

LAMPLIGHTER

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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

In this week's Torah portion, Va'etchanan, Moses describes the Revelation at Mount Sinai to the younger generation of Jews who were about to enter the Land of Israel. He describes the voice of G-d, saying: "A great voice, which did not continue." One of the explanations that the Midrash offers for this is that G-d's voice did not have an echo.

The Midrash's answer seems to beg a few questions. How does the absence of an echo indicate greatness? If the voice was indeed strong, would it not have produced an echo? Furthermore, why did G-d perform such a miracle? Since miracles are not performed unnecessarily, why would G-d seemingly change the laws of nature just so that His voice would not produce an echo?

An echo is produced when sound waves hit an object. When the sound waves reach a wall, a mountain, or any such obstacle, they are bounced right back. The only condition necessary to produce an echo is that the object deflecting the sound waves must be strong and rigid. If the object is soft and yielding, the sound will be absorbed and no echo will result.

This physical phenomenon will explain why G-d's voice on Mount Sinai had no echo. When G-d said, "I am the L-rd your G-d," His voice was so overwhelmingly powerful that there was nothing in the world that was strong enough to deflect the sound. G-d's voice actually penetrated the physical world. Every object in the world, from the inanimate to the higher forms of life, absorbed the G-dly voice and was affected by it.

The phenomenon of the Revelation at Sinai is akin to what will take place in the Messianic Era, described in these words: "And the Glory of G-d will be revealed, and all flesh will see." Even our very bodies will be able to perceive G-dliness. So it was at the Revelation. All of physical reality absorbed the Revelation of the G-dly voice.

This is why G-d's voice had no echo. This was not a miracle; the laws of nature were not at all abrogated. It is in keeping with natural law that when a sound is absorbed, no echo is produced. And since the Voice was totally integrated into physical reality, there was nothing that could bounce the sound back. Therefore, the absence of an echo shows the infinite strength of the voice, rather than the opposite.

This phenomenon did not occur only once in the history of the world. Whenever a Jew studies Torah, the holy voice of Torah penetrates the physical surroundings and elevates the world. Our Sages say that in the World To Come, "the very beams of the house will bear witness," for they have been absorbing all the holiness produced when a person learns Torah in his home. (This explains why many tzadikim commanded that their coffins be made from the wood of their desks and tables where they learned Torah and gave food to the poor, for the Torah and mitzvot were "absorbed" by the very planks themselves!)

The power of Torah is such that nothing can stand in its way. The world was created in such a manner as to enable the continuing voice of Revelation to penetrate the corporeal world even today.

The Ten Commandments - Not Multiple Choice

By Yossi Goldman

Often, I hear people say, "Well, I am not all that religious, but I do keep the Ten Commandments." At such times I'm tempted to say, "Really? You do know that The Ten Commandments are not multiple choice . . ." I sometimes wonder if the people who glibly make that claim actually know what the Ten Commandments are . . .

Moses reviews the Big Ten in the Torah in Deuteronomy. Why not go through the list, so we can all get a better idea of how we score?

1) **I am the L-rd thy G-d.** Basically, this is the command to believe in one G-d. I have every confidence that we all get full marks on this one.

2) **Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.** Okay, so you don't make a habit of bowing down to that bust of the Buddha in your living room. The question is, should it be there in the first place? And isn't it interesting that today we have all these "Idols" competitions being run around the world. Then, of course, there are all those well-established contemporary idols we tend to ogle and worship, celebrities like Brad Pitt, Madonna, Donald Trump, or even (Heaven protect me) Oprah.

3) **Do not take the name of G-d in vain.** This is not only about taking oaths or swearing in court. What about swearing in the street? How many choice four-letter words are in your vocabulary? And why drag G-d into those graphic expressions?

4) **Observe the Shabbat day to keep it holy.** Interestingly, the Ten Commandments appear twice in the Torah. In Exodus, the fourth Commandment begins with Zachor—Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. This week, we read Shamor—Observe the Sabbath day. "Remembering" is achieved through positive acts such as kiddush, candle-lighting, etc. "Observing" Shabbos, to guard it from any desecration, is the hard part. It may cramp our current lifestyles. That is where true commitment comes in.

5) **Honor thy father and thy mother.** Many people do indeed fulfill this mitzvah in exemplary fashion. I stand in admiration of sons, daughters, and often in-laws, who care for and tend to the needs of an aged parent or parent-in-law. They shlep, they cook, they humor and often tolerate irritable, cantankerous elders. This commandment seems to get more difficult as time progresses. Yet the Torah makes no distinctions based on age. It is our responsibility to look after our parents when they are dependent on us, as they looked after us when we were dependent on them.

6) **Thou shalt not murder.** Well done. Here's another easy one to fulfill. I'm sure not one of you reading this ever murdered anyone. You thought of doing it, you almost did it, but, in the end, Jews are not the murdering type. We can safely tick another one.

7) **Thou shalt not commit adultery.** Umm . . . Let's move on to the next one.

8) **Thou shalt not steal.** Strictly speaking, this refers to kidnapping in particular. However, all stealing—including the white-collar methods—is included.

9) **Thou shalt not bear false witness.** How truthful are we? Even if we are not under oath, our word should be sacred. I remember hearing an old rabbi being introduced to a group of university students simply as a "man who never told a lie." How many of us could make that claim?

10) **Thou shalt not covet.** Not easy either. Commentaries define this injunction as a prohibition on badgering someone, or conniving, to acquire—even legally—that which belongs to another. Go get your own. Why must it be his spouse, house or car?

There you have it. Did you score full marks? Did you pass, or are you in the forty-percent-or-less bracket? Worth working on, isn't it? Hopefully, we can all improve our score, and one day claim with justification that we really do observe the Ten Commandments.

Slice of LIFE

A Special Tefillin

by Gurman Locks

Last week at the Kotel, I asked an elderly man to put on tefillin. He strongly refused.

I asked him, "When was the last time you put on tefillin?"

He smiled and proudly said, "Seventy-two years ago!" pushing aside any possibility of him putting them on again. He held out his arm to show me the fading numbers tattooed there. "1938," he said. "It was the day of Kristallnacht. Do you know what Kristallnacht is?"

"Of course I do," I told him.

"Two hundred and sixty seven synagogues were burned down in one night. They burned down our synagogue, too. My tefillin were burnt up, and I have never put them on again." He said, telling me in no uncertain terms why he was not going to put them on.

"I have a friend who was in the camps, too," I quickly said, "and he not only puts on tefillin today, but he even put them on others inside the camp!" I was trying to show him that he did not have to reject tefillin because of what those evil people did. "Do you want hear how he got the tefillin into the camp?"

"Yeah," he said, strongly, "How did he get them in there?"

"His name is Laibel. Whenever he comes to Israel, he prays with our sunrise minyan. He also has numbers tattooed on his arm. "When we first met, he asked me, 'What do you do around here?'"

"Wanting to say something exciting, I said, 'I put tefillin on people here at the Kotel.'"

"'Oh yeah?' he said, 'Well, I put tefillin on people in the death camp.'"

"I stared at him; there was nothing I could say. I was dumbfounded. I asked him, 'How did you get the tefillin in there?'"

"He looked me in the eye and said that they came to the ghetto and grabbed 137 young boys. He told me that only five of them got out of there alive, only five.

"He was thirteen-and-a-half years old. When they grabbed him, he was wearing the high boots that his father had bought for him. He showed me with his hand that the boots came up almost to his knees. When he saw them coming, he stuffed his tefillin in the top of one boot and his prayer book in the other.

"They pushed the boys into a cattle car and drove them to the death camp. It was not far from the ghetto. When the train stopped, they slid open the side of the cattle car and immediately began pushing them toward the open door of the oven. The boys were frightened and crying out. They asked Laibel, 'What should we do?' He told them, 'I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to stand in rows five across and we're going to march right into that oven singing "ani ma'amin . . ." (I believe in G-d). And they did just that. They stood in rows five across and started singing and marching right into the oven.

"The guards became so confused that they did not know what to do. They screamed, 'You can't do that! No one has ever done such a thing before. Stop it! Stop it at once! Here! Go over there to the showers instead.'"

"They pushed them over to the showers. They made them take off all of their clothing and throw them into a pile in the middle of the floor. They made them empty out their shoes and the tefillin and prayer book fell out onto the pile.

"After the shower, when they were dressed in the camp clothes and were being pushed back past the pile of their clothes, he saw his tefillin and prayer book lying there. He wanted so badly to run over and pick them up, but there were terrifying guards standing right there so he couldn't. He said to the boys, 'Okay, I did something for you, so now you do something for me.'"

"'Whatever you want,' they said. 'You saved our lives.'"

"He said, 'When I give the signal, make a big fight with each other and start screaming out loud. Okay . . . Now!' He whipped his arm in the air as if he was back at the camp giving them the signal. The boys started to fight and scream. The guards ran over and tried to pull them apart, but they wouldn't stop fighting. In the confusion, he ran over and grabbed his tefillin and prayer book and hid them under his arms.

"He was in the barracks and he wanted to put on the tefillin. He was able to put the arm piece on without anyone seeing by pulling his sleeve over it, but how could he put on the head piece? There were evil guards all over the place. He opened the window and stuck his head outside so he could put on the head piece. A guard came by and screamed at him, 'Who said you could open that window?' He told him that he was sick and was throwing up, and if he made him close the window he would throw up inside, too. The guard left him there. And he looked me in the eye and said, 'And I put tefillin on other men like that there, too.' I started to cry and I kissed him on his yarmulke.

"The next day there was a soldier at the Kotel who wouldn't put on tefillin. No matter what I said, he simply refused. Then I told him Laibel's story, and he quickly said, 'Okay, I'll do it.'"

"And you can do it, too" I said, as I gently slid the tefillin I was holding on his arm. He said the blessing and started to cry. We said the Shema, and he prayed for his family. He began to smile even while the tears were streaming down his face. A crowd gathered around all congratulating him on his overcoming all those years of rejection.

You do not always succeed, but you always have to try.

Read more about Gurman Locks and his writings at www.thereisone.com

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INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

Continued. The Childless Woman's Role in Judaism. Part 2

Needless to say, one need not apologize for asking questions. On the contrary, since Jews are described in the Torah as a 'wise and understanding people,' it is desirable that questions which come within the realm of human understanding should be also be understood and not left to faith alone, wherever this is possible. There is only one prerequisite, which goes back to the time when the Torah and Mitzvos were given at Sinai, namely that the Torah must be accepted on the basis of Naaseh ('we will do') first, and then v'nishma ('we will understand') - meaning, that the performance of Mitzvos must not be made conditional on the understanding of their deeper significance, etc., nor must the vitality and enthusiasm of the performance be any the less.

This basic principle and attitude is also a matter of common sense. If the Torah is accepted as Divine - otherwise there is no point at all in any questions and discussions, since if it is man-made one would be free to do as one pleases - that is, given by a Supreme Being, Whose Essence is beyond human grasp, it would be a contradiction in terms to demand to know the meaning and significance of each Divine Mitzva before performing it, for it would reduce the Supreme being to the level of the limited human intelligence, which, moreover, is subject to development, since human understanding increases from day to day with newly acquired knowledge and experience; yet he insists on understanding it today, on his present level.

One might even add that there is a sound pragmatic, or 'business' consideration involved, as, by way of a simple illustration, when one is offered an opportunity to invest a dollar with a view to earning a thousand dollars, though there may be a remote possibility of losing the \$1. A normal individual would certainly not hesitate to make his decision. Similarly, when a Jew, on the basis of na'aseh before v'nishma, invests in a relatively small effort by restricting himself in matters of Kashrus and Shabbos observance, etc., and the Yetzer hara attempts to distract him by saying, even if you live 120 years maybe you will never fully grasp the significance of what you are doing -- the most the person will have lost would be having denied himself certain foods or some convenience on Shabbos. On the other hand, if a person will wait with the performance of Mitzvos until he will realize their significance, and in the meantime will act like any gentile, he will deprive himself of the eternal good which was his within easy reach, and when the time will come and he will discover the truth, he will realize that he has lived in transgression of the Divine Torah, with all the consequences there from,

Much more could be said on the subject matter, but I trust the above will suffice. May G-d, whose benevolent Providence extends to each and everyone individually, lead you in the path of Truth.

P. S. Since you refer to women's lib, which has become so popular in recent years, it baffles me that the thrust of the movement is centered on the woman's becoming similar to man -- and this is what is termed 'independence' and 'feminist' pride, etc.!

QUESTIONS FOR THE RABBI

Why Is the Talmud in Aramaic?

Question: *Since the Talmud is such a fundamental work in Judaism, why wasn't it written in Hebrew, like the Bible and the Mishnah? Isn't Hebrew considered "the holy tongue"?*

Answer: Before we get into why the Talmud was written in Aramaic, a brief overview of the history of the language is in order.

Aramaic is an ancient language that has been around for over 3,000 years. It was the official language of the first Aramean states, and later became the common language, or lingua franca, of the Assyrian and Persian empires.

There is even a sprinkling of Aramaic in the Bible. One example is the phrase yegar sahaduta, spoken by Laban the Aramean (Genesis 31:47).

In fact, the Jerusalem Talmud notes that Aramaic is found in all three sections of the Bible: the Torah (five books of Moses), Nevi'im (prophets) and Ketuvim (writings).

Eventually, during the Middle Aramaic period (approximately 200 BCE–200 CE), Aramaic began to split into two major groups of dialects, the Eastern and Western Aramaic languages.

The Western Aramaic languages were used largely in the area that was under Roman (and later Byzantine) rule. The Jerusalem Talmud, composed in Israel, is written in a Western Aramaic dialect. The Eastern Aramaic languages flourished in the Persian Empire, and as a result the Babylonian Talmud, written in Persian-dominated Babylon, is in an Eastern Aramaic dialect.

During the Mishnaic era, the translations of the Bible known as Targum Onkelos and Targum Jonathan were written in Western Aramaic. According to some, these Aramaic translations of the Torah (targumim) were originally part of the oral tradition going all the way back to Moses at Mount Sinai.

When the Jews returned to Israel from the Babylonian exile and rebuilt the Second Temple, they spoke mostly Aramaic. Hebrew, the "holy tongue," was reserved for holy matters, such as prayer, and was not used for ordinary social and commercial activities. The Talmud was written in Aramaic, the language of the masses, so that it would be accessible to all. After all, the goal of study is to understand what has been learned so that it can be incorporated into our lives.

A WORD

from the Director

This Shabbat, the Shabbat after Tisha B'Av, is called Shabbat Nachamu. It is thus called after this week's Haftora, which begins with the words, "Nachamu, nachamu ami, - Take comfort, take comfort, My people."

Shabbat is the continuation and completion of the past week. Thus, even though during this week we commemorated the saddest event in Jewish history by fasting and mourning the loss of the Beit Hamikdash - our Holy Temple - the whole purpose of this week is to renew our hope and to be comforted that G-d's promise will be fulfilled and our Holy Temple will be rebuilt. Our sadness of Tisha B'Av should be replaced by the comfort of Shabbat Nachamu.

Our sadness is further alleviated by the upcoming date of Tu B'Av, the fifteenth of Av. This is considered a joyous day for numerous reasons.

One reason concerns the generation of Jews that was forced to wander in the desert for 40 years before entering the Land of Israel, due to their acceptance of the spies' false report about the Holy Land. Every year, on Tisha B'Av, members of this generation would die. On the fifteenth of Av, in the fortieth year of their wandering, this decree was lifted.

Also, during the era of the Roman Empire, the Romans attacked the Jews who resided in the city of Beitar and killed multitudes of men, women, and children. On Tu B'Av, the Romans finally allowed those Jews remaining in Beitar to give the murdered Jews a proper burial.

In the time of the Holy Temple, Tu B'Av was celebrated as a full festival. In our times, it is celebrated by making gatherings and increasing in Torah study, especially at night, as from this point on, the nights become longer.

Let us ask G-d to send Moshiach, so that the next Tisha B'Av will be a day of rejoicing in our Holy Temple, in an era when the lessons that can be derived from everything in the world will be openly revealed and acted upon.

J. I. Gutnick

Here's my *Story*

Personal Encounters
With The Rebbe. Culled From JEM's
'My Encounter' Project



While I was a student in the Lubavitcher yeshiva in Montreal, I rented a room from a family living in the neighborhood. And the woman of the house was pregnant at the time. She always had difficulties in childbirth and, in this particular instance; she was told that there was a very serious complication.

As the husband told it to me, the doctor had done a lengthy examination and said: "The situation is critical. It's highly questionable that the baby can survive a normal delivery. Based on my experience in such cases, I suggest that you abort this child. Otherwise, the mother's life will be in danger and the baby many not survive anyway.

This doctor was the most famous and most competent that this family could find, because they had anticipated problems due to the wife's medical history – and this expert was telling them the baby should be aborted.

Before he would sign on the form allowing them to abort the child, the husband said, "You have to give me a while to think about this." And he went and called the Rebbe. After hearing all the details, the Rebbe said: "Don't sign anything. Don't allow the doctor to abort the child. Tell him that you insist that he should do everything possible to save the baby and the mother."

The husband went back to the doctor and said: "I want you to do whatever you can to save my wife and my child!" To which the doctor replied, "Do you have to tell me that? If I could do it, wouldn't I do it?" Then he added, "If you insist I have to save both your wife and the baby, you might just lose both of them, because the situation is critical."

When he heard this, the husband said again, "Give me a while to think," and again he called the Rebbe. But the Rebbe told him the same thing: "Don't sign anything, and tell him that you insist that both the mother and the baby be saved."

So he went back and told this to the doctor, who said, "I'll try my very best. It will take many hours. And since you have other children also, go home, take care of your family, and as soon as I have any news, I'll let you know."

This happened at around ten o'clock at night. The man went home. At four in the morning, the doctor called him, "Mazel Tov! Your wife and the baby are safe and sound. Everything is perfect!"

As soon as he heard this, the husband called up one of the Rebbe's secretaries, even though it was the middle of the night, because he wanted to get the message to the Rebbe that, thank G-d, everything was okay.

Seven o'clock in the morning he got a telephone call from the Rebbe's office. The Rebbe wanted to know if the baby was really born at four o'clock

in the morning, because according to the Rebbe's reckoning, the baby was born at half past three. "Please find out when the baby was born."

The man told all this to me the very next day. He told me that as soon as he had a chance to see the doctor – to hug him and kiss him and thank him – he asked when the baby was born: "I was informed that the baby was born at four o'clock in the morning. But my Rebbe says that, according to his reckoning, it was at half past three. Please tell me exactly when the baby was born."

"What's the difference?" asked the doctor. "As long as your wife is healthy and the baby is healthy, what's the difference when the baby was born?"

"To me it makes absolutely no difference, but obviously to my Rebbe it makes a difference."

So the doctor looked at the medical chart in front of the baby's crib. Sure enough it was marked "Four o'clock." But then the doctor called in the chief nurse and asked her, "How did you mark the time? When the baby is born, or when it was brought into the nursery?"

After a baby is born, they go through all kinds of procedures. They remove the placenta, they examine the baby, wash it, wrap it, put it in a crib. And all this normally takes a half hour. Not until they roll the baby into the nursery did they mark the medical chart.

So the baby was born at half past three, just like the Rebbe said.

Realizing this, the doctor wanted to know more: "Your Rebbe was correct, but tell me, because now I'm very curious to find out, what's the difference to him?"

The man called the Rebbe's office to satisfy this doctor's curiosity. And the Rebbe's answer was: "I could not go to sleep until I was sure that the mother and the baby were safe and sound. And at half past three I was able to go to sleep."

Rabbi Nissen Mangel is an author and speaker, and serves as rabbi of congregation Ksav Sofer in Brooklyn, NY. During the winter of 2012, he was interviewed several times in the My Encounter studio in New York.

PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

Moses tells the people of Israel how he implored G-d to allow him to enter the Land of Israel, but G-d refused, instructing him instead to ascend a mountain and see the Promised Land.

Continuing his "review of the Torah," Moses describes the Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah, declaring them unprecedented events in human history. "Has there ever occurred this great thing, or has the likes of it ever been heard? Did ever a people hear the voice of G-d speaking out of the midst of the fire... and live? ... You were shown, to know, that the L-rd is G-d... there is none else beside Him."

Moses predicts that in future generations the people will turn away from G-d, worship idols, and be exiled from their land and scattered amongst the nations; but from there they will seek G-d, and return to obey His commandments.

Our Parshah also includes a repetition of the Ten Commandments, and the verses of the Shema, which declare the fundamentals of the Jewish faith: the unity of G-d ("Hear O Israel: the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is one"); the mitzvot to love G-d, to study His Torah, and to bind "these words" as tefillin on our arms and heads, and inscribe them in the mezuzot affixed on the doorposts of our homes.

CANDLE LIGHTING



	Shabbos 4 - 5 August	
	Begins	Ends
Melbourne	5:17	6:17
Adelaide	5:18	6:16
Brisbane	5:03	5:58
Darwin	6:23	7:14
Gold Coast	5:01	5:55
Perth	5:25	6:21
Sydney	5:00	5:57
Canberra	5:06	6:04
Launceston	5:01	6:03
Auckland	5:20	6:19
Wellington	5:11	6:13
Hobart	4:57	6:00
Byron Bay	4:59	5:54

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PARSHAS VA'ESCHANAN • 12 AV • 4 AUGUST

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	5.17 PM
	MINCHA:	5.25 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	5.55 PM
SHABBOS DAY:	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA:	9.49 AM
	SHACHARIS:	10.00 AM
	MINCHA:	5.15 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	6.17 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS:	8.00/9.15/10.00 AM
	MINCHA:	5.25 PM
	MAARIV:	6.10 PM