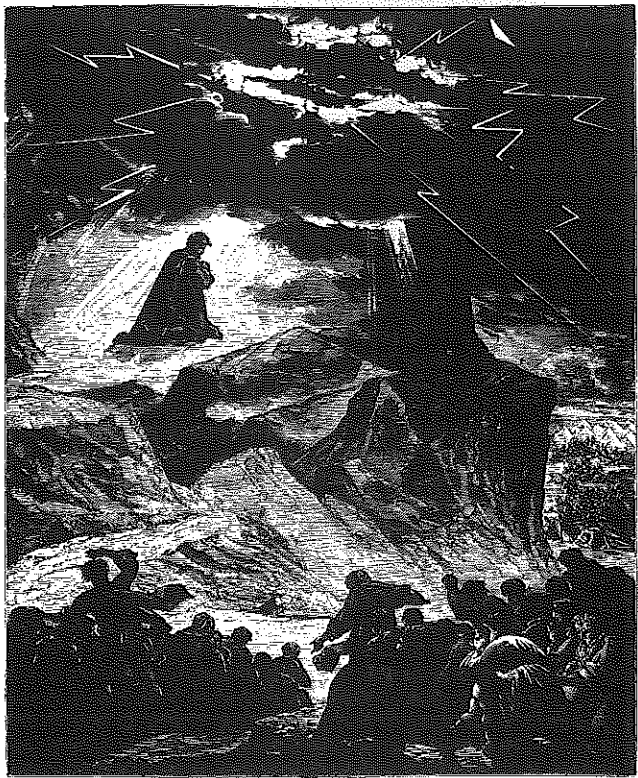
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Three days later Moses leads the people to Mount Sinai. The mountain appears to be on fire. Smoke rises from its peaks. The people hear the loud blasts of a horn and are frightened. Moses leaves them and goes to the top of the mountain. There he receives the Ten Commandments.

1. I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.

2. You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. . . .

3. You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God. . . .



4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

5. Honor your father and mother. . . .

6. You shall not murder.

7. You shall not commit adultery.

8. You shall not steal.

9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

THEMES

Parashat Yitro contains two important themes:

1. Sharing leadership of the community.
2. Appreciating what happened at Mount Sinai.

PEREK ALEF: *The Burden of Leadership*

During Jethro's visit to the Israelite camp, he notices long lines of people waiting to bring their disputes before Moses. Sitting alone from morning until evening, Moses listens to each argument, hears each problem, and states his judgment on each situation brought before him. Jethro is astounded. "What is this thing that you are doing for the people?" he asks Moses. "Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?"

Noting that Jethro was deeply upset with Moses, an ancient sage suggests that what disturbed Jethro was not that Moses appeared overworked but that Moses had become full of self-importance. Moses, he says, was "behaving like a king who sits on his throne while all the people stand."

Rabbi Judah of the village of Akko also detected a dangerous element of conceit in Moses. Why, he asks, did Moses tell Jethro that "the people are coming to *me*" instead of saying that "the people are coming to *God*"? Rabbi Judah's question raises other questions about Moses. Did he believe that he was superior to his people or even to God in helping them solve their problems? Was he beginning to assume that he alone had the wisdom to advise them?

Rabbi Judah's questions seem to imply that Jethro was upset with Moses because he saw him losing his humility, becoming a pompous leader who believed only he could make decisions for his people. For that reason, Rabbi Judah argues, Jethro criticized Moses and told him to find others with whom to share the responsibilities of leadership. (*Mechilta, Amalek, IV*)

While most interpreters do not criticize Moses for holding himself above his people or for playing the role of "king of the Israelites," many cite the dangerous consequences of his decision to judge the people by himself.



Zugot

For instance, Rabbi Joshua comments that Jeth-

ro's warning to Moses was a practical one. Jethro saw that Moses had taken on too much. The work was overwhelming. Fearful that Moses would collapse from exhaustion, Jethro told him, "They will tire you out and cause you to fail in your leadership of them."

Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'im agrees that the danger to Moses was "exhaustion," but he offers a different perspective. He claims Jethro also believed that Moses was exhausting the people. By insisting that he was the only one who could hear their problems and disputes, he forced them to stand in long lines for many hours in the hot desert sun. As a result they became irritable. They turned to one another with complaints. "Moses is taking too long to hear these cases. By the time he hears us he will be too tired to make a fair decision." Rabbi Eleazar says that Jethro heard their dissatisfaction and warned Moses: "The people will despise and reject you with their criticisms." Jethro saw that Moses' desire to do everything himself was wasteful and inefficient. Instead of helping the people, it was creating frustration and dissatisfaction among them. (*Mechilta, Amalek, IV*)



Ramban (Nachmanides)

Nachmanides observes that the trouble with Moses' decision to hear all the disputes and make all the judgments by himself was not simply the frustration of the people but the danger of increasing violence and injustice among them. Jethro, Nachmanides says, told Moses that the people "will tolerate the violence committed against them because they have no opportunity to tell it to you. They do not want to abandon their work and affairs to wait for a free moment when they will be able to approach you." In other words, Jethro saw that, as the people lost faith in Moses' ability to hear their cases, they began to take the law into their own hands. Because they refused to waste their time waiting for him to make judgments, violence and injustice increased among them.

Essentially, in Jethro's critique of Moses, Nach-

manides sees a very important criticism of courts not equipped to handle the large number of cases brought to them. The results are long delays, mounting frustration, a loss of faith in the system's capacity to deliver justice, and, often, the decision of some people to take the law into their own hands. Because, at first, Moses insisted on doing everything himself, he increased the dangers of violence and injustice, rather than providing for efficient and fair judgment. (Commentary on Exodus 19:22)

Excellence in management

The excellent companies have a deeply ingrained philosophy that says, in effect, "respect the individual," "make people winners," "let them stand out," "treat people as adults." (Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., In Search of Excellence, Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., New York, 1982, p. 277)

Participating in management

(Decentralization) . . . increases the amount of discretion and autonomy that individuals have at work by decentralizing decision-making and increasing participation in decision-making processes as much as possible. . . .

The benefits of decentralization in terms of reduced distress and strain are illustrated in the experience of an officer of a hospital equipment corporation. Over a ten-year period, this officer had worked for two different corporations. One company was very centralized; the other used a very decentralized decision-making approach. During his ten years in the centralized corporation, he had insomnia, depression, and nightmares about going to jail and about running afoul of corporate policies and procedures. . . . After a year of this distress, he left the centralized corporation and subsequently joined the decentralized corporation. Following the move to the new corporation, his insomnia and depression cleared. . . . His family reported that he was much easier to be around, and he was more the man they used to know. (James C. Quick and Jonathan D. Quick, Organizational Stress and Preventive Management, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1984, pp. 163-171)



Sarna

Modern interpreter Nahum Sarna agrees with Nachmanides' observation. "Jethro," he says, "is appalled at the inefficiency of the system of justice, with its inevitably debilitating effects on Moses himself and the hardships it imposes on the public." It is for that reason that he suggests a new system to Moses. He recommends that he appoint judges for thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, allowing them to hear disputes and make judgments. "Make it easier for yourself," he counsels Moses, "and let them share the burden with you." (*Exploring Exodus*, pp. 126-127)

The benefits of sharing the burden of leadership, of "decentralizing" seem clear in this situation. Justice will be dispensed more quickly. The people will be less frustrated and less likely to take the law into their own violent hands. Trust will be established and strengthened by confidence in a system of justice that works. Leadership will be more rested, more alert, and more accessible. Jethro's suggestion to Moses about dividing up the burdens of leadership is both functionally wise and socially just.

Jethro, however, not only recommends the sharing of leadership but offers a critique for choosing leaders. He tells Moses: "You shall seek out from among all the people those who are capable and fear God, those who are trustworthy and spurn ill-gotten gain." Not surprisingly, interpreters from all ages have explored the meaning of this remarkable definition of leadership.



Rashi

One ancient sage suggests that "capable" means "wealthy, people of means." Rashi agrees, saying that people of "wealth will not need to flatter others or show them favor."

Nachmanides disagrees. "A capable person," he argues, is "wise, alert, and fair" in the adminis-

tration of justice and is "strong and alert" when it comes to "organizing troops for battle." (*Mechilta, Amalek, IV*; Rashi on Exodus 18:21; Nachmanides on Exodus 18:21)



Ibn Ezra

Ibn Ezra offers another point of view. He writes that the phrase "capable people" means "people who have the strength to tolerate without fear the hardship of those who criticize their decisions." For Ibn Ezra leadership means independence, confidence in one's opinions, and the strength to stand behind them. (Comment on Exodus 18:21)



Sforno believes that when the Torah uses the words "capable people" it has in mind individuals "who possess the talent to lead Jews out of a fight, and a sufficient enough knowledge of an enemy's strategies and resources to guarantee victory." "Capable people" are those who understand how to compromise and resolve differences between angry parties. But they are not naive. According to Sforno, they also realize that not all disagreements can be settled. Often there are anger, hard feelings, and threats of violence between parties. In such a situation a "capable person" will know how to judge the weaknesses and strengths of the opponent, and how to make efficient and effective use of all resources available for victory. (Comment on Exodus 18:21)

The commentators also ask the question: What can the description "trustworthy people who spurn ill-gotten gain" mean?

Rabbi Joshua suggests that the phrase describes those "who would never accept money while they were sitting in judgment." Clearly, Joshua has in mind people who refuse to accept bribes or judges who, while hearing a case, refuse to accept any money from anyone for fear that it might appear as though they were accepting bribes.

Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa and his friends argue that the phrase "spurn ill-gotten gain" describes "those who do not put great importance on their own money." According to Rabbi Hanina and his friends, such people are to be respected and revered. They are to be trusted because "if they do not put great importance on their own wealth, then they are not likely to place much importance upon taking the money of others to increase what they possess." (*Mechilta, Amalek, IV*)

Rules for judges

Any judge who takes money from the judgments he makes is no longer qualified to be a judge. (Baba Batra 58b)

Any judge who is in the habit of borrowing things from his neighbors is forbidden to act as a judge in a lawsuit involving them. (Ketubot 105b)

Nachmanides explains that people who do not place much importance upon their own wealth are likely to be trustworthy because they will not be intimidated by those who offer bribes or threaten their property. Instead, they will say, "Even if this person will burn my property, or destroy it, I will render a just decision." Such people, Nachmanides argues, "love the truth and hate oppression. When they see oppression and violence, they cannot tolerate them. Therefore, they put all their efforts into 'rescuing those who are robbed from those who defraud them.'" (Comment on Exodus 18:21 with quote from Jeremiah 21:12)

Commenting on Jethro's suggestion to Moses that he share the leadership of the community with others, the ancient sage Rabbi Nehemiah taught that "as soon as a person is appointed to leadership, he or she must no longer say: 'I live for my own benefit. I do not care about the community.' For now the whole burden of the community is on his or her shoulders. If a person is seen causing harm to another, or breaking the law, the leader must act to prevent the wrongdoing or be punished." (*Shemot Rabbah 27:9*)

Leadership has always been a serious responsibility. Caring for the safety of a community and preserving its culture and traditions are complex

tasks. Jethro appreciated the need to share the burden, and the interpreters of his advice to Moses creatively define for us the qualities of leadership required by Jewish tradition. It is a high ethical standard, which continues to be useful as a measure for excellence in leadership today.

PEREK BET: *What Happened at Mount Sinai?*

The giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai is one of the most important events in Jewish history. It is also a moment filled with mystery. The Torah reports that, while the people of Israel stood at the bottom of the mountain, they not only saw flames and smoke rising from it but also heard the blare of horns and felt "the whole mountain tremble violently." According to the report, the people were so frightened that they remained below while Aaron and Moses climbed to the top. Afterwards, Moses descended and presented the Ten Commandments to the Israelites.

From that moment until today, Jews have asked the question: "What happened at Mount Sinai?" Is the Torah report an accurate recording of history or a legend in which some kernels of truth are hidden?

How the Torah was given

The Torah was given portion by portion. (Gittin 60a)

The Torah was not given to angels. (Berachot 25a)

When the Torah was given, God showed Moses all the details of Torah and all the innovations that would later be introduced by the rabbis. (Megillah 19b)

Moses received the Torah at Mount Sinai and handed it on to Joshua. Joshua handed it to the elders, and the elders handed it to the prophets. The prophets handed it on to the people of the Great Assembly. (Avot 1:1)

There are many differing views about what happened at Mount Sinai. For instance, Rabbi Yochanan claims that God's voice was divided into seven voices, and the seven voices were further divided into the seventy languages spoken by all the peoples of the world at that time. Other rabbis of Yochanan's time disagree. They claim that God spoke with a single voice.

Rabbi Isaac taught that "the message of all the prophets who were to arise in later generations—people like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah, and Hosea—was given to Moses with the Torah." Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish agrees. (*Exodus Rabbah*, Yitro, 38:6)

Extending this idea that all the books of the Hebrew Bible were given to Moses at Mount Sinai, some of the ancient rabbis claim that God gave two Torahs to Moses. One they call *Torah Shebichetav*, "Written Torah," comprising the Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The other they call *Torah Shebealpeh*, "Oral Torah," made up of all the books of the Prophets, the *Midrash Agadah*, the Talmud, and all decisions and explanations of Jewish law by rabbinic scholars through the ages.

Agreeing that two Torahs were given by God to Moses and the Jewish people, other sages explain that God said to Moses: "Write down everything I tell you, for I have made a covenant with Israel." God then dictated the Torah, the Talmud (*Mishnah* and *Gemara*), the Midrash, and even answers to all the questions that leading rabbis in the future would require when they were asked "What did God say to Moses on Mount Sinai?" (*Tanchuma*, Ki Tisa, 58b; *Pesikta Rabbati* 7b)

Clearly, the ancient rabbis have added their own versions of what actually happened between God, Moses, and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. Their belief that two Torahs were given, including answers to all questions that might arise throughout all time, not only adds to the mystery of whatever occurred at Mount Sinai, but also grants special authority to all subsequent interpreters. This is an important point that should not be overlooked. As a result of their theory of "two Torahs," rabbis now have the right to say that their own interpretations or decisions are "the law according to Moses at Mount Sinai!"



Rambam (Maimonides)

The whole Torah

I believe with perfect faith that the whole Torah, now in our possession, is the same that was given to Moses our teacher. (Moses Maimonides, Principles of Faith, #8)

This view of what happened at Sinai became the most dominant interpretation among Jews from early rabbinic times until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Philosopher Yehudah Halevi, for example, writes that "the people believed that Moses held direct communication with God; that his words were not creations of his own mind. . . . They did not believe Moses had seen a vision in sleep, or that someone had spoken with him between sleeping and waking so that he only heard the words in his imagination but not with his ears, that he saw a phantom and afterwards pretended that God had spoken with him." Halevi concludes by citing proof of God's speaking to Moses at Mount Sinai. He says there was no "trickery" there. "For God's speaking was followed by God's writing. For God wrote the Ten Commandments on two tablets of precious stone and handed them to Moses." (*The Kuzari*, New York, Schocken Books, 1964, pp. 60-61)

Orthodox Jews continue to claim that God gave the Torah, both the Written Law and the Oral Law, to Moses on Mount Sinai. It was a onetime gift or revelation. A complete Torah with everything that Jews would ever need to know was presented to Moses and passed on afterwards from generation to generation as *Torah mi-Sinai*, "Torah from Sinai." As proof for this claim today's Orthodox authorities, like Halevi in his time, cite the Torah text itself. It says, they argue, that "God spoke all these words." Therefore, they conclude that is obviously what happened.

A few Orthodox thinkers, however, disagree. Like Rabbi David Hartman of Jerusalem, they do not believe that the Torah given at Mount Sinai

was "a complete, finished system." Hartman explains that "belief in the giving of the Torah at Sinai does not necessarily imply that the full truth has already been given and that our task is only to unfold what was already present in the fullness of the founding moment of revelation." What happened at Mount Sinai, he says, "gave the community a direction, an arrow pointing toward a future filled with many surprises. . . . The Sinai moment of revelation . . . invites one and all to acquire the competence to explore the terrain and extend the road. It does not require passive obedience and submission to the wisdom of the past." (*A Living Covenant*, The Free Press, New York, 1985, p. 8)

Torah for Reform Jews

Torah results from the relationship between God and the Jewish people. The records of our earliest confrontations are uniquely important to us. Lawgivers and prophets, historians and poets gave us a heritage whose study is a religious imperative and whose practice is our chief means to holiness. Rabbis and teachers, philosophers and mystics, gifted Jews in every age amplified the Torah tradition. For millennia, the creation of Torah has not ceased and Jewish creativity in our time is adding to the chain of tradition. (From "A CCAR Centenary Perspective: New Platform for Reform Judaism," Reform Judaism, November 1976, p. 4)

What the Torah reveals

There is little reason to question that Moses, who led our people in the wilderness and organized them into a nation, also gave them laws. Those laws formed the basis of the various decisions and practices by which the Israelites lived after they entered the Land [of Israel]. In the course of time, those decisions and practices were recorded, compiled, and edited, a process which continued down to the time of Ezra (420 B.C.E.), some centuries after the sojourn in the wilderness. . . . The Torah reveals the working of God in the life of our people in that it articulates the earliest striving of our people to live up to the highest potentialities of human nature. (Mordecai M.

Kaplan, Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers, *Reconstructionist Press, New York, 1956, pp. 167-168*)

Hartman's view—what happened at Mount Sinai was an unforgettable “founding moment” in Jewish history but not the conclusion of God's gift of Torah to the people of Israel—is close to the view held by Rabbi Jakob J. Petuchowski, a leading Reform Jewish scholar. In explaining what occurred, Rabbi Petuchowski comments: “The thunders and lightnings at Sinai, as they appear in the biblical narrative, are an echo sounding through the ages of what had happened there. They testify to the fact of Revelation, to the impact it had on the people. But it is only the man of a prosaic mind, the man lacking in imagination, who would read this biblical account as if it were a news bulletin reporting in every detail what has actually happened.”

For Petuchowski, the giving of Torah at Sinai was a momentous event in the history of the Jewish people, but it is not to be seen as the moment in which the entire Torah was given to Moses. Quite the contrary. “The laws and commandments of the Torah,” Petuchowski writes, “do not all go back to that moment—at any rate, not in the form in which we read them today. They have evolved in the course of the centuries. Different circumstances called forth different responses. Life in the days of the Hebrew monarchy was different from life in the days of the Judges. And the generations engaged in the task of settling in Palestine faced different problems from those that beset the wanderers in the desert. Yet all the different responses to all the different challenges were made from the perspective of the initial commitment at Sinai. . . . The ‘giving of the Torah,’ therefore, is not confined to the occasion at Sinai. . . . What parts of the Torah really and truly took on their present form already at Sinai we shall probably never know. . . .” (*Ever Since Sinai*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Arbit, 1979, pp. 67-80)

Petuchowski's view of an evolving Torah of commandments and their interpretations is shared by Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut who, in considering what happened at Mount Sinai, asks the question: “What precisely was revealed?” Plaut argues that

“the traditional answer that the Written and Oral Laws in their entirety were entrusted to Moses at Sinai is unacceptable to me. Only the Written Law then? I rebel equally against this thought.” Plaut bases his conviction that the entire Torah tradition evolved over the long course of history on the basis of archeological and historical research.

So what does Plaut believe happened at Mount Sinai? In answering the question, he recalls the explanation of modern philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, who believed that the people did not hear words spoken at Mount Sinai at all. What happened there and what left a lasting impression, Rosenzweig speculates, is that the people encountered God. It was at Sinai that the people began the process of searching out what God wanted of them. From that moment on, the Jewish people has been engaged in a covenant, a partnership with God. “A Jew,” Plaut comments, “by the very condition of his Jewishness, pays the continuing price of Sinai. If Jewishness remains his fate, Judaism remains the framework of his native spiritual existence, and God his partner. . . . Each generation should regard itself as standing at Sinai.” (*The Case for the Chosen People*, Doubleday, New York, 1965, pp. 90-95)

This conviction that something wonderful and awesome took place between God and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai is also central in the philosophy of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. He comments that “a cosmic fear enveloped all those who stood at Sinai, a moment more staggering than the heart could feel.” Heschel explains: “*What* we see may be an illusion; *that* we see can never be questioned. The thunder and lightning at Sinai may have been merely an impression; but to have suddenly been endowed with the power of seeing the whole world struck with an overwhelming awe of God was a new sort of perception. . . . Only in moments when we are able to share in the spirit of awe that fills the world are we able to understand what happened to Israel at Sinai.”

Heschel's conception of the wonder-filled event at Mount Sinai maintains that something extraordinary took place between God, Moses, and the Jewish people. He does not, however, identify what of the Torah might have been revealed at

that time. What is significant about the moment at Mount Sinai is that God spoke and the people of Israel responded. "It was both an event in the life of God and an event in the life of humanity. . . . The wonder of Israel's acceptance was as decisive as the wonder of God's expression. . . . Without that power to respond, without the fact that there was a people willing to accept, to hear, the divine command, Sinai would have been impossible." (*God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York, 1955, pp. 195-197, 259-260)

So what did happen at Mount Sinai? According to Heschel, God spoke, and the people of Israel listened. They heard the commandments and responded that they would live according to them. The moment was one of the most important in Jewish history because in it God chose and challenged the Jewish people to live according to Torah, and the Jewish people answered, "All that God has spoken we will do!"

We have discovered many theories about what actually happened at Mount Sinai between God, Moses, and the Jewish people. Perhaps two complete Torahs were given by God in that wonder-filled moment. More likely, a God-inspired Moses delivered the Ten Commandments, and later generations, also inspired, wrote down the other commandments that were compiled and edited into what we know today as the Torah. No one can be sure.

All that can be said with certainty is that, whatever happened at Mount Sinai, the people of Israel never forgot the wonder of it. They recalled it as momentous, mysterious, and awesome. They believed that God had spoken and that they had been chosen to become a "treasured people . . .

a holy nation." At Sinai, God and the Jewish people entered into a sacred covenant filled with mitzvot—ethical and ritual responsibilities that not only continue to evolve but give meaning to Jewish lives and justification for the existence of the Jewish people.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What problems do the commentators believe Moses created for the Israelites by setting himself up as their only judge? Do these same problems exist today? How might Jethro's advice to Moses help solve contemporary problems?
2. Is "decentralization" really necessary for good management and effective institutions? What are some of the negative aspects of "sharing leadership" rather than relying upon one strong personality? How might some of these problems be overcome? How did Jethro anticipate such problems?
3. Orthodox Rabbi J. David Bleich writes: "The text of the Bible as we have it today—that of the Torah scroll read in the synagogue—is identical in every significant detail with the original scroll of the Torah written by Moses in the wilderness." How do the interpreters in our chapter agree or disagree with Bleich?
4. How has the Oral Torah tradition of evolving new interpretations of Jewish law and practice actually guaranteed the survival of the Written Torah? Is there a parallel between the Constitution of the United States and its interpretation by the courts and the Torah with its long history of rabbinic interpretations?