

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LABEL LAM**

### Dvar Torah

**T**he foundation of foundations and the pillar of all wisdom is to know that there is a prime source of reality...The knowing of this matter is a Positive Mitzvah as it says, "I am HASHEM your G-d ... (Shemos 20:2) (Rambam Hilchos Yesode' HaTorah 1:1-6)

It is worth noting that the Rambam uses the term - "knowledge" as opposed to -"belief". We might ask how one achieves the certainty associated with "knowledge" on this most important subject. The Rambam gives a key. "I am HASHEM your G-d Who took you out of the land of Egypt. How is "knowledge" implied in that verse?

The Kuzari asks why The Almighty makes such a small claim!?" "I am the HASHEM your G-d Who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage!" He could have said, "I created the heavens and the earth!" Why focus on Egypt?

Imagine if you will, I own the GM building in Mid Town Manhattan. I lock an employee in the 46th Floor wash room over a three day holiday weekend. Monday morning I unlock the door and remind him that I am the one who let him out of that room. He looks at me and wonders aloud, "Why did you lock me in there in the first place? And, "Since you own the whole building, why do you need to claim control over one small water closet in the entire complex?" He's right! Why?

The Kuzari explains the intent of the verse. The knowledge G-d is reinforced by the entire process of the exodus. It was something that we experienced unlike the inception of the world. Who was there, then? In Egypt, we, as a people, witnessed the whole drama of Egypt's miraculous collapse and our emergence as a nation. It was an historical revelation not a hysterical revolution. Therefore The Almighty commands us to know the reality of His existence and not just to believe abstractly or philosophically.

Since that time, way back when, a year has never lapsed without Pesach or a week without Shabbos- "In memory of leaving Egypt..." ...Or a day without Tefillin or Tzitsis, both being reminders of having left Egypt. The echo of that experience is captured forever in our continuous loyalty to those observances and many more for more than 3300 years. And so says the prophet about our people- "You are my

witnesses, so says HASHEM and I am your G-d!" (Isaiah 43:12)

I was on a plane from St. Louis to Seattle and one seat away was a middle aged woman that worked up the courage to ask me about half way into the flight, "Are you Amish?" (Not Heimishe). I told her, "No, I am not! I don't think Amish people fly on planes." "I'm sorry!" she said showing great care and sensitivity. I told her that she need not apologize. I went back to my reading and she returned to her book until she got up the courage again, "What are you then?" she asked. I told her, "I'm a Jew!" There was an awkward silence.

After some moments she inquired again, "What do you people believe?" I told her, showing the Hebrew Text of the Tanach (The Bible) I held in my hands, "We are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that stood by Mount Sinai with Moses and heard The Almighty declare, "I am The Lord your G-d that took you out of the Land of Egypt...That's who I am and that's who we are!" The conversation ended but I could tell she was overawed by the realization that this fellow who walked onto the plane is part of a living group that stepped right out of the Bible. I too was flying high on the grandness of that fact for the rest of the flight.

Our presence as a people is a living extension of and active testimony to that national experience when we all heard what we heard. The world might yet accept what we have known not because of what we say but rather because we were there! © 2005 Rabbi L. Lam & [www.torah.org](http://www.torah.org)

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**W**hen Yisro sends a message to Moshe, informing him that he has arrived with Moshe's family (Shemos 18:6), Rashi brings the Midrash that explains why there is a separation between the mention of his having come and that his wife and children have come too: "If you will not come out on my behalf, come out for your wife's sake; and if you won't come out on behalf of your wife, come out for the sake of her two children."

Because it explains the verse's verbiage, we can easily understand where the Midrash is coming from, and why Rashi brings it. What seems to need an explanation, though, is why Yisro had to say such a thing. Why would he think that Moshe wouldn't want to see him? Even if there was a reason why Moshe would

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only come to see his wife and children but not his father-in-law, wouldn't the same thing have been accomplished by just stating that they've all arrived? If Moshe only wanted to see his children, he would come see them, and - because they were all together - he would end up seeing them all anyway! Why did Yisro go through this whole *shpiel* about coming out to see him, but even if that wasn't enough of a reason to come, then at least come to see his wife, or his children? As the Maharal asks, was Yisro seeking the honor of being worthy of Moshe's attention?

From the continuation of the Mechilta (one of the Midrashic sources of this Rashi), it seems that Moshe only went out to Yisro because G-d had told him to: "I drew Yisro close to me, and did not distance him from Me; you should do the same- when someone comes to you to convert [and] does not come except for heaven's sake you should also draw him close and not distance him." The Mechilta concludes by adding that "from here you learn that a person should push away with the left [arm] and bring close with the right [arm]."

We can deduce several things from this Mechilta. First of all, that Yisro was coming to convert and G-d wanted Moshe to accept him as a convert. Also, that Yisro was somehow being pushed away (by the "left arm") and needed to be drawn closer. In order to understand the message that Yisro was sending to Moshe, we should try to understand why he felt he was being pushed away.

Where was Yisro that Moshe had to "go out" to him? Yonasan ben Uziel (18:7) explains that Moshe went out from the protective Clouds of Glory that surrounded the entire nation. This would explain why Yisro couldn't speak to Moshe directly, instead having to send a message from outside the Clouds to Moshe inside them. (This was accomplished either by writing a letter and attaching it to an arrow that was shot through the Cloud, or by giving the letter or a verbal message to

someone that had been outside the Clouds and was able to get back in.) If Yisro had come all the way from Midyan - from the comforts of home - to the desert in order to convert, he would understandably feel rejected when he couldn't even get into the encampment because of the exclusivity of the protective Clouds. Was he being turned away, considered not good enough to join the Nation of Israel? This might have been the "pushing away" that Yisro felt.

If Yisro thought that he might not be worthy, on his own, of being accepted as a convert, he realized that he was not the only one being affected. Tziporah, Moshe's wife, had converted, but had been living with her non-Jewish father. Her children, i.e. Moshe's children, were similarly affected by having a grandfather who was not part of the holy nation. It is therefore possible that Yisro was appealing to Moshe that even if his desire to convert wasn't enough of a reason to come out to get him, he should do it for his wife's sake, and/or for their children's sake, as they would benefit from his conversion as well.

G-d told Moshe that Yisro's conversion should be welcomed on its own merits, and so "he went out to greet his father-in-law" (18:7), i.e. for Yisro's sake, without having to come onto the benefit it would provide his family. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**W**atching Moshe (Moses) judge the Jews from morning to night, Yitro (Jethro), Moshe's father-in-law, offers sound advice. He tells Moshe that if you continue trying to judge everyone, you surely will wear away-it is too difficult a task. Yitro suggests that Moshe appoint other judges, who will share the burden.

In advising Moshe to share judicial responsibility, Yitro insists that lower courts handle less important matters, and matters of greater magnitude would go to Moshe. "And it shall be," Yitro concludes, "that every major (gadol) matter they shall bring to you, but every minor (katan) matter they shall judge themselves." (Exodus 18:22)

Moshe listens to Yitro's advice with one deflection. Rather than dealing exclusively with major matters, Moshe tells Yitro that he will judge the most "difficult (kasheh)" cases. (Exodus 18:28).

Hatam Sofer notes that Yitro uses the term gadol because he believes that only the more important people, only the large "tycoon" type companies should be judged by Moshe. The less important people, the small corporations, regardless of the complexity of the judicial issue, would automatically come before the lower courts.

Moshe rejects this division insisting that he would deal with the complex questions, no matter where they come from-the lower courts would handle the easier questions, no matter their origin.

Here the Torah accentuates the importance of every individual problem. No matter how low one is seen by society, his or her problem is of great importance. For this reason, depending upon the complexity of the question, every person can potentially come before Moshe.

It is ironic that Moshe teaches his father-in-law this particular lesson. According to some commentators, Yitro converts to Judaism. (see Ramban, Numbers 10:29) Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for the convert to be treated as a secondary citizen. Moshe informs Yitro that no one's claims would be overlooked, everyone, including Yitro, is given equal attention.

An important message surfaces: The test of a community, is not the way it treats the most powerful. Rather it is the way it treats the little people, those whose problems, on the surface, seem to be insignificant.

As much as Yitro teaches Moshe by proposing the division of judicial responsibilities between higher and lower courts, Moshe teaches Yitro that even the lowly, even those who seem to be insignificant, are entitled to supreme consideration. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

“**T**he whole nation trembled... and they stood under the mountain. And Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire... and the whole mountain trembled exceedingly” (Exodus 19:16-18).

From Madonna to Adult Education classes from coast to coast the Jewish (and even Gentile) world has become enraptured with the heretofore esoteric study of the "Kabbalah" (literally, that which was "received" from earlier generations), largely based upon the mystical interpretation of the Bible found in the Zohar (literally, Splendorous light) and its commentaries. In order to provide a glimpse into this Kabbalistic approach to Biblical study, let us examine the more mystical interpretation of the atmosphere surrounding the Revelation at Sinai; you will immediately see that the mystical school of thought has transformed a mysterium tremendum of fear and trembling into a Sacred Marriage of love and commitment— with fascinating ramifications affecting our liturgy, our theology and our husband-wife relationships.

When the Bible reports that the "whole nation... stood under the mountain," Rashi cites the Talmudic commentary, "The Almighty held the mountain over them like a canopy," threatening them with death if they would not accept the Commandments (B.T. Shabbat 88a). The Zohar accepts the interpretation that the mountain was held over them like a canopy; however, it was not a canopy of coercion, but was rather a canopy

of commitment, a nuptial canopy (huppa) of love and marriage.

For the Zohar, there is only one great love in the Bible, the love-covenant between G-d and Israel; the Revelation at Sinai formalized and legalized that love relationship, providing the marriage contract (Ketubah) in the form of the commandments, and the consent of the bride-Israel with the words, "We shall do (commit) and we shall obey (internalize)," na'aseh v'nishma (Exodus 24:7).

Every human love relationship is merely a spark of that fiery passion at Sinai; hence, the bride and groom are walked to the nuptial canopy amidst the fire of candles, and the bride walks around her groom seven times, reminiscent of the seven expressions of betrothal enunciated by the prophet Hoshea:

"I (G-d) shall betroth you (Israel) unto ME forever; I shall betroth you unto ME in righteousness, in justice, in lovingkindness and compassion; I shall betroth you unto ME in faithfulness and you shall know (love) the Lord."

You will notice that in this ritual of the seven expressions of Divine betrothal of Israel, it is the woman who encompasses the man, the bride who seems to be the more dominant, representing the Divine. You will also remember that in the Kabbalistic—hasidic tradition, the noun generally used for G-d is Shekhinah, literally the Divine Presence Dwelling-in-World which is a feminine form (as are all words ending in "ah", kamatz heh in Hebrew, such as yaldah, a small girl, or shifhah, a female maid-servant).

When we move into the realm of liturgy and Sabbath ritual, the Kabbalistic imagery and all of its ramifications become magnificently clear. We recite three major and different Amidot (Standing silent Prayers) on the Sabbath: one in the evening, one the following morning, and the final one in the afternoon. The evening Amidah evokes the Sabbath of Creation, citing the Biblical verses, "And the heavens and the earth and all of their hosts were completed. And the Lord completed on the seventh day His creativity which He had made..."

It is the woman-bride who is endowed with the major spark of the Divine creativity, since it is she who nurtures the fetus in her womb and actually gives birth to the child. The Kabbalat Shabbat Friday evening prayer liturgy -- introducing the Evening Service and created by the mystical interpreters of the Zohar in 16th Safed—features the Shekhinah, the feminine aspect of the Divine: the Eshet Hayil (literally, Woman of Valor) Sabbath evening song actually refers to the Shekhinah, (so it is even to be recited or sung around the table if no woman is present), and in the Lekha Dodi chant we go out to greet the Sabbath—Shekhinah Queen-bride. Moreover, in this Sabbath evening amidah we ask that "All of Israel who sanctify Your Name shall rest in Her (vah)," a feminine pronoun, and the leader of the Sabbath table first slices the bottom hallah (of the two

hallot), which likewise symbolizes the woman. No wonder the betrothal ceremony opens with the bride representing G-d and encompassing the groom! Indeed, the Hassidic Sages note that the opening words of the Friday evening Amidah are "Ata Kidashta", literally "You sanctified", or "You betrothed" (Kiddushin can be translated as sanctification or betrothal); Friday evening likewise begins our sacred Marriage with G-d.

The morning Amidah evokes the Sabbath of Revelation, describing the glory of Moses as He descended from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of stone in his hands, on which were written the laws of the Sabbath. In the act of Revelation it was the masculine aspect of G-d which was dominant, the G-d groom who chose His bride Israel and gave her His contract of marriage. Therefore, in the Sabbath morning Amidah we ask that "all of Israel who sanctify Your Name shall rest in Him (vo), a male pronoun, and the leader of the Sabbath morning table first slices the upper hallah (of the two hallot) which symbolizes the male. And so it is traditionally the male who gives the ring—as well as the marriage contract—to his bride. Sabbath morning, explain the Hassidic Sages, evokes the gifts and feasts (sacrificial meats of the Mussaf Amidah) of the betrothal meal.

The concluding Sabbath afternoon Amidah pictures the Sabbath of Redemption, when You (G-d) are one and Your Name is one, a G-d of peace accepted by the entire world. This can only come about when the masculine and feminine aspects of the Divine, when G-d and His bride Israel, act in concert—together—to bring about the perfection of the world in peace and tranquility. In this Amidah we ask that "all of Israel who sanctify your Name shall rest in them (vam)," a plural pronoun, and the leader of the Sabbath third meal table slices both hallot together.

The parallel to the wedding celebration is the yihud, or marital home, where bride and groom live together as one in harmony and equality, with neither dominating the other. And so the religious mystics transformed a Biblical passage of awesome and even fearful dimensions into a song of love and mutuality which reverberates within our Sabbath liturgy and ritual as well as in the Marriage Ceremony and its message.

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### **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?!" © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & www.torah.org

#### **RABBI ARON TENDLER**

### **Rabbi's Notebook**

**“Y**isro, Priest of Midian, father in law of Moshe, heard what G-d had done for Moshe and the Bnai Yisroel..." (18:1)

"Moshe's father in law saw everything that he as doing for the nation..." (18:14)

"Heed my advice... You be the nation's representative bringing their issues to G-d... You will make known to them the path they should follow... However, you are to find men worthy of being leaders... the burden will be eased for you... you will be able to endure and the entire people will arrive in peace." (18:19-23)

There is one G-d, one Torah, one truth, one chosen nation, and each of us is ultimately responsible first and foremost for just one person— ourselves. This week's Parsha and the telling of Matan Torah are all about the power of one and the responsibility of one.

Yisro is singular in his generation. Rashi on Pasuk 18:11 referenced the following Mechiltah. "This teaches us that Yisro was familiar with every form of idol worship. There wasn't a single idol that he had not worshipped."

The Torah's designation of Yisro as the "Priest of Midian" means exactly what the Mechilta said. Yisro had explored every religion in his personal search for truth. Knowing that all religions claim to be divinely mandated but are actually manmade, Yisro did much more than experience each religion. He actually

engaged each religion to the point where he became the high-priest of that religion. From that vantage point he was able to evaluate the divine quality of each religion and god. When he realized that the religion had no divine quality and no god and instead he was in the position to do and say whatever he wished under the guise of divinity, he withdrew, debunked the religion, and continued his search for G-d and truth. Because of Yisro's personal odyssey the only proper designation the Torah could use in describing Yisro was, "Priest of Midian." Whatever the religion or the practice, Yisro was the acknowledged although often hated high priest.

(Note: Yisro's manner of seeking truth followed the intended process of the pre-diluvium world. As we have explained in previous issues, the pre-diluvium world was gifted with tremendous longevity so that they would be able to search for truth by living and playing out their assumptions of religion and G-d. Instead of learning from their mistakes and doing it better the next time they used their prodigious number of years to substantiate their own falsehoods and corruptions.)

When Yisro heard of the miracles of the Exodus, he knew that truth existed. As Yisro himself said, (18:11) "... Now I know that G-d is the greatest of all gods." Confronted by the absolute truth of G-d's justice Yisro had no other choice. Taking his daughter and grandsons, Yisro went to join Moshe and the Jews in the desert. However, that was just the beginning.

Yisro was just one person. Granted, Yisro was uniquely gifted with an incisive and challenging intellect and a burning desire to live by absolute truths to the extent that he willingly sacrificed position, fame, and safety to shun falsehood; however, he was still just one person. Arriving at the desert camp he entered an arena of absolutes with an expectation of perfection. How could it be any other way? His whole lifetime had been spent pursuing a G-d whose truth would translate into reality. A whole lifetime had been spent immersed in every possible human avarice hoping that this time or the next he would discover true human nobility and divine proof. Now, truth would soon be his! More so was the expectation that he would discover a utopian society founded on principles of truth and the reality of G-d. Finally he would find the nobility of human spirit he knew existed translated into the workings of families and society.

In truth, Yisro did discover a setting of unequaled intensity and seeking, but it was far from utopian. Observing the interaction between Moshe and the people Yisro realized that of all those present only a very few, and he among them, were in a position to understand the import of the moment.

Let me explain.

The Talmud states that Kriyas Yam Suf (parting of the sea) was a moment of such confrontation between the illusions of human limitations and the reality of divine magnificence that everyone, even the least prepared, was elevated beyond prophecy. In

essence, it was the first time in history that a nation of people had no choice but to proclaim, "I see G-d!" The resultant spontaneity of national Shira (song) confirmed that the very fabric of nature resonates with the reality of G-d's existence if only we allow ourselves to see beyond the veil of our own ignorance.

The verse states that, "Yisro, priest of Midian, father in law of Moshe, heard what G-d had done for Moshe and the Bnai Yisroel..." The Talmud argues whether Yisro arrived at the desert camp before or after Matan Torah; however, everyone agrees that he certainly came after Kriyas Yam Suf. The verse also states that, "Yisro rejoiced for all the good that G-d had done..." A man like Yisro did not just hear the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim and Kriyas Yam Suf and extract intellectual evidence of G-d's existence and confirmation of absolute truth. For Yisro, hearing the events propelled him into a level of spiritual ecstasy just short of Shira. The Torah doesn't just say that Yisro was pleased with the miraculous saving of the Jews from Pharaoh's evil clutches. It says that he "rejoiced!" Yisro arrived at the desert camp in a state of elation. The long journey of his search was over! The chances are that he arrived at the camp singing and dancing expecting to be greeted by the same.

However, that is not what he found. Instead, Yisro found a nation of just freed slaves struggling to understand G-d's expectations for them. Instead, he found Moshe engaged from morning to night in the job of answering questions, settling arguments, establishing compromises and peace, and living lives of relative normalcy. In a flash Yisro realized that for all intents and purposes the nation was like a newborn child. Every moment was new and exciting. Every moment was immediate and all consuming. However, because they were a nation of adults and not children the fascination and newness had to give way to questions, challenges, and struggle. Yisro realized that of all the people gathered he alone was best prepared to accept and deal with the truth. At the same time, Yisro also knew that no one was better equipped than he to help the nation deal with their experiences. If anyone understood questions, challenges, and struggle it was he.

Turning to Moshe Yisro did what he did best. He analyzed the situation, ascertained the deficiencies in the system, and applied his vast experience to correcting the situation.

(18:19-23) "Heed my advice... You (Moshe) be the nation's representative bringing their issues to G-d... You will make known to them the path they should follow... However, you are to find men worthy of being leaders... the burden will be eased for you... you will be able to endure and the entire people will arrive in peace."

"Moshe, like me, you are expecting too much from them! You feel that the miracles and wonders of the past year are enough to guarantee willful subjugation and servitude to G-d. However, that is

because you have lived with the hope and struggled with the realities. You were granted years of relative freedom to explore and grow so that when confronted by a burning bush you knew that something unique was about to happen. Not so the rest of the nation. For them, the burning bush would have been a momentary diversion and curiosity. Few if any would have opened themselves to the possibility of prophecy. What the nation needs now is the constancy and availability of leadership. What they need is to find other role models from whom they can learn and to whom they can better relate. Who and what you have become is beyond their capacity to understand and appreciate. They are not yet able to appreciate the level at which you function. Instead, they approach you under the guise of seeking answers to practical issues while really desiring support and understanding. In turn, you give them practical answers and believe that you are doing the job G-d intended for you and giving them what they need. Neither is true! You are not doing the job you are supposed to do and you are not giving them what they really want.

(18:19-23) "Heed my advice... You be the nation's representative bringing their issues to G-d... You will make known to them the path they should follow... However, you are to find men worthy of being leaders... the burden will be eased for you... you will be able to endure and the entire people will arrive in peace." © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & www.torah.org

### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**T**he sages and the later commentators maintained an ongoing controversy about whether Yitro's arrival took place before or after the giving of the Torah (see Zevachim 116a). The Ramban supports the view (as he does consistently throughout the Torah) that the passages in the Torah are in general written in chronological sequence. His main proof in this case is that Moshe told Yitro "everything G-d had done to Pharaoh and to Egypt because of Yisrael, all of the events that occurred to them on the way, and that G-d had saved them" [Shemot 18:8]. If Yitro arrived after the momentous events of Sinai, "why didn't Moshe tell him about Sinai, which would have proved to him that G-d represents truth and that His Torah is truth, with no other gods except for Him?"

Opposing this approach, the Rashbam accepts the view that Yitro came after the Torah was given. His main proof is from the verse, "And Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, arrived, with Moshe's sons and wife, at the place where he camped, at the Mountain of G-d" [18:5]. But Bnei Yisrael only arrived at the site in the following chapter: "In the third month after Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, on that day, they arrived in the Sinai Desert. And they left Refidim and came to the Sinai Desert and camped

in the desert. And Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain." [19:1-2]. This implies that the events involving Yitro only occurred later on. Ibn Ezra adds another proof, based on Moshe's words to Yitro: "And I teach them G-d's laws and His teachings" [18:16]. This certainly seems to be a reference to the mitzvot that were given at Sinai.

However, if Yitro did indeed arrive after the giving of the Torah, why is his story presented beforehand, out of sequence, instead of following the chronological order? According to the Rashbam, the reason is "in order not to break the sequence of the mitzvot. That is, the goal was to show the link between the events at Mount Sinai and the commandments that appear later on, starting with the Torah portion of Mishpatim." Ibn Ezra, on the other hand, feels that the story of Yitro was moved forward in the Torah in order that it should be close to the story of Amalek, which appears at the end of the portion of Beshalach: "Since the evil done by Amalek to Yisrael was noted above, this was contrasted with the good that Yitro did for Yisrael."

In fact, Amalek and Yitro are tightly linked together in other places in the Tanach, and they represent the two most extreme approaches of the other nations. Amalek is the ethical and religious epitome of evil, while Yitro shows the traits of charity, righteousness, and faith. Since Bnei Yisrael were given a unique command to eradicate Amalek, it is proper to emphasize that the non-Jews always have the opportunity to choose the better path of Yitro. In the next case where the eradication of Amalek appears, when Shaul was given the task, the battle is preceded by an opportunity for the descendants of Yitro to separate themselves from Amalek. "And Shaul said to the Kaini: Turn away, leave the Amalekites lest I destroy you with them, even though you were kind to Bnei Yisrael when they left Egypt. And the Kaini went away from within Amalek." [I Shmuel 15:6-7]. This shows that the attitude of Bnei Yisrael to the other nations depends on the paths of each nation and the way they act.

### **Why is the Torah Portion Named for Yitro?**

by Taffet Halperin

At the center of this week's Torah portion—in fact, possibly at the very core of the entire history of the nation of Yisrael—is the momentous event of Mount Sinai. However, this Torah portion, which describes the most important event that Bnei Yisrael ever experienced in their history, begins with the words "And Yitro heard" [Shemot 18:1]. But Yitro was a Gentile! Why did the rabbis who divided the Torah into separate portions see fit to start the Torah portion at this point?

Perhaps the reason for this distribution was to emphasize the difference between the affair of Amalek, at the end of the previous Torah portion, and that of Yitro, which is at the beginning of the current one. Amalek is the extremist embodiment of Esav: They

trapped the stragglers of the nation and took advantage of the weaknesses of their enemy, and the Almighty declared war on them from generation to generation. In contrast, Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, was amazed by the redemption from Egypt, wanted to become closer to Yisrael, and recognized G-d's authority. Bnei Yisrael's faith was strengthened in two ways: by the war against Amalek, and by the close approach of Yitro, who said, "G-d is blessed... Now I know that G-d is greater than all other gods" [18:10-11]. The recognition of G-d by the Gentile, Yitro, serves as preparation and an introduction for the giving of the Torah.

Yitro had two objectives in coming to the camp of Bnei Yisrael, one of them personal and the other national. The personal goal was to bring his daughter and her two sons back to his son-in-law Moshe. Evidently, Tziporah and Moshe were separated when Moshe left Midyan and returned to Egypt, and now—two months after the Exodus from Egypt—the family was once again reunited. At the same time, Yitro had an objective based on nationalism and faith. Yitro (in contrast with Amalek) was sensitive to Moshe's weaknesses, and he proposed that he appoint faithful judges. And Moshe accepted his advice.

At first glance, Yitro's suggestion seems quite problematic. How was it possible to appoint judges and officers only two months after the nation left Egypt? In addition, only a few days later Bnei Yisrael were in any case about to receive the Torah. Why was Moshe so eager to accept Yitro's suggestion instead of waiting to hear from the Almighty about the preferred system of Jewish justice? Note that even if these events occurred after the Torah was given, it is reasonable to accept practical advice from Yitro, as the sages have taught us, "If you are told that there is wisdom among the Gentile, you can believe it is so."

In any case, no matter how great Yitro was, he was separated from Bnei Yisrael before the Torah was given. This corresponds to the continuation of the above phrase by the sages, "If you are told that there is Torah among the Gentiles, do not believe it." Only after Yitro left, "Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain [19:2] – as one man, with one heart" [Rashi]. Only then did Yisrael stand at the foot of Mount Sinai in order to receive the Torah, and only then did they hear the Ten Commandments.

#### RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

“**A**nochi / I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." (20:2)

R' Eliyahu Capsali z"l (Crete; 17th century) quotes R' Eliezer Rokeach z"l (Worms, Germany; 1160-1238) who writes: Why do the Asseret Ha'dibrot begin with "Anochi"? Because Hashem spoke to the Patriarchs using that word. He said to Avraham

(Bereishit 15:1), "Anochi / I am a shield for you." He said to Yitzchak (Bereishit 26:24), "Anochi / I am the G-d of your father Abraham." Finally, He said to Yaakov (Bereishit 28:15), "Anochi / I am with you."

What is the significance of this parallelism? R' Capsali explains: Hashem used the word "Anochi" at the beginning of the Asseret Ha'dibrot to proclaim to the world the greatness of the Patriarchs and that we received the Torah in their merit. All of the wonders associated with the Giving of the Torah—the cadres of malachim that "accompanied" Hashem and the honor that was shown the Jewish People beyond what any nation has ever experienced, all of that was in the merit of and in tribute to the Patriarchs. (Meah She'arim p.12)

Many commentaries ask: Why did Hashem say, "Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt," rather than, "Who created heaven and earth"? R' Moshe Isserles z"l ("Rema"; Cracow, Poland; 1525-1572) answers:

The early commentaries point out that the plagues in Egypt demonstrated three things: that Hashem has the power to do anything He wants, that Hashem watches over and is actively engaged with the world, and that Hashem is the Creator. Thus, writes Rema, the expression, "Who took you out of Egypt," means exactly the same thing as, "Who created heaven and earth."

This parallelism is alluded to in the Asseret Ha'dibrot themselves. On the first luchot was inscribed (20:11), "For in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore, Hashem blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it." However, on the second luchot was inscribed (Devarim 5:15), "And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem, your G-d, has taken you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you to make the Sabbath day."

Rema adds: The relationship between Creation and the Exodus is spoken of by many early commentaries. The work Akeidat Yitzchak writes that anyone who denies Creation must necessarily deny the possibility of miracles. Such a person also cannot believe in the prophecy of Moshe or in the eventual coming of mashiach. Rambam, too, writes that one who believes that Moshe performed miracles and took us from Egypt necessarily believes that G-d created the world.

The Gemara lists many miracles that took place on a regular basis in the Bet Hamikdash. What was the purpose of these miracles? They, too, served to remove any doubt as to the existence of the Creator. (Torat Ha'olah III Ch.11) © 2005 Rabbi S. Katz & www.torah.org

