

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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**Parashat Yitro**  
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**פרשת יתרו**  
**כ"ד בשבט תשע"ז**

Torah Reading: *Shmot* (Exodus) 18:1-20:23

Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, suggests a system for establishing lower courts to settle disputes; Hashem articulates the *Aseret HaDibrot* (Ten Commandments) to the *Bnei Yisrael* amidst fire, smoke, and sounds of the *shofar*.

We often translate, as I did above, *Aseret HaDibrot* as "The Ten Commandments" but they are not really Ten Commandments as *Dibrot* means "sayings." They are the Ten Sayings.

Why are there specifically ten? Let us think of other things that appear in the world or Jewish life as "ten." There are fingers and toes, and, as a matter of fact, the Hebrew letter which designates ten, *yod*, literally means "hand." There are ten plagues that the Egyptians suffered before allowing the *Bnei Yisrael* to go free. There are the ten lost tribes, those who were exiled by the Assyrians in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, leaving only the tribes of Yehudah and Binyamin in Judea. Ten people make up a minyan. On Yom Kippur, we read of the Ten Martyrs who died during the Hadrianic persecutions during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. The first letter of God's ineffable Name is *yod*. There are ten generations recounted in the Torah between Adam and Noach and between Noach and Avraham. Most of the time, the Western World utilizes base 10 in mathematics. Ten is a triangular number (one that can be arranged into a perfect equilateral triangle,) and a tetrahedral number (if we start with one marble and then add a layer of three marbles under it we have a perfect tetrahedron of four marbles. If we then add another layer of six marbles under that we have a perfect tetrahedron of ten marbles. Such

arrangements occur naturally in atomic structure of metals and other materials. In the physical sciences such an arrangement is called "close packed hexagonal" or cph for short.).

Surely, all of these occurrences cannot be coincidental! At least the 16<sup>th</sup> century Lurianic kabbalists in Tzfat (Safed) did not think so. They claimed that the number 10 indicates the creation of a new reality and therefore the perfection of the Divine order.

According to them, all of this emanates from the Ten *Sefirot* (emanations) with which God created the world. They say that the only "raw material" with which God could make the world was Divine essences. Therefore, Hashem "poured" the Divine essences into the creation of the world. These "essences" or "emanations" are 10 different aspects of Hashem. The *Sefirot* are considered revelations of the Creator's Will and they should not be understood as ten different "gods" but as ten different ways the One God revealed the Divine Will. (This is an oversimplification of the kabbalistic explanation of the process, but it is sufficient to address the proliferation of the number 10 in our lives.)

The Ten *Sefirot*, in short, are:

- 1 *Keter*- "Crown"
- 2 *Chochmah*- "Wisdom"
- 3 *Binah*- "Understanding"
- 4 *Chessed*- "Kindness"
- 5 *Gevurah*- "Power"
- 6 *Tiferet*- "Beauty"
- 7 *Netzach*- "Eternity"
- 8 *Hod*- "Splendor"
- 9 *Yesod*- "Foundation"
- 10 *Malchut*- "Kingship"

According to the kabbalists, because the reality of the world derived from 10 emanations of Divine perfection, all iterations of the number 10 indicate new realities and Divine order.

Mysticism offers a fundamentally different way to look at the world. Some relate strongly to it; others do not. However one feels about it, this investigation of the number 10 is certainly intriguing.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Can you think of other places that the number 10 appears in life or in Jewish life?
- Look at the examples above. How do they each represent a new reality or Divine order?