

February 2, 2013 – Yitro (Exodus 18:1-20:23)

This is the sidrah containing the first version of what have come to be called the Ten Commandments, including the words for public reading. The rabbis have referred to this, the central part of the public revelation at Sinai, as the Ten Utterances, since we consider that the Torah has many other commandments, but these are the ones which are said to have been spoken aloud, in the hearing of all the Israelites and, it is to be assumed, the others who came out of Egypt with Moses.

We discussed at length verse 20:19, in which the text says God spoke to Moses saying that the Israelites “saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens.” Seeing speech is not a description with which we often deal, but it is one that is fascinating to consider. Is it describing something real, or something strictly metaphorical, and if the latter, what is it a metaphor for?

We also talked about what it might mean for Judaism that we had a public revelation, to all, rather than just the kind of private revelation on which some other religions depend.