

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### Wein Online

**V**Yitro is one of the most enigmatic of all of the personages that appear in the Torah. There are many Yitros in Yitro's life and perhaps this is the reason that the rabbis taught us that he possessed seven different names. Each name perhaps represented a different Yitro at a different point of his life. We meet him at the crossroads of his life's choices and beliefs. On one hand he is a priest or former priest of paganism in Midian. He has experimented with every form of religion in the world before coming to the faith of monotheism. He is influenced undoubtedly by his unexpected son-in-law, Moshe. But he is also greatly influenced by the Exodus from Egypt and the visible and impressive miracles that accompanied this event.

But there is also an inner conviction that moves him and makes him a monotheistic believer. He states: "Now I know that the Lord is God for He has avenged Himself on the Egyptians in the manner that they intended to destroy the Jews." The Egyptians drowned Jewish children in the Nile and they were therefore drowned themselves at Yam Suf. Thus Yitro is impressed not only by the miracle of the destruction of the Egyptian oppressor but by the manner and method of destruction that the miracle exhibited itself.

It is the measure for measure method of punishment that truly fascinates him and leads him to abandon his home and background to join Israel in the desert. Having arrived at his new beliefs by judicial and rational analysis, Yitro then applies that same method in advising his son-in-law Moshe as to the formulation and efficient operation of the Jewish judicial system in the desert. He is consistent in his analytical approach to matters. Perhaps that is why he was so positively influenced by the measure for measure punishment of the Pharaoh and his Egyptian hordes.

Yitro is the ultimate "outsider" looking in to see Torah and the Jewish people. Many times the "outsider" sees things more clearly than the "insider" in a society does. In Yiddish there is an expression that a temporary guest sees for a mile. (I know that this lost something in translation but you get the gist of it.) The

**As you read these divrei torah, please keep  
Esther Malka bas Kayla  
in mind for a Refuah Shelaima**

Jewish people, especially in our religious world, live a somewhat insular existence. Due to this, many times we are unable to see what otherwise can be plain to others.

The example of Yitro encourages us to give respect to the insights of "outsiders" in our community. Oftentimes they come from different backgrounds and have fought their way through many false beliefs to arrive at Torah and the observance of mitzvot. Their views and experiences should be important to us. The tendency to force the "outsiders" to become exactly like the "insiders" is eventually counterproductive to both groups. Yitro never becomes Moshe but Moshe and Israel benefit from Yitro's judgment and advice. We can all benefit from insights, advice and good wishes from our own "outsiders." © 2008 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he last sentence of this week's portion states that ramps should lead to the altar. (Exodus 20:23) Why are ramps used and not steps?

The issue may be one of modesty. In the ancient Near East nudity was associated with ritual activity. This link is rejected by Torah. If there were steps, the robe of the priest would be upset while he climbed them, revealing the nakedness of his limbs. As Rashi points out, with ramps, this would not occur.

Another idea comes to mind. The altar symbolizes a central place of spirituality. The ramps connecting the ground with the altar teach that in order to reach the higher world of the spirit one must be in constant motion. Ramps imply perpetual movement, whereas steps can offer rest. Similar to the ladders of Jacob's dream, in the world of the spirit one can either ascend or descend-never can one stand still.

Another important contemporary lesson can be learned. The presence of ramps can be viewed as a symbol of accessibility. Once there is accessibility in the place of the spirit, either in the altar or in today's synagogue, it sends a message that all places should be open to the handicapped. Not only do ramps send a message of welcome to the physically challenged, but

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they also send to one and all, even to those not in wheelchairs, that everyone, regardless of affiliation, health or station in life is welcome.

For me, the ramps to the altar powerfully remind us what makes a synagogue beautiful. I have heard Jews with a passion for architecture, debate this question at length. Some may advocate an ultra-modern structure with a skylight over the ark, while others may prefer a more traditional structure. Personally, the first items I look for in a shul are ramps. If the synagogue is accessible, it is beautiful.

To those who feel themselves far removed from the issue and believe it has nothing to do with them, let it be said that none of us are immune from the misfortunes that befall others. There is no such thing as the sick and the well. There are only the sick and the not yet sick.

A photograph in my office says it all. It is of a man sitting in his wheelchair at the bottom of a flight of steps, leading up to the entrance of the synagogue. Over its door, is emblazoned the sentence, "Open the gates of righteousness for me, I will enter through them." (Psalm 118:19)

The man sits with his back to the doors, unable to enter. As a Jewish community we have failed him. Our task is to learn from the ramps that led to the altar in the tabernacle. They teach that we must make sure that this man can face the door and be welcomed as he makes his way in. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

#### **RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN**

### **A Life Lesson**

**J**ethro, the father-in-law of Moses, came to see Moses after he had heard all of the miracles that God had performed for the Jewish people. Jethro saw that a countless number of Jews were all standing in line to speak to Moses with questions they had. Jethro then told Moses:

"Why do you sit alone with all the people standing by you from morning to evening?... You will surely become worn out... as well as this people that is with you...." (Exodus 18:14-17)

Jethro couldn't believe that Moses was the only person who was able to give advice and answers to the Jewish people. Jethro knew that this lack of hierarchy was destined for failure. So he advised Moses how to establish a system whereby the Jews would first go to other knowledgeable people and only seek out Moses for the most complicated and difficult questions and cases.

This method of delegation is in place in virtually every company, army, and government around the world. In fact, it's vital for any large entity to ever run effectively.

Even though the power of delegation can be just as effective in our own lives, many of us have a difficult time delegating certain important tasks to others. The reason for this is that the moment we ask someone else to do something for us we immediately lose a sense of control. Even though we all have very capable people around us, many of us live with a belief that the best outcome can only occur when we do something ourselves.

But ironically, the exact opposite is true. This is because the only way ever to achieve greatness is to be able to go "outside yourself" and be humble enough to realize that others are extremely capable and many times can actually do a better job than you can. Also, allowing others to assist you in the countless tasks that they're very capable of doing will immediately increase your self-esteem. This is because it will reign in your egocentric belief that you're the best one to do everything and demonstrate that you have the ability to trust others to get a job done. And all of this will then free you up to do the things that no one else really can't do.

Additionally, there are times when we would love to delegate something to someone else but the other person simply lacks the knowledge to do it. So we say to ourselves, "it's easier if I just do it myself." Again, this is a debilitating belief. While initially it might take some time to teach others a new set of skills or knowledge, investing a few minutes with them now will enable and empower them to know exactly what to do in the future.

So fight the urge, and delegate important tasks by asking someone to do something that you ordinarily would only do yourself. This will prevent you from "surely becoming worn out" and allow you to focus your energies only on the things that have the potential to make you great. © 2008 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.ocm

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### **Taking a Closer Look**

**A**fter seeing Moshe in action as the sole judge for the entire nation (Shemos 18:13), his father-in-law, Yisro, warns him that if this situation continues, "also you, and also this nation that is with you, will not survive" (18:18). Rashi tells us that the

extra wording ("also" and "also," as well as Moshe not being included in "the nation") teaches us that Yisro was also referring to Aharon, Chur, and the 70 elders. However, when Yisro tells Moshe that if he follows his advice "you will be able to survive, and also all of this nation will reach its destination in peace" (18:23), Rashi says that the extra wording refers to "Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and the 70 elders." Why was Rashi inconsistent in his explanation of whom Yisro was referring to?

Although this question is discussed by many of the commentators, almost all of those whose commentary includes explaining Rashi ask an even stronger question: How could Rashi have included Chur in the first place if by the time this conversation between Moshe and Yisro took place, Chur was already dead? Rashi had told us (18:13) that the "morrow," when Yisro saw Moshe sitting alone as the nation's judge, was after Yom Kippur, when the nation received the second set of luchos, which was on the 10th of Tishray, 2449. Rashi also tells us (32:5) that Chur was killed trying to prevent the golden calf from being made, which happened before Moshe came down with the first set of luchos on the 17th of Tammuz, 2448, almost three months earlier. Why would Yisro include Chur as one of those who wouldn't last under the current system if he was no longer alive?

In order to answer this question, some (including some of the Ba'aley Tosfos) say that Chur being included must be according to the opinion that Yisro "came" before the Torah was given. However, Rashi (18:13) is adamant that no matter when Yisro "came," this conversation occurred after Yom Kippur. The Sifsay Chachamim quotes the Maharshal as suggesting that Rashi was using different Midrashim, which do not need to be consistent. If Chur is included here, he must have still been alive, and this source must disagree with the Midrash that Rashi quotes later (that Chur was killed trying to prevent the golden calf). Whether or not Rashi will quote conflicting Midrashim is itself a lengthy discussion (see Nachalas Yaakov on Beraishis 1:1, d"h listim), but even if he generally would, the reason to do so would be because in each instance that particular Midrashic approach fits better into the more straight-forward understanding of the verse. Here, though, there would seem to be no advantage to having Yisro include Chur rather than Nadav and Avihu (as Rashi himself does the second time, and as the Mechilta does when explaining this verse). Additionally, there is no known Midrash that mentions Chur here, although that doesn't preclude the possibility that one exists.

Other Ba'aley Tosfos (e.g. Chizkuni) are among those that suggest that even though Chur was already dead, Yisro used him as an example of a qualified judge that, even if he were still alive, would still whither away under the weight of being responsible for

so many people/cases. However, it seems rather strange for Yisro to choose someone who was already dead as one of his examples, rather than someone who could still help Moshe. Even though G-d sent a message through Yirmiyahu (15:1) that even if Moshe or Shemuel were still alive He could not forgive the nation in its current state, and one through Yechezkel (14:14) that even Noach, Doniel and Iyov would not be able to help them, the point G-d was making was about the sorry state of the nation. Yisro was trying to make the point that Moshe couldn't do it by himself, or even with only a few helpers; even if Chur would have made a terrific judge, why use him as an example if he wasn't around to help?

Rabbeinu Yeshaya and the Mizrachi are among those that, because of the strength of this question (Chur being dead months prior to Yisro's advice), along with the fact that the Mechilta takes a similar approach without mentioning Chur (and having no known Midrash that does), suggest that the inclusion of Chur is in fact a printing/publishing mistake, and Rashi never really included him. Although this would certainly answer the question(s), being that others have tried to explain how Chur could have been included, I would like to build upon the Chizkuni's approach and try to explain why Yisro would have specifically included Chur in his discussion with Moshe.

Another issue that is discussed is about Yisro's advice. It seems so obvious to just add more judges in order to lighten the load that it is rather odd that Yisro is given such credit for the idea. However, the genius behind Yisro's advice would seem to be more than just a numbers game, i.e. increasing the amount of judges, but in creating a justice system. There were "officers over thousands, officers over hundreds, officers over fifty and officers over tens" (18:21/25). If it was just a matter of adding more judges, Yisro should have suggested a straight ratio (such as one judge for every nine people). Having separate categories indicates that each has a different role. The Vilna Gaon says that only the "officers over hundreds" were the judges. The "officers over thousands" were the nations actual leaders; the ones "over fifty" taught Torah; and the "officers over tens" were the enforcers, i.e. the police. With the right amount of qualified people fulfilling each role, the law would be known, people would avoid breaking it, there would be less confusion and fewer disagreements, and a much lighter caseload. In any case, the question should be turned around. Instead of wondering what the big deal was about Yisro's advice, it should be why Moshe didn't employ the "obvious" answer of just adding more judges before Yisro brought it up. Or, more specifically, what did Yisro think was the reason Moshe hadn't added more judges?

While Moshe was away for the first set of 40 days on Mt. Sinai, he had appointed Aharon and Chur to be the judges in his place (24:14). Since then, Chur

had been killed, and Moshe may have been hesitant to replace him. Whether it was because of what had happened to Chur, or because there were not yet other qualified candidates, Yisro may have thought (or Moshe may have told him) that he hadn't added any judges because one of his best judges had recently been killed. Perhaps he would shortly be able to appoint more judges, but not quite yet. Yisro therefore responded (or preempted what he thought would be Moshe's response) by saying that losing Chur is irrelevant to the issue, for even if he and Aharon and the 70 elders were judges, the nation wouldn't survive. More was needed than just adding judges; the entire justice system needed to be revamped. Chur was specifically included because the delay in making any changes might have been precisely because of his death.

After making his recommendation for implementing the new system, Yisro concluded by saying that this way everyone would reach their destination in peace, not just the nation, but those who would have otherwise had the burden of judging the people. Who were those people who (Yisro thought) would have been the judges added, if it were only a matter of adding judges? Besides Moshe, it would have been Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and the elders. Chur wasn't around, so he couldn't be included this time, and Yisro figured that Nadav and Avihu would be the ones to replace him. Since Chur would have been added had he not been killed, and the delay in adding more judges was a direct result of his death, he was included in Yisro's argument of why a whole new system needed to be instituted. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**A**fter the momentous events of Mount Sinai, the Almighty commands Moshe to turn to the nation. "This is what you should say to Bnei Yisrael: You have seen that I spoke to you from heaven" [Shemot 20:19]. The Almighty then reviews what Bnei Yisrael have been commanded not to do and what they have been commanded to do. "Do not make anything together with Me, and do not make silver gods or golden gods for yourselves. Make for me an altar from earth, and you shall sacrifice on it your Olah, your Shelamim, your sheep, and your cattle. In every place where I will mention my name, I will come to you and bless you." [20:20-21]. What connection is there between these two commands and the events of Sinai? Is there a connection between the positive command and the negative one?

Evidently the common theme in all of these commands is the question of how Bnei Yisrael should continue to serve G-d. The nation of Yisrael had just been through an especially strong emotional

experience of Divine revelation, and it would be difficult for them to return to routine lives devoid of direct contact with the Almighty. As a result, the Almighty gives them two basic commands. First is what the people should not do? they should not make golden or silver gods, even if they are "with Me," that is, if they are not an expression of idol worship but rather meant to be a way to serve G-d. The need for this command is obvious, and in fact the nation failed to observe it? "This nation committed a great sin, they made for themselves a god of gold" [32:31]. Perhaps the Golden Calf was not an example of idol worship and a belief in another god, but it certainly violated the command not to make "golden gods together with Me."

But in any case, together with the prohibition, an alternative should be proposed which can give the people an opportunity to preserve the great emotional effect of Mount Sinai. This is the concept of the altar made of earth, serving from that point on as a small model of the events at Sinai and providing a framework allowing continuity after the people had left the mountain. At Sinai, the Almighty promised the people, "I am coming to you in the thickness of the cloud" [19:9]. It now becomes clear that this was not a unique one time event, but rather that "in every place where I mention My name, I will come to you to bless you" [20:21]. The people can internalize the concept that the holy Shechina is not limited to Mount Sinai, and the fact that it remained on the mountain was only temporary. The Shechina is not bound to a specific place, rather it can be found "in every place where I mention my name."

The above explanation corresponds especially well to the approach that sees the Tabernacle as an afterthought, a reaction to the sin of the Golden Calf (many people give credit for this approach to Rashi, who felt that "the events of the Golden Calf preceded the construction of the Tabernacle by a long time" [see Shemot 31:18]). This implies that under ideal conditions the altar alone would have been the only vessel necessary to provide continuity of the events at Mount Sinai.

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah reveals to us the unlimited potential of the Jewish soul. The prophet Yeshaya shares with us his astounding vision of Hashem's throne of glory. He says, "Fiery angels stand before Hashem in service... They call to one another and say in unison, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is Hashem the master of the legions whose glory fills the entire world'" (6:2,3) Yeshaya saw one of the loftiest visions ever to be seen by man and responded in the following manner, "Woe to me for I remained silent because I am a man of impure lips...and my eyes beheld the Divine Presence itself." (6:5) This verse displays Yeshaya's

humble response to his awesome experience feeling unworthy of catching the faintest glimpse of Hashem's magnificent glory. Yet, Yeshaya was troubled by his personal silence during those lofty moments unable to participate in the angels' glorious praise. (see Radak ad loc) He attributed this to his personal imperfection and inadequacy. Apparently, his speech was impure and sinful and rendered him unworthy of uttering a sound in Hashem's holy presence.

The vision continued and Hashem commanded one of His fiery angels to deliver Yeshaya a burning coal. Yeshaya said, "And with tongs the angel removed the coal from the altar, touched my mouth and said... 'Your sin is removed and your error forgiven.'" (6:6,7) Immediately following this, Hashem asked, "Whom shall I send?" and Yeshaya responded and said, "Here I am; send me." (6:8) Yeshaya's awesome vision together with his humble response initiated him into prophecy. After this initial cleansing, he became worthy of transmitting Hashem's penetrating message to His people. In addition, Yeshaya's cleansing process allowed him to join the ranks of the angels and converse with Hashem in His actual presence. (Radak ad loc)

This intriguing incident suggests the unthinkable, that man can rise to the lofty status of Heavenly beings. Although Yeshaya was privy to the inner most levels of spirituality he sensed his mortality and felt unworthy of associating with such elevated levels of holiness. Alas, he was a human being and not a spiritual entity. He identified with impurity and sin and didn't deserve to see such revelations or sing Heavenly praises. Hashem revealed Yeshaya that he had the potential and after minor refinement he would personally attain those lofty levels. Interestingly, when we reflect upon this incident we tend to side with Yeshaya. We also wonder, "What position does an impure mortal occupy amongst Heavenly angels?" How could man even consider participating in Heavenly praise? Although angels reflect Hashem's glory what can be said about man?!

The answer to these is found in the essential discussion of mortality between Hashem and the angels. The Sages relate that the angels complained to Hashem when He chose to share His precious Torah with His people. They argued, "Your glory (Your Torah) should remain among the Heavenly beings. They are holy and Your Torah is holy, they are pure and Your Torah is pure and they are everlasting and Your Torah is also." Hashem responded that the Torah could not remain amongst them because they are perfect spiritual beings with no mortality, impurity or illness. Hashem's true glory would ultimately come from man plagued by impurity and mortality. (Midrash Shochar Tov 8) This response also troubles us because, in truth, we side with the angels. Isn't perfect fulfillment of Hashem's will the greatest tribute to His honor? What could be more

glorious than the angels' purest praises? How could mortality and impurity serve as positive factors in Hashem's ultimate glory?

The Sages' words in this week's haftarah provide deep insight into this. Rashi reflects upon the burning coal and notes that the fiery angel held it with tongs. This suggests that the coal's heat was too intense for an angel to hold. Surprisingly however, Yeshaya's lip endured direct contact with the coal without being harmed. Rashi quotes the Sages who explain a human being's potential truly surpasses the status of an angel. They support this with a verse in Yoel that says, "For His camp is massive but mightier are those who do His word." (Yoel 2:11) Chazal interpret Hashem's massive camp to refer to His angels and those who fulfill His word to refer to His prophets. This teaches us that, in truth, a devout prophet is greater than an angel. (Rashi 6:7 from Midrash Tanchuma)

The upshot of this is based on man's equal ability to obey or disobey Hashem. An angel's clear perception of Hashem basically leaves no room for anything but perfect behavior. Man, on the other hand, is plagued by impurity, weakness and temptation. His perfect adherence to Hashem's will is undoubtedly true testimony to Hashem's greatness. Man's absolute negation for Hashem's sake displays the true power of His word. The spiritual ascent of a prophet proves that free thinking man can be so subservient to his master that he transcends all physical barriers. Maimonides explains that the basic qualifications of any prophet demand full control over all passions and emotions never succumbing to any physical desire. After achieving this he continues to detach himself from worldly matters totally focusing his mind on spirituality while training it never to stray into frivolity or vanity. He continues developing until his mind becomes transfixed on Hashem's innermost secrets thus deeming one worthy of Hashem's contact. During prophecy one realizes that he transcended all human barriers and joined the ranks of the angels. (see Rambam Yesodei HaTorah 7:1) This incredible accomplishment by man supersedes indeed the Heavenly angels even during their loftiest praises to Hashem. Man, unlike angel, begins far from perfect but can actually refine himself and attain the spirituality of the Heavenly hosts themselves.

We now understand that the human being sings the "praise of all praises" through his enormous efforts overcoming his human imperfections. Yeshaya originally felt unworthy of participating in the Heavenly display of Hashem's glory due to his human limitations and imperfections. Hashem responded that his conscious decision to totally subject himself to Hashem's will surpassed the Heavenly praise. Once Yeshaya's personal speech was totally cleansed he was worthy of participating in the loftiest of all praises.

He could now speak in Hashem's presence and even rise above the angels and display, through his total subservience, Hashem's greatest honor.

This lesson has great bearing on our times. Chafetz Chaim raises the classic concern how the latest generations consider meriting the advent of Mashiach? If previous generations who were undoubtedly more pious than ours did not merit Mashiach how could our shameful generation merit him? Chafetz Chaim answers that, on the contrary, no generation ever qualified for Mashiach as much as ours. He explains that in previous times Mitzva observance was, basically, a foregone conclusion. It did not require endless self sacrifice and had therefore had relatively limited value. In our days, however, foreign influences are so rampant that even basic Mitzva observance requires tremendous devotion and sacrifice. In present times, we may add, morality has fallen so low that attaining any level of purity and self negation is a tremendous accomplishment. In this light every mitzva has such great value that we, above all, display Hashem's greatest glory. Hashem undoubtedly tells His angels, "Look at My people who manage to remain moral and pure even in their corrupt and free thinking environment." "Can anyone bring Me greater glory than them?!" © 2008 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**W**hat is the difference between constructive criticism and destructive criticism? How can we teach people to re-order their priorities - and do it in a way that our message will be heard and acted upon?

Interestingly enough, we have much to learn concerning these issues from a Gentile sage, Moses' father-in-law, Yitro. And Yitro's lessons are so important that it is no accident that the portion which recounts the revelation of the Decalogue bears his name.

The portion opens with the fact that "Yitro, Sheik of Midian, had heard about all that G-d had done for Moses and his people Israel when he brought Israel out of Egypt." He travels to see his son-in-law. But Yitro is not coming alone. He brings with him Moses' wife, Ziporah, who had been sent home earlier, and 'her' two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, whose very names suggest that Moses had initially been a stranger in a strange land (Midian) and had been saved from Pharaoh's sword when he had been helped by G-d and supported by Ziporah. The message which Yitro sends ahead to Moses is that he is on his way "with YOUR wife and HER two sons". [Exodus 18:1-6]

Clearly, Yitro's main goal is to re-establish the family relationship and bring Moses together again with his wife and children. It is worthwhile for him to do so, because he understands that Moses is now a great leader in the eyes of G-d as well as the world at large.

He senses that he must be subtle in his understandable anger; after all, Ziporah took Moses in when he was an unknown fugitive and hardly deserves to be cast aside now that her husband has achieved world recognition as the great emancipator and defeater of the Egyptian hosts. Moreover, the two boys ought not remain 'her' sons and not 'his' sons! But all this is communicated gently and only "between the lines and words" of the text. Yitro understands that he must first carefully hear Moses' concerns and watch Moses' lifestyle; only then would he be able to craft the proper argument on his daughter's behalf.

Hence, the priest of Midian first listens to Moses' account of the miracles, and becomes so moved that he brings offerings and sacrifices to G-d; he also cleverly positions himself on Moses' side. And the next day he observes. Yitro finds Moses involved in serving as judge to the nation, a one-man Supreme as well as Small Claims Court. All day long people line up and wait for the opportunity to listen to his judgment.

Something is not quite right. Moses may have engineered the greatest exodus in recorded history, enabling an entire nation of slaves exiting from their masters as free individuals. Nevertheless a major logistical problem now confronts Moses. One person, no matter how capable, cannot possibly assume the sole responsibility of adjudicating for an entire nation. Since there are only 24 hours in a day, the lines outside Moses' tent keep getting longer and longer. And no matter how quickly you see each petitioner, there are not enough days in the week to keep the line moving and the scales of justice balanced.

"You will wear yourself away both you and the people that is with you," [Ex. 18:18] says Yitro. Moreover, he now understands why Moses rejected his family; at the very least he had no time for them! If he can only learn to delegate authority, not only will the national needs and justice be better served, but Moses can also have the requisite time for a family life. Thus Yitro advises Moses: "you must seek out - from amongst the people capable men, such as fear G-d, men of truth, hating unjust gain, and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands and rulers of hundred and rulers of fifties and rulers of tens and let them judge the people ..." [Ex. 18:21]

As a result of this pyramidal structure, no person in the nation is more than four steps away from Moses. "So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law, and did all that he said." [Ex. 18:23] He also, at least according to one view in the Midrash, took back his wife and children. Yitro, through patience and wisdom, removed the root cause of the marital problem and therefore the symptom disappeared automatically. At the same time he taught the first leader of the Jewish people the crucial lesson of delegation of authority - as well as involvement of many others in order to successfully implement the vision of a nation founded

upon social justice and righteousness. In the process of Yitro's re-structuring, 78,600 additional Jews became involved in, and responsible for the administration of a proper judicial system!

And in addition to delaying your critique until you understand the root cause of the problem, Rashi (Rav Shlomo Yitzhak, 1040-1105) adds another dimension to our definition of constructive criticism. In his Biblical Commentary, Rashi refers to the Biblical segment of the advice of Yitro with the code words "You must seek out". [Ex. 18:21] However, these are not the opening words of Yitro's advice; Yitro approaches his son-in-law with, "What you are doing is not good; you are going to wear yourself out." [Ex. 18:17, 18] Apparently Rashi is trying to teach us that it is no great accomplishment to point out the problem, to provide negative criticism; anyone can be a nay-sayer. The greatness of Yitro only begins when he provides a workable solution: "You must seek out...capable, G-d fearing men...as leaders..."

When I was in college, I had a friend who wrote excellent essays in our Writing Expression course - but I always had to provide him with a theme for an essay or short story. I met him many years later on a college campus, where he had recently received tenure. Since I was well aware of the University rule of "publish or perish", I could not resist asking him: "But who gives you your ideas now for the various articles you must publish?" "It's no problem", he smilingly replied. "I write criticisms of other people's articles and books." Criticism alone is not at all creative! © 2008 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### **RABBI BORUCH LEFF**

## **Kol Yaakov**

**H**ave you ever felt uninspired in your Judaism? Did you ever wonder if there was some kind of special weapon that can be used against despair and hopelessness in spiritual growth? Isn't there any quick 'pep' talk section in the Torah that will get you going again?

It would appear that such a segment does indeed exist and is found in this week's Torah portion, all in the span of two and a half verses.

The Revelation at Sinai is about to occur. The most significant event in all of world history-God's communication of His laws and directives to the world-is at hand. God tells Moshe that he should make some introductory remarks, in God's name, before God Himself talks to the Jews at Sinai.

So shall you say to the House of Jacob and tell to the Sons of Israel:

"You have seen what I did to Egypt and that I carried you on wings of eagles and have brought you to Me. And now if you listen well to Me and you will keep My covenant, you will be a treasure to Me from all the peoples, although all of the earth is Mine. You will be to

Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words that you should speak to the Children of Israel. (Exodus 19:3-7)

Rashi comments on the phrase "These are the words": No more, no less.

This comment begs the following question. Why does God suspect Moshe to suddenly change or distort His words? God testifies about Moshe that he is the most faithful person alive (see Bamidbar 12:7), which is perhaps the reason why Moshe is chosen to be the messenger of God to transmit the Torah. If so, we know clearly that Moshe never added or subtracted anything from the way in which God instructed him to say something. What then could Rashi's comment "no more, no less" mean?

The explanation is as follows. We derive from here the method that Moshe used to relate God's words. First, Moshe would say: "These are the exact words of God." Then, when he would finish stating God's words, without adding or subtracting a single one of them, Moshe would begin to explain and exhort, to admonish and to urge. He would isolate certain concepts from God's words, individually, and use his own words to clarify or motivate.

At times, Moshe felt the need to mention and discuss a concept that was not directly or specifically mentioned in God's words. This being the case, God tells Moshe that in this instance, in the introductory words of motivation for the Jewish People's acceptance of Torah should be "no more, no less." The concepts discussed by God here are the only concepts that are necessary for the Jew's commitment to God's Torah and Covenant. God does not want Moshe bringing up any other reason or motivation for the acceptance of Torah. The ideas in these two and a half verses are all that's required.

So, if we want to know how we can further our personal acceptance and commitment to Torah, and conquer disillusionment and despondency, we must look at these verses and discover its ideas for motivation. God informed Moshe that everything one needs to become inspired to accept Torah can be found in these verses-nothing more, nothing less. One shouldn't think that long, involved speeches or actions are necessary. If we read and study these verses seriously, we will have all that is required to begin spiritual growth and closeness with God.

What do these verses stress?

If you were given only 5 minutes to speak to an audience about God and religion, and these 5 minutes would be the only opportunity for this audience to hear about God in the entire lives, what would be the most important topic to discuss? It would probably be the fact that God loves and cares for each and every one of us. Through hearing such words, people would begin to discover God's love and concern and want to relate to God. If I hear that someone loves me, I usually try to

find out who he is and in most cases attempt to love him back. In God's case, my quest to discover His love for me will lead me to perceive the love through His Instructions for Living, which is the Torah.

God tells us in these verses: "You saw what I did to Egypt. You know why I destroyed and punished them. It was not due to my anger for their evil sins and immorality. They were deserving of punishment long before they met the Jewish nation. I was waiting, thinking perhaps they might repent. But as soon as they began making life difficult for you, I started striking against them. This could only be because I love you. I was even willing to protect you like an eagle defends his young." (Paraphrased based on Rashi.) God continues to relate: "If you keep my Torah, you will be my treasure. I only want the best for you and I want you to be my holy nation and kingdom of important ministers."

There are, of course, many details and subjects in these verses that are discussed, but in general they are all messages of God's love for us and how we are to maintain that love. This is the key element to inspire a nation to accept a Torah at Sinai and the main thrust necessary to motivate individuals to commit or re-commit themselves to spiritual growth through God's Torah.

So, if you are down and out, and have just about had it with trying to grow spiritually, remember God loves you. He cares about everything that is going on in your life and anxiously awaits your relationship with Him. © 2008 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.org

#### **DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

## **What's Bothering Rashi**

**T**his week's parsha contains within it the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were given exclusively to Israel at the momentous Revelation at Mt Sinai. Yet when we examine them, we notice something strange—most of these commandments are ones which the gentiles are also obligated to observe. They are not the private domain of the Jews! But there is one commandment which is the Jews' private possession—that is the Sabbath. Let us look at that mitzva and Rashi's comment on it.

"For in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth and the seas and all that is in them. And He rested on the seventh day. Therefore Hashem blessed the Sabbath day and He sanctified it." (Exodus 20:11)

"He blessed...and He sanctified it"—RASHI: "He blessed it through the manna by giving a double portion on the sixth day—double bread; and He sanctified it through the manna in that none fell on the Sabbath."

Rashi's comment is not difficult to understand, but what would you ask about it? A Question: Why doesn't Rashi accept the simple meaning of the verse: The day was blessed and sanctified? Why does he

reduce the blessing and the sanctity to the one issue of the manna? Certainly we don't think the Sabbath is holy only because of the manna. Why does he abandon p'shat here? What's bothering Rashi?

An Answer: The blessing and the sanctity of the Sabbath cannot be seen; it is an abstraction, it has no objective manifestation. Rashi sought a meaning to these abstract words that would give the people something they could understand. How does his comment deal with this issue?

An Answer: When Hashem spoke to the Israelites about the uniqueness of the Sabbath, He wanted to tell them something they could understand from personal experience. Hashem had already given the Israelites the manna. (See earlier in Exodus, Chapter 16:14-36.) By means of the manna they saw concretely the reality of the Sabbath, as no other generation had. They received the double-bread on Friday which included a portion for the Sabbath and they saw that on the Sabbath itself no manna fell. This was the most convincing way to convey the uniqueness of the Sabbath.

But as you think more deeply about the double portion that fell on Friday, which is supposed to be the blessing for the Sabbath, what question would you ask?

Hint: Think logically about this.

A Question: Granted that two portions of manna fell on Friday, but one was for Friday and one—only one—was for Sabbath. So what was special about the Sabbath, and what kind of a blessing is this, since it too had only one portion allotted to it?

An Answer: The manna fell each day with enough food for that day. None was left over for the next day. And if someone tried to save some for the morrow, it turned wormy and rotten (see Exodus 16:20). But the double bread left from Friday to the Sabbath morning did not rot. So while the Sabbath had no more manna allotted to it than any other day, it was nevertheless blessed. The blessing was that a person went to bed Friday evening with no worry for the morrow; he was guaranteed provision for his next day's meal. This was not the case for any other day of the week. What does the Torah mean when it says the Sabbath was sanctified by the manna's not falling on that day?

An Answer: The Hebrew word *kadosh*, conventionally translated as holy, actually means separated. It was in this sense that the Sabbath was holy— it was separated from all the other days of the week in that the people had their food without the need to go out to collect it in the fields. As you think about that, you realize that that is what is special about the Sabbath for every generation. The observant Jew need not work for his bread on this day. It is the true Day of Rest.

That is its sanctity. © 2008 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.ocm