

# א בִּסְל תורה!

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ט"ז שבט תשפ"ה · יתרו

## Hashem's Special Connection With Each and Every One of Us

By Sara Canner '28

In this week's פרשה, פרשת יתרו, בני ישראל receive the ten commandments—a huge milestone for בני ישראל. Receiving the Ten Commandments is the foundation and the roots of our nation. Every Jewish soul was present at the giving of the תורה on סיני. When Hashem brought together בני ישראל and said, "אֲנִי ה' אֵל-לֵקִיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם" "I am the Hashem your G-d Who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (שמות כב:) You might think, if Hashem wanted to really emphasize His greatness, He would have said, "I am the Hashem your G-d Who created heaven and earth?" That is so much more impressive.

While "G-d Who created heaven and earth" is indeed impressive, it has very little to do with each one of us on a personal level. Even when we hear "G-d Who took the Jewish people out of Egypt," we still might not think that it is personal and more about your individual self. However, we come to see that it is especially personal when considering the משנה in יח: that says, "In every generation, a person is obligated to regard himself as if he had come out of Egypt." The Hebrew word for Egypt, מִצְרַיִם, also means boundaries and limitations. We all have our own roadblocks that can at times hold us back. Our own limitations can be externally imposed or self-created; however, G-d promises us that "I took you out of Egypt once; I can also take you out of your own Egypt." We are connected to The One G-d and therefore, there is nothing we cannot accomplish. The

Ten Commandments are like the root of a tree, a foundation for בני ישראל.

With ט"ז בשבט, the birthday of the trees, occurring this week, we had the opportunity to reflect on our choices and our foundation. ט"ז בשבט falls out in the middle of the winter when everything is cold and the trees are lifeless and bare. Should we not celebrate ט"ז בשבט in the spring when the trees are blooming and the sun is shining? רש"י explains that even though the trees look lifeless in the winter, by ט"ז בשבט, the sap begins to run within them. The sap indicates that the trees are coming back to life and starting to nurture the future buds, leaves, and fruit. On ט"ז בשבט we are celebrating what is going on behind the scenes, beyond our control, by the hand of Hashem. When a situation looks bleak and hopeless, the tree symbolizes that the situation can change. Hashem made it so that each Jew was at סיני. This proves just how personal the receiving of the Ten Commandments was. Just as ט"ז בשבט in the winter symbolizes a new beginning, hope, and redemption, so too does the receiving of the Ten Commandments.

# The Meaning of Coveting

By Mimi Fischer '26

This פרשה introduces us to the Ten Commandments: some of the most basic guidelines on how to live our lives as Jews. These commandments include both seemingly obvious obligations, such as observing שבת, and a prohibition against committing murder; however, they also include more obscure commandments, such as the commandment of not coveting. In בני ישראל, Hashem commands בני ישראל to, "do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or whatever belongs to your servant." While some may take this commandment at face value, interpreting it to mean that any feelings of jealousy towards one's friend are forbidden, this law is much deeper and harder to understand. For one thing, how do we break the commandment to not covet? Do we break it in our hearts the second we feel jealousy, or is it a commandment against taking action on our jealousy? And if we assume the latter is correct, why would the text say "do not be jealous" and not "do not act on your jealousy?" Furthermore, if coveting is a commandment of our action, why do we have ten commandments and not just a commandment against coveting? If we prohibit ourselves from acting on our jealousy, then we would not often feel incentives to steal, murder, commit adultery, turn to other gods, etc.

רבינו בחיי addresses this concern and answers that coveting is a commandment of your heart. This commandment teaches us to train our minds so that we do not even desire the things others have, and believe that all objects belonging to other people are

unattainable. According to רבינו בחיי, preventing jealousy is not in your actions; it is a way of life, which helps us develop a sense of morality and self-control. However, רבינו בחיי adds something interesting about coveting: he says that there actually are certain situations where coveting is acceptable and even rewarded! For example, coveting to perform מצוות of the תורה is not only permissible but praiseworthy. אבן עזרא similarly connects coveting to our religion and Hashem. He says that an intelligent person, who observes this 10th commandment, realizes that he can only attain what Hashem appropriates to him. Therefore, if he desires and covets to complete the מצוות of the תורה, which Hashem granted him at סני, one can easily see how coveting can be used constructively. In this way, coveting is a commandment of action: you only violate the prohibition against coveting when you use said feelings negatively.

In short, the concept of coveting is a complicated one: it is both a commandment of the heart, to resist your internal feelings of jealousy, and a commandment of action, of not acting negatively on said jealousy. Obviously, coveting can be an extremely harmful characteristic to have, as it can hurt relationships and even ruin lives. However, human nature constantly thwarts our attempts to resist our constant feelings of jealousy. It is only natural to look at someone else and covet what they have. But the commandment of לא תחמוד tells us that when one constructively uses these feelings, jealousy can lead to increased interest in מצוות, admiration of peers and relatives, and more.

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