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Gematria on the Parshah: Anochi: Hearing Sinai Today

By: Moshe Herskovits



In Parshat Yitro, the Jewish people witnessed the greatest moment in history: Hashem Himself speaking directly to the entire nation. Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi teaches that Hashem still calls to us daily from Sinai, but we do not hear Him. Sinai did not end. It simply became quiet, and we must learn how to listen again. What was revealed at Sinai, and how can we learn to hear the voice of Hashem in our own lives today?

The Revelation of Anochi & Lo Yihyei Lecha

The first word spoken at Sinai was Anochi. Not "I command" and not "I decree," but Anochi Hashem Elokecha, I Am Hashem Your God. Chazal teach that the word Anochi contains an entire world of meaning. The Chiddushei HaRim explains that when Hashem said Anochi, Am Yisrael could hear His voice emanating from all of existence, perceiving that every part of reality is a manifestation of His word.

This idea is revealed in gematria. **אֲנֹכִי** (I Am) equals 81, the same as **הַכֹּל ה'** (Everything is Hashem YKVK) and **טבע** (nature), teaching that all of existence and all of nature are continuously sustained by Divine energy.

Amalek also attacks by minimizing the value of every Jew. The Torah describes how Amalek struck from behind, targeting the weakest and most distant from Hashem. Spiritually, Amalek whispers that what a Jew does does not matter, and that the Jew himself does not matter. Famously, the gematria of **עמלק** (Amalek) is 240, equal to **ספק** (doubt). Amalek injects doubt into a Jew's heart, eroding his sense of worth and spiritual significance.

How Amalek Diminishes Hashem's Name

Immediately following Anochi comes the second commandment, **Lo Yihyei Lecha Elohim Acherim** (You shall have no other gods). The gematria of **לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ** (you shall have no other) is 111, the same as the letter **אֶלֶף**, which represents absolute oneness and unity. When Am Yisrael heard this commandment, they perceived that there is no independent force in existence, no nature, no luck, and no power apart from Hashem.

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that this idea is not theoretical. Failing to recognize that an experience comes from Hashem is not merely a mistake, it is a spiritual transgression of the first two commandments. To see something as separate from Hashem is to introduce a false god into reality. Hashem wants us to remember that every moment is an expression of His love. The gematria of **אחד** (one) is 13, the same as **אהבה** (love). To truly accept Hashem's oneness, we must recognize that everything we experience flows from His love.

Truth in Exile

The Vilna Gaon explains that the essence of exile is that truth itself is hidden. The gematria of **אמת** (truth) is 441, the same as **בגלות** (in exile), teaching that exile is not only physical displacement, but a distortion of perception.

The Tikkunei HaZohar 71a teaches that Mashiach will reveal this truth to us, opening our eyes to recognize Hashem's love and presence in every detail of life. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said that if we truly understood how much Hashem loves us, we would run after Him as if a lion was chasing us. Exile is forgetting this constant love and involvement.

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that Hashem creates everything through specific Hebrew words, which are spoken constantly. If Hashem paused for even a moment, all existence would return to nothing. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that each person is brought into being by Hashem calling their name with care and love, and that every breath, thought, and experience exists because of His Anochi. We are never separate from Him. All of reality exists and continues only because of His loving presence.

Hashem is the Only I. A businessman once came to the Sfz Emes seeking guidance. The Rebbe gave him spiritual advice, and the man objected: "The world does not work that way." The Rebbe replied, "This is your problem. You think there is a world; there is only Hashem."

Rav Zusha, similarly, always spoke in the third person. He never used the word "I," explaining that Hashem is the only true I. He is the sole loving force behind the universe and our lives. Our task is to be like Rav Zusha: to recognize that we are the Ayin through which Hashem's Ani shines. The words **אני** (I) and **אין** (nothingness) share the same letters. Our task is to realize that Hashem is the only true I and that all of existence, including ourselves, is a loving expression of that I.

Challenge for this week: This week, pick one daily moment, such as drinking your morning coffee, taking a walk, or a stressful meeting, and consciously say, "This is Hashem's energy." Notice how your perception shifts. That is hearing Sinai today.

God Speaks to You From Inside Your Egypt

By: Adam Klasner



The Ten Commandments do not begin with a command.

They begin with a word. *Anochi*.

Not the usual Hebrew word for "I." Not Ani. Anochi is different. Deeper. More primal. Chazal point out something startling.

Anochi is an Egyptian word. It is how "I" was spoken in the language of exile. Which means that at the holiest moment in Jewish history, when God reveals Himself and gives the Torah, He does not begin in holy language. He begins in the language of slavery.

This is not incidental. This is the message.

God does not wait for the Jewish people to fully leave Egypt internally before revealing Himself. He speaks to them from within the Egypt still alive inside them.

Anochi means more than "I am."
It means I am with you here.

So many people believe they need to be elevated, clean, calm, and spiritually aligned before God can meet them. Before truth can reach them.

Before healing can begin.
The Torah says the opposite.
Revelation begins inside the mess.

Your Egypt is not just history. It is the part of you that feels constricted, anxious, ashamed, reactive, or stuck. The emotional language you learned in survival mode. The patterns you wish you had outgrown. The thoughts you do not like admitting to yourself.

And that is where God says Anochi.

Not Ani. Not a distant, abstract declaration of existence.

Anochi. I am speaking to you in the language you actually live in.

This is why Yitro had to arrive before Matan Torah. He came from the outside. He had explored every false god, every worldview, every distraction. And he returned saying, "Now I know." He embodied the truth that nothing needs to be rejected to be redeemed. Even detours can become doorways.

The Torah is not given to angels.
It is given to people who struggle.

People who fall.
People who carry Egypt inside them.
The danger is not having an inner Egypt.

The danger is believing God cannot be found there.

When we are afraid of our inner darkness, we fragment. When we shame our emotions, they go underground. When we reject parts of ourselves, they return louder.

But when we can stay present, without panic or judgment, something shifts. The struggle stops defining us. Space opens. And we begin to hear a different voice beneath the noise.

Anochi.

Not accusation. Presence.
Not distance. Relationship.

The Torah begins with an Egyptian word because redemption does not come from escaping reality. It comes from sanctifying it.
God does not speak past your struggle.
He speaks from within it.

Standing for All of Torah

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



In this week's Parsha, Parshas Yisro, we encounter the Aseres HaDibros (Shmos 20:1-14).

Let's begin by noting a Halachic anomaly. The Rambam was asked about the custom to stand during the Krias HaTorah of the Aseres HaDibros. The questioner explained that a Rav had instituted the practice of sitting during the reading and had even authored a responsa defending that position. His concern was rooted in a teaching of Chazal: the daily recitation of the Aseres HaDibros was abolished in order to distance from the heretical belief that these verses are more important than the rest of the Torah (Brachos 12a). Standing specifically for the Aseres HaDibros, he argued, risks conveying a similar message.

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Later, a new Rav arrived in the city and stood during the reading of the Aseres HaDibros. When questioned, he defended his practice by explaining that the Torah was given while the Jewish people were standing, and therefore standing re-enacts Matan Torah. The questioner then turned to the Rambam for guidance.

The Rambam sides unequivocally with the original Rav who opposed standing. He writes that wherever the custom is to stand, one must prevent it, "because of the damage this causes to faith," as it suggests that there are hierarchies between verses of the Torah and that some sections are more exalted than others. This, the Rambam writes, is exceedingly harmful and must be avoided (Teshuvos HaRambam 263).

Despite this clarity, it is striking that the nearly universal custom today is to stand during the Krias HaTorah of the Aseres HaDibros. Without entering into the Halachic minutiae, many note that in communities where people stand for Krias HaTorah generally, standing from the beginning of the Aliyah avoids singling out these verses specifically.

This leads us to a question: If there is truly no distinction between one verse of the Torah and another, why were the Aseres HaDibros alone conveyed directly by Hashem to the entire nation? Why were they singled out so dramatically, to be set into the Shnei Luchos HaBris and placed in the Aron HaKodesh, central to the Jewish people?

After all, the Rambam writes that there is no difference between the seemingly mundane verse of, "and Timna was a concubine," and the declaration of, "I am Hashem your G-d," for all the words of Torah are pure, holy, and true.

One explanation emerges from Rashi, who explains that all 613 Mitzvos are contained within the Aseres HaDibros (Rashi on Shmos 24:12).

With this in mind, perhaps we can understand why the custom to stand has endured. Standing does not declare that these verses are greater than the rest of the Torah - Chas v'Shalom - but reenacts the moment when Klal Yisrael accepted the entire Torah. Since the Aseres HaDibros encompass all 613 Mitzvos, standing for their reading actually affirms the value of every word of Torah, fully aligned with the Rambam's core principle and concern.

The Lost Ark of the Covenant

By: Avi Abrams



The legendary Ark of the Covenant, popularized by Indiana Jones, has captivated imaginations for centuries. According to the Torah, this gold-covered wooden chest housed the Ten Commandments and symbolized the covenant between God and Israel. It rested within the Holy of Holies in King Solomon's Temple until the Babylonian destruction nearly 2,500 years ago. Curiously, while the Tanach lists the Temple vessels that were taken to Babylon, the Ark is missing from the record, and historical sources confirm the Holy of Holies stood empty during the Second Temple period.

A vital clue to its fate appears in the Book of Chronicles. It states that 22 years before the Temple's destruction, King Josiah moved the Ark to "the House that Solomon built." Since the Ark was already in the Temple, Jewish oral tradition suggests that Solomon—foreseeing the Temple's destruction—constructed a hidden underground chamber specifically for the Ark's safekeeping. According to this tradition, the Ark remained hidden in these subterranean tunnels beneath

the Temple Mount in Jerusalem to this day.

This mystery has inspired figures like Vendyl Jones, the real-life archaeologist who served as a partial inspiration for the Indiana Jones film. While Jones searched the Judean Desert, believing it was connected to Jerusalem by secret passages, later excavations in the city revealed just how extensive these underground networks truly are.

Following the Six-Day War (1967), excavations beneath the Western Wall uncovered a vast system of tunnels. These Western Wall Tunnels revealed dramatic features, most notably Warren's Gate—a massive, sealed passageway that stood closest to the original site of the Holy of Holies underneath the Temple Mount. In 1981, Rabbi Yehuda Getz explored an opening near this gate, hoping to find Judaism's most sacred object. However, religious and political tensions quickly halted the project, and the opening was sealed by Israeli authorities.

Whether the Ark lies beneath the Temple Mount or elsewhere remains one of history's greatest mysteries. Jerusalem continues to conceal layers of history beneath its stones, as the verse states; "the built-up Jerusalem is like a city that was joined together within itself" (Psalms 122:3). Jewish tradition maintains that the Ark will one day return to its place in a rebuilt Third Temple. Just as the Dead Sea Scrolls resurfaced after two millennia, many believe that the original Ark of the Covenant will eventually come to light as well.

You Reached The Top Of The Mountain— Now Get Back To Work!

By: Rabbi Jacks



We love to obsess over the climb. We grind and push until we reach the summit of our personal mountains. But a verse in Parshas Yisro reveals a jarring truth about what happens in the next moment. After we accomplish the big win. After we have reached the peak of the mountain.

The Torah describes a specific scene where Moses sits down to judge the people's disputes. The text explicitly states this happened "on the next day." Rashi clarifies that this was the very next day after Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the second tablets. This was the day after the very first Yom Kippur. Moses had just achieved the highest level of intimacy with the Divine. He had secured forgiveness for the entire nation. You would expect him to take a break. You would expect him to bask in the glow of his spiritual perfection. Yet Moses didn't pause for a moment. Instead, he went back to work immediately.

There is a powerful story about the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe (known as the Rebbe Rayatz) and his father (the Rebbe Rashab). The story took place on the night following Yom Kippur. The Rebbe Rayatz asked his father what could possibly be required of them now that the holy day of Yom Kippur was over. They had just finished an entire day praying with the intensity of angels. What would be an appropriate next step after reaching such spiritual heights? His father, the Rebbe Rashab, answered his son: "Itzter darf men ersht teshuvah toun" (Now, one must first do Teshuvah – repent!) This instruction may seem illogical at first glance. They had just spent an entire day cleansing their souls of every blemish. Why, of all times, would the Rebbe Rashab be thinking of Teshuvah?

We misunderstand the definition of Teshuvah when we link it only to sin. Teshuvah means to return to your essential self. The version of you

that existed yesterday is simply too small for today. You might have crushed your goals and reached a level of total perfection. Know this: that perfection is now your cage! The very name of our Parsha, Yisro, means addition because you are required to add to your service exactly when you think you are finished.

Comfort is the enemy of greatness. The feeling of satisfaction is a lie that tries to seduce you into mediocrity. You have a soul that is a piece of the Infinite. An infinite soul does not know from finish lines. Moses went from the clouds of glory to the grit of solving legal disputes because he knew that standing still is a spiritual death sentence. Like Moses, acknowledge that your biggest achievement is now just the floor for your next ascent. You have no time to celebrate. Because you are on a mission to climb infinitely higher... now get back to work!

When Trust Becomes a Blessing

By: Yacov Aboudi



Parashat Yitro opens with a quiet moment that carries enormous weight. After hearing what Hashem did for Bnei Yisrael, Yitro responds with a simple declaration:

"וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ ה'."
"And Yitro said: Blessed is Hashem."
(Shemot 18:10)

Just two words. And yet the Gemara reacts sharply:

גִּנּוּת הָיָא לְמֹשֶׁה וְלִשְׁשִׁים רְבֹאָא שְׁלָא אָמְרוּ בְּרוּךְ ה' —
עַד שֶׁבָּא יִתְרוֹ וְאָמַר בְּרוּךְ ה' —
"It is a disgrace to Moshe and the six hundred thousand that they did not say 'Baruch Hashem' until Yitro came and said it."
(Sanhedrin 94a)

Moshe Rabbeinu. A generation that saw open miracles — and yet something was missing. The Zera Shimshon explains that while Bnei Yisrael believed and even sang Shirat HaYam, song flows from emotional overflow, while saying Baruch Hashem requires settled recognition. Yitro, standing outside the miracle, paused and named the Source.

The Ramban (end of Parashat Bo) teaches that open miracles train a person to recognize Hashem in all of life, especially when things appear ordinary. Recognition does not automatically follow experience; it must be learned. The Beis Yisrael of Ger adds that what we call nature is itself hidden miracle, and the difference between living within nature and above it is not what happens to us, but whether we recognize Hashem within what happens.

Rashi notes that Yitro "שמח" — he rejoiced with understanding (Rashi to Shemot 18:9). The Zohar teaches:

"בִּרְכָה לֹא שְׂרִיָּא עַד דְּאֵתְמַלֵּל בִּפְמֻא"

"Blessing does not rest until it is articulated with the mouth."
(Zohar II, 63a)

The Arizal explains the inner dynamic: awareness prepares divine flow, but it is speech — verbal praise and gratitude — that draws the shefa fully into the world. Until gratitude is articulated, blessing remains incomplete (Arizal, Sha'ar HaKavanot; Etz Chaim, Sha'ar HaTefillah).

Yitro's "Baruch Hashem" was not an afterthought. It completed the miracle — turning experience into awareness, and awareness into a way of living. Recognizing Hashem's hand is not an alternative to responsibility; it gives our choices direction and meaning.

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