

# The Center for Modern Torah Leadership

www.torahleadership.org

Shiur at Brandeis University, March 18, 2010

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE JEWISH?

The mission of the Center for Modern Torah Leadership is to model and foster a vision of fully committed halakhic Judaism that

- embraces the intellectual and moral challenges of modernity as spiritual opportunities,
- recognizes that ideas and rhetoric have consequences, and takes responsibility for the societal implications of its interpretations of Torah,
- understands that the real-world effects of Torah are mediated by the character of Torah leaders, and that self-knowledge is therefore essential for Torah leadership, and
- takes the ultimate significance of all human beings as *tzelem Elokim* as fundamental Torah principle.

CMTL's Summer Beit Midrash program invites 10 – 12 outstanding men and women to join the Beit Midrash from July 6 through August 11, 2010. SBM is a full-time fellowship of intense learning and teaching that immerses men and women with advanced textual skills in the process of psak Halakhah and allows them to experience themselves as producers of Halakhah. The program culminates with each participant writing and defending a teshuvah to a case designed to challenge them both intellectually and religiously and to generate critical self-knowledge. This summer's program will focus on halakhic issues related to informed consent with particular emphasis on the place of autonomy, especially bodily autonomy, as a right and as a value within Halakhah. Stipends are available for qualified applicants on a rolling admissions basis. SBM is hosted by Young Israel of Sharon and all fellows are housed in private homes in Sharon, Massachusetts.

### APPLY NOW!

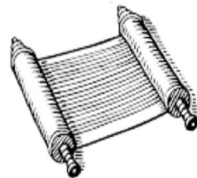
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**Center for Modern Torah Leadership**



חרות ואחריות

[www.TorahLeadership.org](http://www.TorahLeadership.org)

**"Taking Responsibility for Torah"**

### **ספר המצוות לרמב"ם מצות עשה א**

המצוה הראשונה היא הצווי אשר צונו להאמין האלו--הות, והוא שנאמין שיש שם עלה וסבה הוא פועל לכל הנמצאות, והוא אמרו ית' אנכי י"י אלהיך.

The first mitzvah is the command by which He commanded is to believe in Divinity, meaning that we must believe that there is a purpose and cause which activates all existents, This is the intent of His saying "I am Hashem your G-d".

### **ספר מצות גדולות עשה א**

המצוה הראשונה - מצות עשה להאמין כי אותו שנתן לנו את התורה בהר סיני על ידי משה רבינו הוא ה' אלקים שהוציאנו ממצרים וזהו מה שאמר בשעה שנתן את התורה אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים:

The first commandment is a "positive commandment" to believe that He Who gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai via Mosheh Rabbeinu, He is Hashem G-d Who took us out of Mitzrayim, and this is the intent of what He said at the time He gave the Torah: "I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out of the land of Mitzrayim".

### **From Sefer HaKuzari Book 1**

**The Khazar said:** I see that it is necessary to ask the Jews, as they are the remnants of the Children of Israel, as I see they are the basis for all argument that G-d has an Instruction for this world.

**So he called in one of the Jewish wise men, and asked about his wisdom.**

**The Jew said to him:**

We believe in the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob Who took the Children of Israel out of Mitzrayim with sign and wonders, Who fed them in the desert, Who gave them the Land of Israel after taking them across the Jordan with great wonders, Who sent Moses with his Torah, and afterward thousands of prophets warning us to keep that Torah, and promising great rewards for those who kept it and severe punishments for those who rebelled against it. We believe all that is written in that Torah – it would take a long time to say it all.

**The Khazar said** I had correctly concluded not to ask a Jew, as I knew they had lost their memories and wisdom, as lowliness and poverty have stripped them of all positive traits. Should you not have said, O Jew, that you believe in the Creator of the world, Who arranges and organizes it, and Who created you and fed you etc.? These are the arguments of all religious men, which drive them to seek the truth and to imitate the Creator in his righteousness and wisdom.

**The chaver replied:**

What you say is true of rational, conventional religion arrived at via analysis. But such religions are subject to many doubts, and if you ask the philosophers you'll find they can't agree on either action or opinion, because they are mere arguments, for some of which there is proof, some of which seem compelling, and some which don't seem compelling and for which there is certainly no proof . . .

**The chaver said** This is how I answered you. So G-d began his speech to the masses of Israel with "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Mitzrayim", and not with "I am G-d the creator of the world and of you", and so when you asked for my belief, I told you the basis of my obligation and that of the community of Israel, which was made clear to them at Sinai through their own witness, and afterward through ongoing tradition, which is like witnessing.

**The Khazar said** If so, I see that your Torah is given only to you!

**The chaver said** Yes! And every individual who joins us from among the nations will receive the good which the Creator will do with us . . .

### 1. Genesis 15:13

ויאמר לאברם: ידע תדע כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם, ועבדום וענו אותם, ארבע מאות שנה.  
G-d said to Avram: “You absolutely must know that your descendants will be *gerim* in a land not their own - they will be enslaved and afflicted – for 400 years.

### 2. Exodus 2:22

ותלד בן ויקרא את שמו גרשם כי אמר גר הייתי בארץ נכריה.  
(Tziporah, the wife of Moses), gave birth to a son. He called him “*Gershom*”, saying: “I have been a *ger* in an alien land”.

### 3. I Chronicles 29:15

כי גרים אנחנו לפניך ותושבים ככל אבותינו כצל ימינו על הארץ ואין מקוה  
For we are *gerim* before you, residents like all our ancestors; our days pass like shadows over the land, and there is no hope (but You).

### 4. Leviticus 25:23

והארץ לא תמכר לצממת כי לי הארץ כי גרים ותושבים אתם עמדי  
The land (of Israel) cannot be sold permanently, for the land belongs to Me; for you are *gerim* and settlers staying with me.

### 5. Exodus 22:20

וגר לא תונה ולא תלחצנו כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים  
Do not oppress or torment the *ger*, for you were *gerim* in the land of Mitzrayim.

### 6. Exodus 23:9

וגר לא תלחץ ואתם ידעתם את נפש הגר כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים  
Do not torment the *ger*, for you know the soul of the *ger*, for you were *gerim* in the land of Mitzrayim

### 7. Deuteronomy 10:19

ואהבתם את הגר כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים  
You must love the *ger*, for you were *gerim* in the land of Mitzrayim

### 8. Leviticus 19:33-4

וכי יגור אתך גר בארצכם לא תונו אותו. כאזרח מכם יהיה לכם הגר הגר אתכם ואהבת לו כמוך כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים; אני ה' אל-היכם.  
Should a *ger* be among you, do not torment him. Rather, the *ger* among you must be treated just like a citizen, and you must love him as yourself, for you were *gerim* in the land of Mitzrayim. I am Hashem your G-d.

### 9. Numbers 9:14

וכי יגור אתכם גר ועשה פסח לה' כחקת הפסח וכמשפטו כן יעשה חקה אחת יהיה לכם ולגר ולאזרח הארץ  
Should a *ger gar* among you, and make a Passover-sacrifice to Hashem – like the standards and rule of the Passover-sacrifice, so he must do. There will be one standard for you and for the *ger* and for the citizen of the land.

### 10. Deuteronomy 23:8

לא תתעב אדמי כי אחיך הוא; לא תתעב מצרי כי גר היית בארצו.  
Do not abominate the Edomite, for he is your brother; do not abominate the Mitzri, for you were a *ger* in his land.