

Parashat Yitro, 5784, 2024:

The Essence of the Asseret HaDibrot

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו, כל בני ישראל בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

The most celebrated section of our *parasha* is that of the *Asseret HaDibrot*. It begins with the well-known words: “And *Elokim* spoke all (*kol*) these words saying.” (*Sefer Shemot* 20:1) The *Mechilta of Rabbi Yishmael* focuses on the word, *kol*, and suggests: “This comes to teach us that the *Asseret HaDibrot* were said in one utterance (*b’dibbur echad*), something that is impossible for a human being to say in this manner...” (*Mesechta d’b’Chodesh* IV) In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) cites this statement nearly verbatim, signaling that this is the correct interpretation.

This citation is further interpreted by the Maharal (Rabbi Yehudah Loew ben Betzalel, 1525-1609), in his supercommentary on Rashi’s *Commentary*, entitled *Gur Aryeh*: “...this is to say that the entire Torah is one entity and one word—in *inyan echad v’dibbur echad*.”

He bases his interpretation on two premises:

- 1) The entire Torah is derived (*yotzim*) from the *Asseret HaDibrot*. (See Rashi, *Sefer Shemot* 24:12)
- 2) These *Asseret HaDibrot* were stated *b’dibbur echad*; therefore, the entire Torah was [initially given in] one pronouncement. (*Sefer Shemot* 20:1, translation and brackets my own)

In an interpretative tour de force, the Maharal expands on this approach in his *sefer*, *Tifferet Yisrael*, chapter 34:

Based on the aforementioned, we can state that the *Asseret HaDibrot* were said in one word. This is coming to teach that the entirety of the Torah is one, and it is one ordered and inseparable entity. This is the case, since all of the *mitzvot* derive from the *Asseret HaDibrot*, and that each of the Taryag (613) *mitzvot* are included therein. Moreover, the *Asseret HaDibrot* were stated in one word, which teaches us that the Torah is completely indivisible. It is, therefore, proper to say, [as well,] that it is one order (*seder*) [that is, an undividable object]. (Translation and brackets my own)

Closer to our own time, my rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, provides a different analysis of the *Mechilta*. Rather than suggesting that the word, “*kol*,” encompasses the entire Torah, the Rav limits its scope to the *Asseret HaDibrot*:

Apparently, the *Mechilta* and *Rashi* have interpreted *va'yidabare Elokim ate kol hadevarim ha'aleh* in the holistic sense, and translated it as follows: G-d proclaimed the whole, the entirety, or the totality, of those Commandments. They did not interpret *kol* as referring to each and every one of those Commandments. *Kol* is not interpreted as in terms of every Commandment, rather, it is interpreted as referring to the totality, the organic unity of all Ten Commandments...*kol* injects a new idea, a new world. (This and the following quotations *Norot HaRav*, volume V, B. David Schreiber, editor, pages 18-19)

What exactly is the “new world” that is revealed in the word, *kol*? As the Rav explains:

The Decalogue is not an incidental sum consisting of mutually unrelated precepts. Rather, the Decalogue constitutes a primordial entity, whose unity and integrity are inherent in the very essence of the system. In other words, there are not Ten Commandments. There is one Commandment which branches out into ten aspects. The practical consequence of this concept is clear and obvious. The Decalogue is indivisible. One either accepts all of the Commandments or none at all...All of the precepts were pronounced and promulgated in one utterance, within an indivisible, infinitesimal period of time.

Rav Saadia Gaon (d. 942), cited in *Rashi's Commentary* on *Sefer Shemot* 24:12, takes this one step further: “All 613 *mitzvot* are included in the *Asseret HaDibrot*.” I believe this the true essence of the *Asseret HaDibrot*, and the reason why they have captured our attention since time immemorial. For on the day they were given, the entire Torah was revealed to *klal Yisrael*, and we became Hashem’s nation forevermore.

Shabbat Shalom

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Please contact me at rdbe718@gmail.com to be added to my weekly email list.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:
<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)