

What Happened at Sinai?

By Rabbi Herschel Becker, Young Israel of Kendall

We refer to the holiday of *Shavuot* in *Kiddush* and *Tefillah* as *z'man matan Toraseinu* - the time of the giving of our Torah. What do we refer to when we say we received the Torah on *Shavuot*? Was it the scroll as we know it? Did that include Torah *sheb'al peh* - the Oral Law? Was it the *Luchos* - the Tablets? Did we actually receive anything at that time? Is it the time we were given ten commandments? If so, what happened to the other 603?

The Torah states that three days after the splitting of the sea, the people of Israel reached a place called Marah.

Rashi, Beshalach 15:25

(כה) שם שם לו. במרה נתן להם מקצת פרשיות של תורה שיתעסקו בהם, שבת ופרה אדומה ודינין

At Marah the Mitzvos of Shabbos, honoring father and mother, the laws of the Parah Adumah (red heifer) and civil laws were presented to the people (Rashi, Beshalach 15:25).

Ramban, Beshalach 15:25

והיה זה להרגילם במצות ולדעת אם יקבלו אותם בשמחה ובטוב לבב

The Ramban explains that the laws were not meant to be binding at that time, but rather build familiarity with the Torah and help the Jewish people see it as a source of study.

In *Mishpatim* (**Mishpatim 24:3**) Rashi explains that on the fourth day of the month of Sivan, Moshe repeated to B'nei Yisrael the *Mitzvos* of Marah as well as the Noahide laws.

Rashi, Mishpatim 24:3

ויבא משה ויספר לעם. בו ביום. את כל דברי ה'. מצות פרישה והגבלה. ואת כל המשפטים. שבע מצות שנצטוו בני נח, ושבת וכבוד אב ואם ופרה אדומה ודינין שניתנו להם במרה

In verse 4 the Torah states, "And Moshe wrote all of the words of Hashem."

Rashi (Mishpatim 24:4) explains that Moshe wrote the text from *Breishis* until the giving of the Torah as well as the *Mitzvos* they were commanded in Marah.

ויכתוב משה. מבראשית ועד מתן תורה וכתב מצות שנצטוו במרה. וישכם בבקר. בהמשה בסיון

In verse 7 it states, "He took the *Sefer Habris* - the book of the covenant - and read it within earshot of the people." Rashi (**Mishpatim 24:7**) explains this took place the next day, on the fifth day of Sivan. Moshe read to them from *Breishis* until the events of Sinai as well as the *Mitzvos* from Marah.

ספר הברית. מבראשית ועד מתן תורה ומצות שנצטוו במרה

Summary of position 1: According to the explanation of Rashi, sections of the Torah that preceded the events at Sinai, were written and read before the Revelation at Sinai.

In Yisro (**Shemot 20:1**) the Torah states: “G-d spoke all of these statements, saying.” Rashi (**Shemot 20:1**) explains that Hashem stated all of the ten commandments in one utterance.

את כל הדברים האלה. מלמד שאמר הקב"ה עשרת הדברות בדבור אחד, מה שאי אפשר לאדם לומר כן.

The people could not comprehend all of the words said together, and therefore Hashem repeated the first two commandments. Hearing the voice of Hashem, though, was overwhelming, so Moshe related the other eight commandments.

Since Hashem knew the statements would be incomprehensible, why were they uttered in one breath in the first place? The Gur Aryeh (**Shemot 20:1 on Gur Aryeh super-commentary on Rashi**) explains that this was done to teach us that the Torah is one unit, not individual concepts. Each element is an integral and inseparable part of the whole.

Summary of position 2: Hashem uttered all ten commandments simultaneously, then stated the first two and Moshe finished the rest.

At the time of Revelation, were ten commandments given or 613?

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (**Shemot 20:1**) states:

The ten utterances do not have any greater holiness or importance than any other Mitzvos from the Mitzvos of the Torah. They do not include all of the Mitzvos of the Torah, and are not more sanctified than the other Mitzvos.

The Almighty clearly proclaimed these ten utterances only as an introduction, as a prelude to all of the important edicts that would follow as it states (Exodus 19:9) “Behold! I come to you...so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever.”

This states clearly that the purpose of standing at Sinai was to prepare the hearts of the people for receiving all of the other Mitzvos that would be given to them in the future through Moshe and to make certain in their hearts and to remove all doubt as “Hashem spoke to the congregation” (Deuteronomy 5:19) as they saw with their own eyes. Because of this they will accept the other Mitzvos as well - as Hashem spoke through Moshe, and they will fulfill them with complete faith, so that they are firmly established forever.

Summary of position 3: Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that only ten Mitzvos were given at the time of Revelation. The other Mitzvos were told to Moshe afterwards when he ascended above Mt. Sinai.

The Talmud (**Berachos 5a**), referring to Shemos (**24:12**), explains that the Mishneh, Prophets, Writings and Gemara as well, were given to Moshe at Sinai. This took place after hearing the Ten Commandments as he was told to ascend to receive the *Luchos*.

Talmud (**Megillah 19b**) states that the Holy One, Blessed is He, showed Moshe the fine interpretations of the Torah and the fine Rabbinic interpretations and what the Sages would innovate in the future. And what is it that the Sages would innovate in the future? The Mitzvah of reading the Megillah.

The **Tosfos Yom Tov (in his introduction to the Mishneh)** says that the Talmud is very careful in its choice of words. Hashem “showed” Moshe the fine interpretations, not that they were presented to Moshe. The distinction indicates that Moshe was to see these lessons, but not necessarily transmit them.

שאני אומר שזה לא היה מוסר משה לאחרים כלל. ודקדוקי לשונם כך הוא שאמרו מלמד שהראהו ולא אמר שמסר לו או שלמדו...כאדם המראה דבר לחבירו לראותו ואינו נותנו לו. וזה דקדוק נאה וענין אמתי

Even though the Oral Law was to be transmitted, it was to be done with discretion. For example, Moshe was aware of the reading of Megillah to take place in later generations, but was not to transmit the fact that the Jews will be saved through Mordechai and Esther on Purim.

Summary Step 4: Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the *Luchos* and learn the secrets of the Torah and the Oral Law, to be transmitted with discretion.

It is noteworthy that in the Biblical and Talmudic text the phrase ten “commandments” is nowhere to be found. They are referred to as the ten *dibros* - utterances or sayings. Even though these commandments were chosen as introduction, Judaism is a religion of 613 and not 10 commandments.

But why were these 10 chosen to be the introduction?

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explains:

If you analyze the order that these basic laws follow, you will find truth shedding light on the concepts of G-d's Torah. The first half starts with "Anochi" - "I am" and concludes with "Honor" (thy father and mother). The second half starts "You shall not kill" and ends with, "You shall not covet." The commandment to recognize the oneness of the Creator begins with a search of one's heart "You shall not have" (another god). But it doesn't end there. One is demanded to exhibit control regarding that which comes from the mouth "You shall not say in vain"; one's work "Remember the Shabbos"; and family "Honor". The societal edicts begin with demands dealing with action and speech "You shall not kill", "You shall not commit adultery", "You shall not steal", "You shall not bear false witness". It does not stop there, for the heart and mind are also to be controlled "You shall not covet".

This is the truth that is stated here. All matters of religion and that which is called the service of G-d with truth of heart and mind, are considered worthless if one cannot control that which comes from the mouth and one's actions in dealing with family and friends. Only with our actions can we indicate that we are truly and sincerely serving G-d. The opposite holds true as well. Any trait of goodness in the life shared with others is considered naught if the intent is only to do that which appears to be proper in the eyes of others, if it is unaccompanied by sincerity of the heart and purity of thought. For only Hashem can see what is in the heart and judge one's thoughts. Every action of goodness should emanate from the heart, and every good feeling of the heart should result in action, provided that a person looks to Hashem, for that is the root and source for each good thought. This is the spirit that hovers over the foundations of the Torah and is this spirit that binds the two Luchos - the Luchos of laws between man and G-d, and the Luchos of the Mitzvos between man and man - until there is no distinction between them.

Simply put, in choosing these ten utterances the Torah is presenting a formula to be carried through in our fulfillment of all the *Mitzvos*:

Action and Speech
 coupled with
Heart and Thought
 in service of Hashem
 and in our dealings with those around us.
 This is the formula for our *Kabalas Hatorah*
 Receiving the Torah on this day,
 and for every day of our lives.