

## Hearing from God

This weeks reading is from **Parashat Yitro** (*Shemot / Exodus 18:1-20:23*), the Scriptures tell us Yitro (Jethro) came to Moshe bringing Moshe's wife Zipporah and his two sons (*18:6-8*). Moshe told Jethro everything the Lord had done and Jethro said *18:10* "... *'Blessed be the Lord who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.'*" (*NASB*) Jethro saw all that Moshe was doing for the people and recommended that he select leaders from the people as judges so that he can deal with only the heavy matters (*18:13-26*). Moshe says farewell to his father-in-law and on the third month after the exodus the people arrived at the wilderness of Sinai (*18:26-19:1*). The Lord told Moshe to have the people consecrate themselves for on the third day the Lord will come down on the Mountain of Sinai (*19:7-16*). The Lord warned Moshe to warn the people not to break through and gaze so they would not die (*19:24-25*) and God called Moshe and Aaron to come up on the mountain. The Lord gives the people His ten commandments (i) to have no other gods before Him (*20:1-5*), (ii) do not take the name of the Lord in vain (*20:6-7*), (iii) remember the Shabbat (*20:8-11*), (iv) honor your father and mother (*20:12*), (v) do not murder (*20:13*), (vi) do not commit adultery (*20:14*), (vii) do not steal (*20:15*), (viii) do not bear false witness against your neighbor (*20:16*), (ix) do not covet your neighbors house (*20:19*), and (x) do not covet your neighbors wife, male or female servants, his ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor (*20:19*)

The Scriptures, according to *Shemot / Exodus 19:14-17*, tell us that Moshe went down to the people and consecrated them, they washed their clothing. In addition to this, the Torah tells us that Moshe instructed the people to not go near a woman for the Lord will show Himself on the third day. What was the purpose of this instruction to not go near a woman for three days because the Lord was going to show Himself upon the mountain to the people?

### ספר שמות פרק יט

יד וירד מִטֶּה מִן־הַהָר אֶל־הָעָם וַיְקַדֵּשׁ  
אֶת־הָעָם וַיְכַבְּסוּ שְׂמֹלֹתָם: טו וַיֹּאמֶר  
אֶל־הָעָם הָיוּ נְכַנְיִים לְשִׁלְשַׁת יָמִים אֶל־  
תִּגְלוּשׁוּ אֶל־אִשָּׁה: טז וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי־  
לַיְשִׁי בַהֲיִית הַבֹּקֶר וַיְהִי קֹלֹת וּבִרְקָקִים  
וַעֲנָן כָּבֵד עַל־הָהָר וְקוֹל שִׁפָּר חֲזוֹק מְאֹד  
וַיִּתְרַד כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה: יז וַיּוֹצֵא  
מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם לְקִרְיַת הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־  
הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְּצֻבוּ בְּתַהֲמִית הָהָר:

### *Shemot / Exodus 19:14-17*

*19:14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. 19:15 He said to the people, 'Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.' 19:16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 19:17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. (NASB)*

Why did Moshe instruct the people to not go near a woman for three days prior to the Lord revealing Himself on the mountain? When thinking about not going near, this

reminds us of the mitzvah regarding being intimate with one's spouse during niddah. In addition to this, we are also reminded of the term negiah (נגיעה) meaning literally “touch,” which is a concept in Rabbinical law (Halakha) that forbids or restricts physical contact with a member of the opposite sex (*except for one's spouse, children, siblings, grandchildren, parents, and grandparents*). A person who abides by this halakha is colloquially described as a shomer negiah (“one observant of negiah”). In the rabbinic literature, earlier sources do not use the word “negiah,” but use the word “k'reiva” (coming near) or one of its grammatical variations (*See, e.g. Sefer Mitzvos Gadol 126, Rambam Issurei Biah 21:1*) It is interesting in the biblical text, the words Moshe speaks saying, לְשִׁלֹּשֶׁת יָמִים אַל-תִּגְּשׁוּ אֶל-אִשְׁתּוֹ, “for three days do not approach unto a woman.” The word used specifically here is “Tigshu” (תִּגְּשׁוּ) from the root word “nagash” (נָגַשׁ) written in the Qal Imperfect form, meaning as a verb, “to get near to, come close to, approach.” This word is used 19,885 times in the Tanach. What exactly was Moshe trying to say when he said that one is not to draw near to his wife (אִשְׁתּוֹ) for three days?

The prohibition of negiah is derived from two verses in Leviticus, 18:6 “Any man shall not approach (קרב *qarab*) his close relative to uncover nakedness; I am God,” and 18:19 “You shall not approach a woman in her time of unclean separation, to uncover her nakedness” The laws of negiah are typically followed by the Orthodox with varying levels of observance. Some Orthodox follow the Halakha with strict modesty and take measures to avoid accidental contact, such as avoiding sitting next to a member of the opposite sex on a bus, airplane, or other similar seating situation. Others are more lenient, only avoiding purposeful contact. Adherents to the Conservative and Reform Judaism do not follow the strict observance of this Halakha. The verse from *Vayikra / Leviticus 18:6* is regarding being intimate with a close relative, and *18:19* is with regard to niddah. It is interesting to note how these prohibitions are described by the rabbis. The prohibition against physical contact with arayot (*Forbidden relationships in Judaism*) is codified by the Rishonim including Maimonides (*Hilchos Issurei Biah 21:1*) and Moses ben Jacob of Coucy (*Sefer Mitzvos Gadol 126*), note that the rabbis take into consideration of whether the contact is done in an affectionate or lustful manner. Maimonides and the Shulchan Aruch formulate this prohibition as “hugging, kissing, or enjoying close physical contact” (*Rambam Hilchos Issurei Biah 21:1, HaEzer 20:1, and Be'er Heitev 2*). Note that the Rishonim (ראשונים) “the first ones” were the leading Rabbis who lived during the 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the era before the writing of the Shulchan Aruch (שולחן ערוך), the code of Jewish law, 1563 CE, and following the Geonim (589-1038 CE). Based upon these texts and the rabbinic interpretations, the rabbis do not indicate that mere touching is forbidden. So one conclusion we could make regarding *Shemot / Exodus 19:15* is not with regard to touching one's wife. The requirement of restricting the men from approaching their wives appears to be on an intimate level as opposed to merely touching as in the case of casual contact, touching a hand, a kiss, etc.

Understanding the difference here from the perspective of the rabbis is very significant. *Shemot / Exodus 19:15* is a very significant passage especially in light of the rabbinic interpretation on these verses and the concept of “lustful thoughts” that is coupled with Moshe's instructions to the people on preparing themselves to see the Lord God on

the mountain on the third day. If one keeps lustful thoughts in one's heart, do you think he will see the face of God or even the Lord working in his life? The application for us today, men who are sinning in pornography, will not be able to see the face of God. This is also related to the Lord working in the man who is living in unrepentant sin.

*Midrash Rabbah Shemot, Parashat 28, Part 3* has the following to say concerning this section of verses from the Torah.

### ***Midrash Rabbah Shemot, Parashat 28, Part 3***

*And Moshe reported the words of the people unto the Lord (Shemot / Exodus 19:8). God wished at the moment to give them the Torah and to speak with them, but Moshe was still standing and God said, What can I do because of Moshe? Rabbi Levi said, It can be compared to a king who wished to pass acts without consulting the lieutenant governor; when he said to him, do this thing the reply was, It has already been done. The king tried once again, Go and call this counselor that he may come with you, and when he had gone, the king carried out his wish. So when God desired to give the Ten Commandments, Moshe was standing at His side. God thought, When I reveal the heavens to them and say, I am the Lord your God, they will ask, Who is speaking? God or Moshe? Let Moshe therefore descend and then I will proclaim, I am the Lord your God. Hence, when God said to Moshe, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments (Shemot / Exodus 19:10), he said, I have already sanctified them; for it says, For you did charge us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it (Shemot / Exodus 19:23). God then said to him, Go down and you will come up, you and Aaron with you (Shemot / Exodus 19:24); and as Moshe descended, God revealed Himself; for immediately after it says, So Moshe went down unto the people, we are told that God spoke.*

### **מדרש רבה שמות פרשה כח סימן ג**

ג וישב משה את דברי העם אל ה', אותה שעה בקש הקב"ה ליתן להם את התורה ולדבר עמהם והיה משה עומד אמר הקב"ה מה אעשה מפני משה, א"ר לוי משל למלך שבקש לעשות אופימשטאטא חוץ מדעתו של אפרכוס אמר לו עשה דבר פלוני אמר לו כבר נעשית, ושוב א"ל לך קרא לפלוני סינקליטקוס ויבא עמך, עד שהוא הולך עשה המלך מה שביקש, כך ביקש הקב"ה ליתן י' דברות היה משה עומד מצדו אמר הקב"ה אני גולה להם את הרקיע ואומר אנכי ה' אלהיך הם אומרים מי אמר הקב"ה או משה אלא ירד משה ואח"כ אני אומר אנכי ה' אלהיך, כך אמר הקב"ה למשה לך אל העם וקדשתם היום ומחר וכבסו שמלותם א"ל כבר הקדשתיים שנאמר כי אתה העדותה בנו לאמר וגו', א"ל לך רד ועלית אתה ואהרן עמך, עד שמשה ירד נגלה הקב"ה, שנאמר וירד משה אל העם,

In the midrash, the rabbis are discussing Moshe who is up on the mountain of Sinai and the Lord God who is going to speak to the people. The question is if Moshe remained on the mountain, they might be confused between the Lord speaking and Moshe speaking. The explanation is that God told Moshe to descend the mountain so the people would not be confused. The Ten Commandments are given from God both orally and in written form. The Lord instructs Moshe to descend the mountain and sanctify the people. The Scriptures say, *וירד משה מן-ההר אל-העם ויקדש את-העם וכבסו שמלתם: 19:14 יד* *So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. (NASB)* The word sanctify or consecrated comes from the word קדש meaning “holy,” or “to set apart.” The washing of the garments is another way of saying “*get yourselves cleaned up to be presentable before the Lord.*” Note that getting yourself all cleaned up before coming before the Lord, this is applied to those who already are in a covenant relationship with God in the Messiah Yeshua. If one is coming to faith and believe in the Messiah, the Lord helps to clean up his life following placing one’s faith in Him and seeking for His help. Moshe descends the mountain and does just that, he causes the people to get cleaned up and he adds the instruction to not go near a woman for three days prior to the Lord revealing Himself on the mountain. The sense that Moshe is giving in this instruction, based upon the rabbinic interpretation on these verses regarding “*lustful thoughts,*” is that we are to be set out hearts on the things above and not upon pornographic materials if we want to see the Lord God on the mountain on the third day.

What is interesting in *Shemot / Exodus 19:10-11* the Lord tells the people to sanctify themselves because He is going to visit in three days. We have been discussing what it means to consecrate ourselves (set ourselves apart) and the Torah instructs us that we set in order our lives, to walk in God’s ways, and we set in order our hearts, turning from sin and towards the Lord God in heaven. Notice how the instruction to consecrate yourself is repeated through the Torah over and over again. For example, we read in *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:7* ‘*You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the Lord your God.* 20:8 ‘*You shall keep My statutes and practice them; I am the Lord who sanctifies you. (NASB)* Note both the people and the Lord are involved in the sanctification process. Note also, as mentioned previously, the word used for “*consecrate yourselves*” is קדש, derived from the root קדש meaning to make holy. Thus, the biblical use of the verb “*consecrate*” is a synonym for “*sanctify,*” meaning “*to make holy.*” This is an important point because in this world we need to be aware that there is a great amount of unholiness in this world. As believers, we should not choose to rub shoulders with what is unclean and be defiled. What we look at can defile our hearts. What we listen to can defile our hearts. The company we keep can defile, as Paul’s citation from *Isaiah 52:11* in *2 Corinthians 6:17*. Paul says we are to separate ourselves from everything that defiles and then the Lord will accept us (read *2 Corinthians 6-7*). If you are expecting God to work in your life, have you taken the necessary steps to sanctify your life before God? If you are expecting the gifts of the Spirit to be manifest in your life, have you

taken the necessary steps to sanctify your mind, body, and soul for that purpose? (Note, the sanctification of the soul is a joint process with our desire seeking the Lord for that sanctification in His Messiah Yeshua.)

God's command to be holy is not only in the Torah, it is spoken of throughout all of Scripture (compare *Vayikra / Leviticus 11:44, 19:2, 20:17* with *1 Peter 1:16* and *2 Corinthians 6*). In addition to this, *Revelation 19:7-8* tells us the bride of Christ sanctified herself for the coming of the Lord. Who is the bride of Christ? That is us right? According to the Scriptures, consecrated people are never lazy people, this is the lesson that is illustrated in the priesthood with Aaron and his sons from *Shemot / Exodus 28:41* "... consecrate them ... that they may minister unto Me in the priest's office." Take for example, hypothetically, "if you knew the exact day and time Yeshua would return on the clouds for His people, how would you behave? How would you behave yourself?" With these things in mind, are you able to put yourself into the shoes of the Children of Israel in *Shemot / Exodus 19:14-17* and understand what Moshe was telling them to Sanctify/Consecrate themselves? Should we not be living consecrated lives daily? If the Lord has not been working in your life, there may be a reason. If you are sick, ill, and dying, there may be a reason. If the gifts of the Spirit are not manifest in your life, there may be a reason. If you feel distant from the Lord and His Messiah Yeshua, there may be a reason. Have you offered your body, mind, soul, and spirit as a living sacrifice unto God? (*Romans 12*) Remember, spiritual sin maybe related to things that we set up as idols in our hearts. This week's study provides for us an example of an important aspect of our lives, our faith, and our walk before the Lord God in Heaven. We need to take seriously our faith and walk before the Lord because these things do impact our hearing from the Lord and His working in our lives.

**Have you consecrated yourself today  
for the Glory of God?**