

**The Torah is the tree of life, and those who hold fast to it are  
happy.**

**Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace.**

**Purpose –**

In these times, we face challenges we have never dreamed of. One of the questions we ask is “What can I do”. An alternate way of thinking is to ask “Who can I be”. No matter what we face, who we are as a person affects how we respond in life. Our values, strengths, skills, beliefs, relationships and experiences form our responses. By knowing our purpose, we draw upon all of these to act.

**Rabbi Lisa stated in her High Holy Day Sermon of 5775. Live with Purpose.**

...one of the things that American Jews envy about Israeli counterparts is that their lives seem to have a sense of purpose; they know who they are, they have a clear and proud identity with a people and a country, and they have a sense of mission about their lives. That mission is about nurturing their families and contributing meaningfully to society. For many, that identity and mission emanates from their Jewish lifestyle and values, and for many a sense of relationship with God. Here is how I would define Jewish purpose: to act with personal integrity, give of yourself to others, sustain your people, work toward a just world, and cultivate a relationship with God. Jewish answer to happiness: to live purposefully

## **Torah/Midrash Reference:**

The Ten Commandments: Israel's Shared Purpose

YITRO, EXODUS 18:1–20:23

D'VAR TORAH BY:

JORDAN PARR

### **Focal Point**

All the people answered as one, saying, "All that the Eternal has spoken we will do!" (Exodus 19:8)

### ***D'var Torah***

As Moses is about to climb Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, the Israelites gather at the base of the mountain and affirm their commitment to fulfilling God's commandments. Interestingly enough, they have not yet heard what those commandments will be! Nevertheless, they make a commitment to obey God's word: "All that the Eternal has spoken we will do!" (Exodus 19:8).

I like to think of the Ten Commandments as Ancient Israel's mission statement. God and Moses both knew that the Children of Israel needed a document that stated the purpose of the people and pointed them toward their destiny. It had to be a statement broad enough to encompass a variety of interpretations, yet compelling enough to be shared by everyone. The variety of opinions concerning the Ten Commandments today testifies to the sheer power and success of this most influential document. The Ten Commandments formed the Israelite people a disparate people with competing agendas into a unified nation with a shared purpose.

Having a shared purpose defines community. Whether we are talking about a family, a business, or even a sports team, we need to start with a definite goal in mind. A family goal might be to have every child in the family graduate from college; a business goal might be to double last year's sales revenue; a sports team's goal, of course, is to win a championship trophy. People who share our goals enter our communities (the analogy also works in the context of marriage); if they have other goals, they will leave our communities and go somewhere else.

At Mount Sinai the Israelites have a shared purpose: to learn and to do God's will. They are preparing themselves for the coming Revelation and let it be known that they are willing and eager to form a community of like-minded believers at Mount Sinai. Later of course, that shared purpose fades away. But for now, in *Parashat Yitro*, shared purpose is everything. They are eager to enter into this *b'rit*—this strange new covenant with God. The Israelites are not too sure what this commitment entails, but they certainly are ready to learn. Moses ascends the mountain as Israel's emissary to the Divine; he becomes the conduit through which the Israelites come to know God's will. And the Israelites answer the

challenge as one: the entirety of that which God commands, Israel will do. Assent precedes knowledge, a true statement of faith.

How do we bring our people to a shared vision when all we see are competing agendas? This is the great challenge. A shared vision is essential before proceeding with a mission statement. If we cannot answer the simple question, “What do we stand for?” we will stand for nothing and, eventually, be reduced to nothing. This is true of a religious institution, a corporation, a sports team, or even a family.

A mission statement combines and formalizes the nuanced variations of what each individual sees as the mission of the organization and combines those personal ideas into a single coherent and mutually acceptable document. That is why the Israelites can agree to a mission statement, the Ten Commandments, even before they hear them. The basic concepts of obedience and service before God have already taken root among the people. The Ten Commandments are only the formalization of what is already implicit service to God. In a way, the details are unimportant; the sense of common purpose is paramount and, through the words, “All that the Eternal has spoken we will do!” (Exodus 19:8), is made explicit.

Only with a sense of shared purpose can the disparate Israelites become one nation. The anticipation of receiving the Ten Commandments melds them into one people; yet this Revelation can never happen unless the Israelites share the common purpose of service to God. If they were not united in this way, they would not merit this Revelation. This is the lesson that we must remember: without a shared purpose, none of our endeavors, from developing mission statements to moving our organizations forward to leaving our legacy, can occur. Do you have a vision that you have shared with others? If not, why not? And when will you start to work toward that vision?

### **By the Way**

[Rabbi Parr writes: Jack Canfield, the cocreator of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series, published a book entitled *The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be*. In it, he writes about the discernment and fulfillment of our deepest thoughts and dreams and gives the reader a way to achieve them. Regarding the question of shared mission and vision, he writes the following:]

You’ll find that when you share your vision, some people will want to help you make it happen. Others will introduce you to friends and resources that can help you. You’ll also find that each time that you share your vision, it becomes clearer and feels more real and attainable. And most importantly, every time you share your vision, you strengthen your own subconscious belief that you can achieve it. (Jack Canfield, *The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* [New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005], p. 34)

[Rabbi Parr continues: Obviously, Canfield could have had Moses in mind! Moses was superb at bringing his vision to a people and enticing them to share it with him. When we

articulate and then share our vision, we will find a unity of purpose and satisfaction in life, if only because everyone around us is participating in the unfolding of our dreams.]

### **Your Guide**

1. When you sit with your family, do you share your vision for family growth with them? Does your vision mesh with the vision of your spouse or partner, your children, your parents? Do they share this vision with you?
2. As a member of a synagogue, can you quote your congregation's mission statement? Do you agree with it? Does your synagogue have a mission statement? If not, can you help create one?
3. When in your life experiences has assent preceded knowledge? When was the last time that you acted on faith, knowing that the action was risky, but supportive of your vision and likely to further your personal, professional, and spiritual goals?

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- See more at: <http://www.reformjudaism.org/ten-commandments-israel%E2%80%99s-shared-purpose#sthash.v5F2dal1.dpuf>

*The meaning of life is  
to find your gift.  
The purpose of life is  
to give it away.*

*--Joy J. Golliver*

## VALUES ASSESSMENT

Rate each value on a scale of 1 to 10 based on its importance in your life with 1 being low and 10 being high. Then rate each value on a scale of 1 to 10 based on how well you live each value or “walk the talk”.

Value	Value Rating 1 to 10	Action Rating 1 - 10
Accomplishment		
Abundance		
Achievement		
Acts of Loving Kindness (Gemilut Chasadim)		
Altruism		
Autonomy		
Beauty		
Blessings (Berachot)		
Clarity		
Commitment		
Community		
Connecting to Others		
Covenant		
Creativity		
Education/Learning (Torah)		
Emotional Health		
Environment		
Equality/Egalitarianism		
Ethics		
Excellence		
Faith		
Family		
Flexibility		
Forgiveness (Selichah)		
Freedom		
Friendship		
Fulfillment		
Fun		
Giving (T’zakah)		
Holistic Living		
Honesty		
Humor		
Inclusion		
Integrity		

Intimacy		
Innovation		
Jewish Homeland – Eretz Yisrael		
Jewish Living (Halachot)		
Joy (Simchah)		
Justice (Mishpat)		
Leadership		
Loyalty		
Manners (Derech Eretz)		
Memory (Zikaron)		
Mercy (Rachamim)		
Mitzvot		
Nature		
Openness		
Orderliness/Organization		
Peace (Shalom)		
Personal Growth		
Partnership		
Physical Appearance		
Power		
Privacy		
Professionalism		
Recognition		
Respect (Kavod)		
Romance		
Sacredness (Kedushah)		
Security		
Self-Care/Health		
Self-Expression		
Self-Mastery		
Self-Realization		
Sensuality		
Service (Avodah)		
Spirituality/Prayer		
Tikkun Olam		
Tradition/Heritage		
Trust		
Truth (Emet)		
Vitality		
Walking the Talk		
Wisdom (Chochmah)		

## ***Creating a Purpose Statement***

***You were born with an inner guidance system that tells you when you are on or off purpose by the amount of joy you are experiencing.  
Jack Canfield***

### ***Purpose Statement: Questions to ask yourself!***

Please get comfortable, take out your journal and please write whatever comes to mind without judging the ideas. You will not be sharing this with anyone.

- a. What is your favorite hobby?
- b. What is an activity that you get really excited about? At work and at home?
- c. What activities at work and at home bring you satisfaction?
- d. What activities at work and at home bring you pleasure or happiness?
- e. What are you doing when you totally lose track of time? What feeling do you get from doing that?
- f. What do all these activities have in common? All involve people, all are mechanical, computers, involve hands, involve helping others
- g. What are you expressing when you do these activities?
- h. How could these activities and your expression help other people?
- i. What feeling does your creation bring to others?
- j. What are 5 values you have?
- k. How do your values align with what you love to do?
- l. What are 5 strengths you have? Accountable, trustworthy, loving, organizer, teacher, musical, critical thinker, creative thinker, listener
- m. What are some talents you possess? Public speaker, event planning, leader, musical instrument, analyzing, seeing patterns out of disparate data, visionary
- n. What are 5 personal qualities you have? Enthusiastic, creative, friendly, open minded, positive, inspiring, accepting, empowering

- o. What are 2 of your weaknesses? Difficult time making decisions, interrupt others, hard time being and always doing, shop to alleviate pain or sadness
- p. If money was no object what would you be doing to express yourself?

**Putting it all together into a draft statement**

1. List two of your unique personal qualities such as creative, enthusiasm, empower
2. List two ways you enjoy expressing these qualities when interacting with others, such as supporting or motivating or inspiring.
3. Assume the world is perfect right now. What does this world look like? How are people interacting with others? What does it feel like? How are you interacting with others? Write your answer as a statement in the present tense, describing the ultimate condition, the perfect world as you see it and feel it. Remember a perfect world is a fun place to be!!

**Example:** Everyone is freely expressing their own unique talents. Everyone is working in harmony. Everyone is expressing love for each other and Adonai.

4. Combine the 3 prior subdivisions of this paragraph into a single statement.

**Example:** My purpose is to use my spirituality and enthusiasm to support and inspire others to freely express their talents in harmonious and loving ways.

**My desire in life  
Is to use my  
wisdom, creative &  
social justice talents  
To inspire and nurture others  
Toward Tikkun Olam**

Another template one can use:

I, INSERT NAME, hear, feel, see and know the purpose of my life is to be or use, INSERT YOUR TALENTS/STRENGTHS, to INSERT PERSONAL QUALITIES to INSERT HOW YOU WILL HELP OTHERS.

I, [name], hear, feel, see and know the purpose of my life is to use my curiosity and listening skills to support and assist elders in finding the best care possible and to connect with community.

I, [name], hear, feel, see and know the purpose of my life is to use my critical thinking skills to research and analyze information to provide financial stability for my clients.



**Creative Inspiration:**

From Mishkan T'Filah

As I awaken, let this be my thought:  
May my day be filled with acts of loving-kindness.  
Let me be drawn to learning and discernment,  
And may my actions be shaped by mitzvot.

Keep me from iniquity, disgrace and sin;  
May I not be overwhelmed by temptation or despair.

Distance me from evil people and false friends.  
Let me cultivate a life of goodness.

May my hands reach out in kindness,  
And I will serve God through acts of righteousness.

Today and every day, may I merit Your mercy,  
By living my life with compassion and love.

Holy One of Blessing, draw me to Your words;  
Teach me the art of sacred living.