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פרשת יתרו
Parshat Yitro

Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

FAMILY RITUALS

RABBI MOSHE NACHBAR

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SARIT SCHER ('20)
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SAMANTHA HENNER ('20)

Yitro is arguably one of the most enigmatic characters in all of Tanach. We know that he was a community leader in Midian, a prolific worshipper of avodah zara, and had seven names. Yet, he is also the father-in-law of the greatest leader in Jewish history, Moshe Rabbeinu, and after hearing of the great salvation in Egypt, converts to Judaism and leads a major worldwide conversion movement (according to the Zohar Hakadosh). Yitro was an individual with many layers and many experiences.

The midrash (in both the Mechilta and Rabbah) tells us that Yitro served all forms of idolatry, and that he never missed an opportunity to serve a new form of false god. This relationship with avodah zara motivated Yitro to make one of the most outrageous requests from our leader, Moshe. In Parshat Shmot (Shmot 2:21), the Torah tells us:

וַיּוֹאֶל מֹשֶׁה לָשֶׁבֶת אֶת הָאִישׁ וַיִּתֵּן אֶת
צִפֹּרָה בִּתּוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה

The literal translation of this is that Moshe swore to live in Midian in order to marry Tziporah, the daughter of Yitro. However, the midrash (Yalkut Shimoni) reveals that the oath which Moshe made was not to dwell on Yitro's "home turf", rather, it was a promise that his firstborn son would be raised as an idolator. It is astounding that Moshe would agree to this! Our exemplary Jewish leader agreed that his own flesh and blood would serve idols! How could this be? Why would Moshe agree to this? Additionally, what was Yitro's motivation for such a request?

The Baal Haturim (Shmot 2:16) explains that the reason Moshe agreed to such a request was that he knew that Yitro would eventually become inspired

and, ultimately, convert. Moshe was sure that his father-in-law would "see the light" and find Hashem to connect to Him. Therefore, he was far less worried about making this agreement, because he knew eventually Yitro would become a Jew, and he would no longer desire to train his grandson in his idolatrous ways.

The Shem Meshmuel (Parshat Naso) explains that the reason why Yitro desired that his grandson become an idol worshipper was so that, in the end, this child would appreciate Hashem's existence far more. Yitro felt that in order to truly appreciate authenticity, one had to experience falsity. He wanted his grandson to experience all types of idolatrous service before arriving to the true service of God.

These explanations both show how noble Yitro and Moshe were when making this agreement. Yitro wanted his grandson to have the entire world of worship at his fingertips. Moshe wanted his father-in-law and son to experience teshuva. However, good intentions do not always manifest in positive ways. In Sefer Shoftim (18:30) we learn that בֶּן־גֵּרְשֹׁם בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה was a major distributer of idolatry to the Jewish people. The gemara in Bava Batra (109b) notes that this individual does not exist, and that it was actually Moshe's grandson who was the idolator. יהוֹנָתָן בֶּן־גֵּרְשֹׁם בֶּן־מְשֶׁה NOT יהוֹנָתָן בֶּן־גֵּרְשֹׁם בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁה (in fact, if you look in a Tanach you will see that the letter nun is written very small, you can barely see it).

Perhaps a lesson we can learn from all of this is that although we want the best for others, we can not duplicate what worked for us and superimpose that onto others' life paths. Yitro wanted the best for his grandson, but just because he found Hashem after years and years of searching and serving false gods does not mean that is or will be a positive experience for someone else. Moshe wanted his family to experience true *teshuva*, but he could not tailor the exact experience to catalyze that *teshuva*. One must have good intentions when inspiring others, but realize that everyone is different and has different needs. Good Shabbos!

STRONG FOUNDATION

SARIT SCHER ('20)

A key element of Parshat Yitro is Hashem giving Bnei Yisrael the Ten Commandments. After Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the first two commandments, Bnei Yisrael became frightened and asked Moshe to give them the remaining eight commandments himself. Hashem allowed this to happen. He also allowed Moshe to be the one who taught Bnei Yisrael the rest of the Torah.

Why did Hashem make the giving of the Ten Commandments so frightening for Bnei Yisrael? It seems like He is trying to scare Bnei Yisrael away from following Him!

This question can be explained through a story. One day, a poor man was lucky enough to win the lottery. The man decided that the first thing that he would do with the money was to build a house for his family. He made sure to hire the best construction company to build his new house and would constantly check up on the progress of the house. On the first day of construction, the construction workers were digging a large hole. When the man saw this, he became enraged. "I have spent my whole life living in a hole and I am not paying all of this money to continue living in one!" The man was also critical of the workers' idea to use metal beams and concrete for the foundation of his house. "Fancy houses do not have metal and concrete! I want my house to be made only from the finest materials, such as wood and plaster." The construction workers then built the house just as he asked, with just plaster and wood.

After seeing his house, the man was pleased. It was everything that he had dreamed about! He could not wait to move into his new home. The house remained steady during the spring and summer months. However, once the seasons changed to fall and winter and the air became colder, the house became increasingly unsteady. One day, as the man was leaving his house, a strong wind came

and caused the house to collapse. The man was devastated and immediately called the construction company. "My house! How could this happen to my gorgeous house?" the man asked a construction worker. The construction worker replied, "You are right that your house was exquisite, but it had no foundation. Without a solid foundation, even the most beautiful house is just a piece of junk."

The lesson from this story is that Hashem had to make sure that Bnei Yisrael would have faith in Him and follow His Torah during both good and bad times. If a person only follows the Torah when it is convenient, when a "strong wind", i.e., troubling times come, the person will waver in his or her connection to Hashem and the Torah. That is why Hashem had to instill a sense of fear in Bnei Yisrael; He had to send the message to Bnei Yisrael that they must follow the Torah for the sole reason that it is what Hashem instructed them to do.

THANK YOU

REBECCA HENNER ('22)

In Parshat Yitro, Bnei Yisrael are finally in the *midbar* after being taken out of Mitzrayim in the previous parsha, Beshalach. The miracle of Kriyat Yam Suf was so incredible, that all of the world knew about it. Whether it is because of the midrashic explanation that everyone else's water split too, in their cups, bathtubs etc., or simply because people heard of the magnitude of this wonder, it was definitely a known phenomenon. This parsha starts off with saying that Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, heard all about the sequence of events following Yetziat Mitzrayim. Therefore, he brings Tzipora, Gershom and Eliezer to reunite with Moshe.

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לִקְרַאת חֹתְנוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ וַיִּשַּׁק לוֹ
וַיִּשְׁאֲלוּ אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֹהֱלָה

"Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent" (Shmot 18:7).

It seems a little weird that Yitro was coming to meet Moshe, yet Moshe is the one going out of his way, walking a great distance to meet his father-in-law. Isn't Moshe busy? He's leading an entire nation, yet he still goes out of his way to meet Yitro!

The Sforno explains that Moshe did so out of respect, and because Yitro did so much for Moshe. While Moshe was in Midian for quite a few years, Yitro invited Moshe to live in his home and cared for him. Therefore, Moshe felt completely indebted to Yitro, so he went out of his way to greet him. Moshe teaches us how much we have to be grateful to people who do things for us. We must pay them back, even by doing small favors.

A LESSON FROM ALL

NAOMI REICHENBERG ('22)

In the beginning of Parshat Yitro, we see Yitro bring Tzipporah, Gershom, and Eliezer to Moshe in the desert. Moshe recounts all of the miracles that happened in Mitzrayim to Yitro and Yitro then recognizes that Hashem is greater than all other gods. And then we see something so interesting! Yitro notices some flaws within the judicial system that Moshe is running. Moshe listens to the suggestions that Yitro gives and ultimately implements them right away. This encounter is juxtaposed to the *Aseret Hadibrot*. Why place this encounter here, and why does Yitro, a seemingly average man come and give Moshe Rabbeinu advice? What is going on here?

Moshe Rabbeinu most definitely does not need to accept the advice of an average man. He could have listened attentively and politely rejected the suggestion, and yet he listens and even follows through with the plan. This is a tremendous lesson from Moshe Rabbeinu. From here we learn that even if you are of the highest stature, every person has something to offer that should be taken into consideration. Moshe surely did not have to listen to Yitro and yet he knew that such advice could be extremely valuable. This can also be an answer as to why this is juxtaposed to the *Aseret Hadibrot*. An integral part of learning Torah is the ability to learn it from everyone. There are lessons that can be learned from each and every person you encounter, and therefore learning from everyone is an essential part of *limud Torah*. Moshe Rabbeinu

so effortlessly teaches us this lesson. May we all be *zoche* to learn and accept advice from everyone we encounter. Shabbat Shalom.

RIGHT SIDE OF GRATITUDE

SAMANTHA HENNER ('20)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Yitro, Hashem commands Moshe to gather all of Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai, where they will soon be given the Ten Commandments and become the recipients of Hashem's precious Torah. On that day, the mountain was fully covered in smoke, and the shofar was blown so that everyone could hear and feel Hashem's presence surrounding them while they waited patiently at the edge of Har Sinai. As soon as the nation was properly prepared for this momentous occasion, Hashem began reciting the first few commandments out loud to them. The Ten Commandments are divided up and inscribed onto two separate tablets, referred to as the *luchot*. The first five commandments are ones that relate to our relationship with Hashem and the last five are laws between one person to another. The fifth commandment, which is in pasuk 12, clearly states that one should:

כַּבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמֶּךָ לְמַעַן יַאֲרִכוּן יָמֶיךָ
עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ

"Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you" (Shmot 20:11).

When reading this commandment, there is a huge underlying question that is posed. Shouldn't this law be placed on the second tablet because this mitzvah seems to be *bein adam lechavero*, between man and man? What can we learn from this commandments placement on the "wrong side" of the *luchot*?

In a dvar torah written by Rabbi Avi Geller, he explains that when we perform the mitzvah of *kibud av va'em*, we start to realize how much our parents do for us that sometimes goes unnoticed. Through that, we develop the character trait of having and showing gratitude to those who help us on a daily basis. Once we possess and grow this trait by giving respect and honor to our parents, we are then able to show thanks to Hashem and honor Him as well. Honoring one's father and mother is a vehicle to ultimately showing gratitude to Hashem and building a strong relationship with Him. Shabbat Shalom.

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RAVH@YESHIVAHS.ORG