

Shabbat Shalom,

## Parsha

As you may know, this week's parsha is Ekev. It talks overall about what the Israelites hear much of the time; obey "my" commandments and I will bless you. Before we had even looked at this parsha I decided that to prepare for becoming a bat mitzvah my mom and I would study the 613 commandments from the Torah. It is a cool coincidence that this parsha talks about G-d telling the people that we have to follow ALL of the commandments from the Torah.

## Interesting #1

When we first got the idea, we just googled 613 and we started with the first website that had popped up. After that we had our first meeting with Rabbi Tilsen and he suggested we use *Sefer Ha Mitzvot* by Maimonides because it is one of the most famous books about the commandments and it is good to study old sources. We agreed and ordered the book *Maimonides, The Commandments* which was translated by Charles B. Chavel. Maimonides lived roughly during the eleven hundreds and was born in what is now Spain and died in Egypt. He wrote this book not only to talk about the commandments but to explain why these are the ones he believed were the 613. Maimonides selected his 613 Commandments with 13 principles. There is one commandment that is interpreted that each person needs to write their own copy of the Torah even though there are other rules that make that not really easy for most of us to do. So along with my studying I wrote my own copy of the 613 commandments (Luckily I'm not a king because then I would have to write two copies!) I thought about it and in a way, by writing the 613 commandments I have sort of written a copy of the Torah, just without the stories, which I think are there partly to make the commandments more understandable by showing what they are like in life, although our life is very different now than in biblical times.

## The Book of Art

One day when I was at the library, my eye caught a familiar phrase in a book titled, The 613, by an author named Archie Rand. It happens to be a bright and colorful book of each of the 613 commandments interpreted by modern paintings. I thought this was quite fascinating since I hadn't seen for myself someone expressing the commandments in another way than studying them or living them. This book is on display downstairs in the social hall along with the list of 613 commandments that I wrote.

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When I started this project, my plan was to try to really understand ALL of the 613 Torah commandments, but then I realized that the point to learning and understanding these commandments was so I will know what I am responsible for doing and not doing as Bat Mitzvah. A majority of the commandments were about things that didn't seem to have anything to do with me like the temple or being a man. When we discovered a list of 60 positive commandments at the back of the book, that he called "Unconditional Commandments", meaning they applied to every adult Jew, we got the idea to focus on this smaller set. Maimonides had said in his book that women were only able to do 46 out of the 60 commandments because they were women. But, growing up in a synagogue like Beki, all 60 count for me. Most of the commandments in the list of 60 I had either heard before or were easily understandable. I took time to research what Maimonides and Chavel had to say about some of the others that were deeper and not as commonly recognizable. We chose to focus on this section of the commandments for other reasons as well. 1. 613 was a lot to study and this was a way more reasonable amount to take on, 2. Maimonides didn't make the negative commandments into a shortlist at least in this book, and 3. Nachmanides, another leading medieval scholar, once said, We do the positive commandments for the love of G-d and negative commandments for the fear of God. I wanted my learning experience for my bat mitzvah to be for the love of G-d instead of being out of fear of G-d.

## Interesting #2

While I was writing the commandments I noticed that some were very specific, for example: rest on the Sabbath, rest on Sukkot, etc., were not in the same commandment, they were in separate ones (maybe they needed exactly 613 commandments so they separated them into multiple commandments?) As I just said, We follow the positive commandments for the love of G-d and don't do the negative in the fear of G-d. So possibly the specific commandments are specific so that we have more chances to do positive commandments and show our love for G-d. Also in Chavel's introduction he talked about how when there is a negative and a positive commandment about the same thing and you do them both, for example, rest on the Sabbath and don't do work on that day you will be doing two mitzvot since you followed the positive and obeyed the negative commandment. It does end up meaning that more specific negative commandments lead to more punishments which leads to fearing G-d more because if you break a negative one you'll get punished but if you don't do a positive commandment it's just considered passive and there is no punishment according to the Torah - (except for 2: circumcision and the passover sacrifice).

### Interesting #3

A few months ago my mom and I were preparing to lead Junior Congregation. The parsha we were studying was on how we received the 10 commandments. Now when you think of those, most likely your mind goes right to Thou shalt not kill, or Do not steal, one of those types of things. Turns out that those are not the actual commandments we received on the tablets! Its funny to think about since we, or at least I and some of my peers have been taught that list of 10 com over and over digging it into our brains that **those were the ones**. When I read that, I had to kind of sit back and laugh a little that this was something I knew so well and it wasn't the necessarily the real deal. But what if we were taught this way for a reason? Maybe we weren't supposed to know what the real ones were at first and then find them out later in life. I think this fact interested me more since I learned it during the time I was studying the commandments.

### Rabbinical

During this experience I developed a much wider understanding of the commandments. In the earlier years of my life all I knew was just the 10 commandments, then the 613 from the Torah, and now, when I was preparing for my bat mitzvah, I discovered there were ones written by Rabbis. Before this I had no idea that there were commandments that didn't come from the Torah. But things came up after the Torah was given and G-d doesn't talk to prophets anymore, partly because we don't have prophets to talk to. Maimonides listed 7 Rabbinic positive commandments in his book, although many more came after. Those 7 were: the "thanksgiving for each enjoyment" or as we say "the blessing for all different things", the ritual washing of the hands, lighting shabbat candles, the Eruv which is the special area that you can carry things outside of the home during Shabbos, the Hallel service, the lighting of Chanukah candles, and the reading of the Scroll of Esther on Purim. One stood out to me... Hallel! The others seemed reasonable like reading the Megillah because, first of all the Esther story didn't even take place in the Torah, so how could there be a commandment about it in the Torah? I knew Hallel didn't exist in the Torah but for some reason it just seemed such a normal part of many holidays that come from the Torah that I hadn't thought about it before.

### Tikkun Olam

The Hebrew word for commandment is mitzvah but these days what many people usually think when they hear “mitzvah” is “good deed” or tikkun olam. As a bat mitzvah I am now officially responsible for making sure I do tikkun olam and help the world, since you’re supposed to not only study but do the commandments. For my mitzvah project I have chosen a few things that have to do with animal protection out of many things that I care about. The first is buying cruelty-free products which I do by looking on the backs of the container for multiple different signs, including a bunny rabbit with ears shaped as a heart, the phrase “cruelty-free” or “not tested on animals”. The second is safely disposing of six-pack soda can plastic rings. I do this by simply cutting up all the little holes in the ring, so that if the ring ends up in a body of water- whether it blows off the trash truck or, like in some places where the garbage gets dumped in the ocean - no animal will get them stuck around their necks. These are things I have always done but now I am taking the next step of trying to raise awareness so more people will know or remember and get motivated so there will be a bigger effect. Since these efforts don’t require me to be a bat mitzvah, I decided, for a new mitzvah project, to try and come to daily minyans as frequently as possible. Why this? We have this thing in my family called “bringing a little shabbos into the week”. For example, we might have some grape juice in the house which we don’t drink besides on Shabbos. And if I asked my mom if I could have some she would normally say “Sure, let’s bring a little bit of Shabbos into the week.” So even though we are commanded to pray 3 times a day, everyday, Shabbat has been *my* main time to pray and a weekday minyan feels like it might bring a little bit of Shabbos into the week for me. Besides that, since I’ve now learned more of the prayers, all I have to do is come, pray, and know that I’m helping the community.

## Thanks

I want to thank everyone here for coming today and being in my life. Especially on this day I am grateful for everyone in this Jewish community including my Ezra teachers and my tutor from camp Roz for helping me be able to be an active part of our religion in our synagogue, and everywhere I go. I really appreciate my family, including those who are no longer alive or cannot be here today, for their love and support and especially my mom for studying with me, helping me prepare, and just being there for everything that went on. I want to just thank my friends so much, for being my friends but also sharing the b’nai mitzvah experience and helping me with it all. Finally I want to thank everyone here for listening to my devar.

So once again, I wish you all an exceptionally good Shabbos.

