

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES**  
*Parshas Yisro*  
 February 8, 2007

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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## Parshas Yisro

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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### 1. The Spiritual Encoding of Existence

In the Song that Moshe and the Jewish people had sung at the Sea they had said, “...the foundation of Your dwelling place that You, Hashem, have made – the Sanctuary, my Lord, that Your hands established.” Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “The Temple is beloved. The world was created with one of the Hands of G’d. As it states in Yishaya, ‘My Hand founded the earth...’ However, the Temple will be built with G’d’s Two Hands. When will the Temple be built with Two Hands? When G’d will reign supremely forever at the end of time. It is then that He will build the Temple with Two Hands.” What does this actually mean?

There is a positive commandment that one must obliterate the name of Amalek from under the heavens. As it states, “I shall surely obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens...For the hand is upon the throne of G’d (keis).” The Hebrew word for throne is “kisei”; however, the verse writes it in a deleted form without the letter “aleph” to indicate that when the hand of Amalek is upon the Throne of G’d, it is not complete. Therefore it is referred to in the verse as “keis.” Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “And when his name (Amalek) will be obliterated, then the Name of G’d will be complete and His Throne will be whole.” When will this occur? At the end of time.

The Torah states at the conclusion of the first day of creation, “And there was evening and there was morning, day one (yom echad).” After the second day of creation the Torah states, “And there was evening and there was morning, a second day (yom sheini).” The Midrash asks, “According to the order of counting of the days of creation, if the second day is referred to as “yom sheini – second day” and the third day is referred to as “yom shlishi – third day” and so on, the first day of creation should have been referred to as “yom rishon – first day.” However the Torah refers to the first day of creation as “yom echad – day one.” The Midrash answers, that the reason the Torah chooses the word “one” rather than “first” regarding the first day of Creation is to indicate that the only thing that existed within the spiritual realm was G’d Himself. The angels were only created on the

second day. Thus, the Torah refers to the first day of creation as “echad - day one” rather than “yom rishon – first day” to elucidate this point. On the first day, the Omnipotence and Unity of G’d was obvious on the most absolute level. However, on the second day, after the creation of the angels, who also exist within the spiritual realm, their presence detracted from the absolute obviousness of G’d’s Unity. However, at the end of time, when G’d will reign supreme, His Presence and Omnipotence will be so overwhelmingly obvious that although there will be angels who possess great dimensions of spirituality, they will not detract from G’d’s Radiance.

King David writes in Psalms, “How great (*rabu*) are Your works Hashem...” Ramak (Reb Moshe Cordavero) writes in his work Tomer Devorah that the word “rabu,” which literally means “great” should be interpreted as “Master (rav).” Meaning, that every aspect of creation has the imprint of G’d, the Master upon it. Just as the features of the father are evident on his child, so too is the imprint of G’d encoded on every aspect of creation. King David states in Psalms, “The heavens speak the Glory of G’d.” He was able to see and appreciate G’d’s impression upon heaven.

The Prophet Yishaya tells us that G’d had created existence with One Hand. Meaning, G’d’s imprint upon creation is not blatantly obvious. One needs an advanced and refined sense of spirituality to perceive that imprint. This will only be as long as evil exists. The existence of Amalek, which is the personification of evil, does not allow G’d to be incontestably obvious in creation. Thus, G’d’s Throne, His Mastership and Dominion, is not complete. G’d’s Dominion over existence is occluded as a result of Amalek. However, at the end of time when Amalek will be obliterated from the face of the earth and evil will no longer exist, G’d will rebuild the Temple with His Two Hands. Meaning, G’d’s imprint on all existence through the rebuilding of the Third Temple will be so profound that one would not need an acute sense of spirituality to see and appreciate His imprint upon existence. At that moment “G’d will be the King over all of the world, on that day G’d will be One and His Name will be One.”

## 2. The Added Value of the Pursuit of Truth

The Torah tells us that after Moshe had shared with Yisro his father in law, every aspect of the miracles that the Jewish people had experienced after leaving Egypt, Yisro responded, “**Baruch Hashem! – Blessed is Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt...**”

The Midrash states, “Why did Yisro exclaim, ‘Baruch Hashem...’? Yisro had said, ‘There is no deity in the world that I did not serve. I have not found any god that is the equivalent of the G’d of Israel. Now, I understand that G’d is greater than any deity.’”

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that although Moshe and the Jewish people were the direct beneficiaries of the revealed miracles of the exodus, they did not say “Baruch Hashem!” as Yisro had done. As the Gemara states, “It is something unbecoming (and a blemish on their record) that Moshe and the 600,000 Jewish males above the age of 20 who left Egypt did not say “Baruch (Blessed Hashem)” while Yisro said “Baruch.” Why was Yisro able to internalize the events of the exodus to the degree that he had – causing him to exclaim “Baruch Hashem” and the Jewish people did not?

One could say that the Jewish people may have felt that their imminent redemption from Egypt was something that they had expected to happen. Since G’d had promised Avraham, our Patriarch, (at the Covenant Between the Parts) that the Jewish people would be redeemed after 400-year exile and leave with great wealth, that it was in fact a debt that G’d had to pay to the Jewish people. Because G’d was bound by this Covenant, the Jewish people did not appreciate what He had done for them - similar to the lender receiving the money that is owed to him from the borrower. However, Yisro not being part of that Covenant nor being a beneficiary of the miracles was able to recognize and appreciate G’d because he was a third-party observer. Nevertheless, the Gemara tells us that it was unbecoming of Moshe and the Jewish people that they did not say “Baruch Hashem.”

Yisro was in fact uniquely capable of appreciating G’d. In his quest for truth, he had pursued and worshipped every deity in existence. He was proficient in all of the religions of the world. It is through his quest for truth that he concluded that there was no basis for paganism. He concluded that all powers that exist are manifestations of the Omnipotent One, the G’d of Israel. In retrospect, he realized that he had been wandering in spiritual darkness until he came upon the true light of G’d. Since Yisro’s

belief in G’d came about as a result of his own toil, initiative, and quest, he was thus imbued with G’d’s Presence. Consequently, G’d was evident in every aspect of his existence. Therefore when Moshe had shared with him all that G’d had done for the Jewish people and to the Egyptians, Yisro declared, “**Baruch Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt...**”

In contrast, the Jewish people’s belief in G’d was founded upon their witnessing His Hand in bringing about the revealed miracles in Egypt. They understood from that revelation that there was no basis for paganism. They did appreciate the falsehood of idolatry as a result of their own relentless quest for truth, rather it was revealed to them as a consequence of witnessing G’d’s Hand in Egypt. Consequently, they did not appreciate the fallacies of all pagan religions. Since they were not engaged in an intellectual pursuit of truth, when G’d preformed all the miracles on their behalf to vanquish their enemy, although the Jewish people recognized the Omnipotent Being for what He was, their level of excitement/appreciation was not comparable to that of Yisro who had found the truth through his own toil. It was because of this that he had said “Baruch Hashem...”.

After witnessing the splitting of the Sea, the Jewish people acknowledged G’d by declaring, “**This is my G’d and I will exalt Him...**” Chazal tell us, that G’d’s Presence was so palpable that the lowly maidservant was privy to a level of revelation that even the prophet Yechezkel was not. However, it is important to note that after the revelation at the Sea, the maidservant remained a maidservant. She did not change as a spiritualized person in any significant manner. On the other hand, Yechezkel, although he was not privy to what was witnessed at the Sea, he was a prophet who appreciated and understood G’d. This is because the revelation that was seen by the maidservant at the Sea was granted to her by G’d (rather than coming upon it by herself), she thus did not have the ability to process what she had seen. It is similar to one who has no expertise in evaluating diamonds being shown a diamond of exceptional rare value. Although the person may understand that what he is looking at is precious and rare, he has no ability to appreciate the basis for its preciousness. However, Yechezkel the prophet had the capacity to fully process and appreciate the level of G’dliness to which he was exposed. This was because he had pursued spirituality his entire life.

Very often, people perform mitzvos only as a result of positive conditioning without appreciating what they are experiencing. For example, although one may wear tefillin every day without exception, because he does

it out of habit, he no longer has a sense of the mitzvah that he is fulfilling. The Halacha (Jewish Law) dictates that a mourner is not permitted to wear tefillin on the same day of the passing and interment of his loved one. This is based on a verse from Yechezkel, “Your ornament is upon you.” Meaning, that although under normal circumstances a mourner is not permitted to wear tefillin on the day of death and interment, G’d was telling Yechezkel, although he was a mourner, that he should nevertheless wear the tefillin. Since a mourner on the day of the interment of his loved one is in a disheveled state, it is inappropriate for him to wear the tefillin which is an “ornament”/ something of special value. Tefillin is an “ornament” that enhances and glorifies the individual. When one wears tefillin he should feel privileged because he is able to wear something that identifies him as one of G’d’s people. Consequently there should be an excitement and privileged feeling. However when one wears the tefillin as a result of positive conditioning, one does not recognize and feel its special value. It is only the one who studies Torah and is actively engaged in spiritual advancement that can appreciate mitzvos. Because the Jewish people in Egypt did not take any initiative to dispel and refute paganism, they did not process the miracles in the same manner as Yisro had done.

### ***3. G’d’s Quantification of Himself in the Ten Commandments***

The first of the Ten Commandments states, “**I am Hashem, your G’d Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.**” One would think that G’d would identify Himself as “G’d Who created existence.” However, He chooses to identify Himself as “your G’d Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt.” Why does G’d focus on the exodus from Egypt and not Himself being the Creator?

There is a positive commandment to remember G’d as the one who had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt. Ramban explains in the Portion of Bo that initially some segments of mankind believed that G’d had created all existence; however subsequently, He handed it over to the powers/deities, the hosts of heaven. He thus distanced Himself from existence and His Presence no longer had relevance to humanity. When G’d brought about the revealed miracles in Egypt it established the fact the He is continuously involved in the process of creation on an ongoing basis. If He had truly detached Himself from existence He would not have intervened on behalf of the Jewish people. The fact that G’d did, demonstrated that He never disassociated Himself from creation. Nothing can

exist unless He Wills its existence. The miracles of Egypt established that G’d Himself is the basis for the natural order. Nature itself is an ongoing concealed miracle. Ramban states that anyone who does not believe that nature is a concealed miracle is considered a heretic and has no share in the Torah of Moshe. It was because of the miracles in Egypt that G’d was revealed to the Jewish people and the world as the Omnipotent and All-Encompassing Being. Therefore G’d identifies Himself in the Ten Commandments not as the “Creator” but rather as “G’d Who had taken you out of the land of Egypt.” However, we can understand this on another level.

Shalah HaKadosh writes in his work Shnei Luchos HaBris that there are many parallels between creation and the exodus from Egypt. For example, King David writes in Psalms, “The world was built with kindness.” The basis for G’d’s creation of the world was only out of His infinite kindness. Since no one existed prior to creation, there was no one who was deserving of the unlimited opportunities offered by creation. Nevertheless He brought it about to benefit mankind as a result of His Kindness. Similarly the Jewish people were pagans in Egypt and were not deserving of being redeemed. Despite their unworthiness, G’d took them out of Egypt to be His people. This was the equivalent of bringing about a new existence. Just as the world was initially created with the objective that there should be a Jewish people to receive His Torah, so too was the objective of the exodus – that there should be a Jewish people to stand at Sinai to receive His Torah.

In order to be in a position to accept and be fully dedicated to G’d’s Torah, the Jewish people needed to bind themselves unequivocally and selflessly to Him. What must be the setting to bring this about? When one truly understands and appreciates the concern and love that G’d has for him, then one understands that all that is asked of him to do is only in his own best interest. If this should be internalized, there that is nothing too difficult. The Jewish people initially were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, who embittered their lives. At the time of the exodus, they became the subjects of G’d. As it states, “Until now you were subjects of Pharaoh **now you are My subjects.**” Because G’d redeemed the Jewish people from slavery with revealed miracles, ultimately destroying their masters, despite the fact that they were not truly deserving, they experienced a unique level of appreciation and gratitude towards Him. In addition, G’d’s miracles demonstrated His special love for them. It was because of this overwhelming feeling of love and gratitude that the Jewish people were able to accept the Torah at Sinai and bind themselves to His Will unconditionally.

The recitation of the Shema is a declaration of one's acceptance of the yoke of heaven/ G'd's Dominion. It is interesting to note that the Men of the Great Assembly who had authored the blessings of the Shema, had predicated the Shema with the blessing of, "With an abundant love You loved us, Hashem our Father, our King..." It is necessary for one to articulate and internalize G'd's love for His people, demonstrated by the many things that He had done for us. This is contained within this blessing. If one recognizes and appreciates the special love that G'd has for His people, then it would not be difficult to accept His Unity and Dominion upon himself. Similarly, by presenting Himself as the One who had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt, despite the fact that they were undeserving – demonstrating His love for them, it allowed the Jewish people to embrace Him despite the consequences of that dedication.

#### 4. *The Profound Impact of a Role Model*

The Torah states, "**Yisro, the Priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard...**" The Midrash states, "There are those who listen and as a result of what they heard, they lose. There are those who listen and as a result of what they heard, they gain. Yisro heard and he gained. He was a high priest of idolatry; however, as a result of what he had heard he came and attached himself to Moshe. As a result of this he was taken under the wings of the Divine Presence (converted). Through this he merited that the portion (in the Torah) of establishing the judicial system for the Jewish people should be attributed to him..."

Initially Yisro was a person of great renown in the world of paganism. He had served all the deities in existence. After Yisro heard what G'd had done for the Jewish people, he abandoned his glory to go out and become part of the Jewish people in the desert. The Midrash states that he did not merely join Moshe in the desert, and subsequently convert, but rather he first "attached himself" to Moshe and only then did he convert. This level of attachment was a prerequisite for Yisro's conversion. Although he was Moshe's father-in-law and had a relationship with him for more than forty years in Midian, after hearing of the splitting of the Sea and the battle against the Amalekites, he chose to attach himself to Moshe. It was only after Yisro subordinated himself that he was able to internalize, be influenced and affected by what he had heard and was taught. It was because of this level of negation to Moshe that Yisro converted.

There is a positive commandment for a Jew to

attach himself to G'd (*bo tidbok*). The Gemara in Tractate Pesachim states, "If G'd is fire, how can one attach himself to fire? One should associate closely with a Torah scholar. One should marry the daughter of a Torah scholar, engage in business with him, and eat and drink with him." One should be associated with a Torah scholar in a way that he is exposed to many aspects of his life. Through this level of association one will gain a profound appreciation and reverence for G'd. This is the way one fulfills the positive commandment of "**To Him you shall cleave/ attach yourself.**"

Rambam states that one gains an appreciation for the Torah scholar by eating and drinking with him, although these are activities of a mundane nature. It is in this context that one can see the Torah scholar in his true light. The Gemara in Tractate Sukkah tells us, "Even when the Torah scholar speaks about ordinary subject matter, one must study his words. They should not be taken as idle chatter." Because this seemingly ordinary information was expressed by a person of this caliber, his words must be analyzed and studied to appreciate their profound worth. The Gemara derives this from the verse, "Even his (Torah scholar) leaf will not wither..." The leaf of a fruit will wither once the fruit has fully developed because it no longer has any value, however this does not apply to the Torah scholar. The ordinary statement of the Torah scholar, although it seems to have no importance, must be valued because of the one who had expressed it.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Fathers) states, "Your home should be a meeting place for Torah scholars. You should roll in the dust of their feet. And you should drink thirstily of their words." The Mishna teaches us that "drinking of their words thirstily" must be predicated on "rolling in the dust of their feet." Meaning, only after subordinating and negating oneself to the Torah scholar can one appreciate the importance of his teachings. When one sees the uniqueness of the Torah scholar, he will subordinate/attach himself to him. This is what occurred with Yisro before he had converted. He had to first attach himself to Moshe to appreciate his teachings which resulted in his conversion.

One of the morning blessings that we recite every day states, "...G'd girds Israel with power." Based on the Zohar one can understand this blessing to mean, "G'd attaches Himself to the Jewish people the way one attaches a belt to one's waist." This is the level of intimacy that G'd has with His people. Consequently, they are girded with His power. One can only appreciate this level of intimacy if he truly understands who G'd is. This is

brought about by subordinating oneself to a Torah scholar as Yisro had done with Moshe.

### 5. *Witnessing G'd's Retribution* (from Beshalach)

The Torah states, **“Egypt pursued and came after them (the Jewish people)...into the midst of the sea....Hashem looked down at the camp of Egypt with a pillar of fire and cloud, and He confounded/bewildered (*vayahum*) the camp of Egypt. He removed the wheels of their chariots and caused them to drive with difficulty.”**

Sforno explains, “The term ‘bewildered (*vayahum*)’ means that many illnesses came upon the Egyptians when they pursued the Jewish people into the Sea. As we find this term is used regarding the Philistines when G’d afflicted them with disease. The Torah states, **‘Hashem will remove from you every illness; and bad maladies of Egypt that you know – for you were frightened.’** All the plagues that the Jewish people had witnessed in Egypt, except for boils, were not illnesses. They had become frightened when they had seen the diseases that had come upon the Egyptians at the Sea.” Why were the Jewish people frightened? It could not be that they were afraid because they were concerned that the diseases were contagious because they had previously seen the Egyptians afflicted with boils and they remained unaffected. In addition, they had witnessed the plague of pestilence, which only affected the livestock of the Egyptians that were found in the field, while theirs remained unaffected. This clearly confirmed to them that one is only affected when G’d deems it so.

At Sinai, the Jewish people had unequivocally accepted the Torah with the declaration, **“Naaseh V’nishma – we will do and we will listen.”** They were willing to accept the dictate of G’d without understanding its extent and ramifications. However, we find nevertheless that G’d had given them an ultimatum to accept the Torah. He held the mountain over their heads and said to them, “If you accept the Torah it will be good. If not your will be buried under the mountain.” Tosfos asks, “If they had already accepted the Torah with their unequivocal declaration of Naaseh V’nishma, why did G’d need to hold the mountain over their heads?” Tosfos answers that the fires that they had seen at Sinai were the fires of gehennom. By seeing these fires, they became aware of their level of liability should they deviate from the Word of G’d and fail. They wanted to retract their initial acceptance of the Torah, realizing the serious ramifications of their decision. Therefore G’d needed to

give them an ultimatum so that they should not retract from their initial acceptance.

The Jewish people became frightened at Sinai when they understood the consequences of their actions. They had become aware of G’d’s spiritual retribution. When they had seen the Egyptians being punished and afflicted at the Sea, they became frightened when they realized to what extent G’d’s punishment is exacting. It was demonstrated to them that punishment is meted out measure for measure. In Egypt they had seen the Egyptian civilization being punished measure for measure on a general level for their evil ways. However at the Sea they had witnessed the principle of measure for measure to the smallest detail. As Rebbi Akiva states in the Haggadah (of Passover) that at the Sea the Egyptians were punished with 250 plagues. They thus became frightened and overwhelmed understanding that if the Egyptians were being punished at such an exacting level, they themselves would be liable to no less of a degree for transgressing the Word of G’d.

After G’d had burned the wheels off of the Egyptian chariots, the chariots were dragged through the mud with “heaviness/difficulty.” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that this particular moment was G’d’s demonstration of measure for measure. Pharaoh had the ability to chose to acknowledge G’d when he had witnessed the plagues (revealed miracles). Yet he chose to harden his heart. Just as he was obstinate and hardened his heart, not willing to submit to G’d, the Egyptians at the Sea were dragged in their chariots with heaviness/difficulty through the mud.

Baal HaTurim explains the measure for measure differently. Initially after Moshe had revealed himself to the Jewish people as the Redeemer, there was a work stoppage. In response to this, Pharaoh withdrew the straw subsidy that was given to the Jewish people in order to make bricks. Although they no longer were to receive the subsidy, Pharaoh demanded the same quota to be filled. Thus he made their work and lives more “difficult.” Just as Pharaoh caused the lives of the Jewish people to become more difficult/heavy, his pursuit of them through the Sea was to become difficult by having the chariots dragged through the mud.

Pharaoh believed that the reason the Jewish people came to a work stoppage and began to complain was because they had an excess of time to think and ponder their situation. He therefore withdrew the straw allotment so that the Jewish people should not have any time to reflect upon their predicament.

Ramchal writes in his work, the Path of the Just that the modus operandi of the evil inclination is similar to that of what Pharaoh had done to the Jewish people in Egypt. Just as Pharaoh had occupied and overwhelmed the Jewish people by withdrawing their straw subsidy and not giving them time to think and reflect, so too does the evil inclination drive man in a way that he has no time to reflect upon his actions. If one had sufficient time to reflect prior to or after an action, one would not come to sin. Therefore the evil inclination creates a sense of urgency within man to be on to other pursuits without a moment of respite. This distraction desensitizes one from sin.

Initially when Moshe came to the Jewish people as their Redeemer, the Torah tells us that they believed in him. However, after the straw subsidy was withdrawn, the Torah states, **“So Moshe spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of wind (*kotzer ruach*) and hard work.”** The physical hardship that was inflicted upon them by Pharaoh caused the Jewish people to reject Moshe and his proposed redemption. Since, Pharaoh had in effect denied the Jewish people free choice through his ploy of withdrawing the straw, he was to experience in the Sea a more difficult situation (heaviness) – measure for measure.

We see that not only was the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart a basis for his punishment in the Sea, but also according to the interpretation of Baal HaTurim he was punished for the consequences of his actions. Therefore one must not only consider the immediate consequences of one’s transgression, but also the far-reaching damaging consequences of that transgression. For example, one is not permitted to undermine the livelihood of his fellow. That in itself is a negative commandment. However, when one undermines the livelihood of his fellow, he is not only culpable of the immediate transgression, but also all of the negative ramifications that result.

**YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE**

**Monday Through Friday**

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Nefesh HaChaim
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

**Special Weekday Classes**

**Monday**

11:15 – 12:15pm	<b>Talmud: Taanis</b> Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 <sup>th</sup> FL.) Enter on 54 <sup>th</sup> Street
12:30 – 1:30pm	<b>Talmud: Pesachim</b> Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue Between E.51 <sup>st</sup> and E.52 <sup>st</sup>

**Tuesday**

12:15 - 1:15pm	<b>Torah Insight Based on the Parsha</b> Location: Yad Avraham
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**Wednesday**

11:30 – 12:30 pm	<b>Talmud: Taanis</b> Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 <sup>th</sup> FL.) Enter on 54 <sup>th</sup> Street
1:00—2:00 pm	<b>Daas Tevunos</b> Location: Yad Avraham

**Thursday**

10:30 –11:30am	<b>Tehilim with Malbim</b> Location: Yad Avraham
12:00 – 1:00 pm	<b>Talmud: Taanis</b> Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 <sup>th</sup> FL)