



Parsha

PARTNER



PARSHAS YISRO

22 SHEVAT 5767

10 FEBRUARY 2007

Parsha Perspectives

OZER ALPORT

וישמע יתרו (18:1)

"And Yisro heard" After hearing about the miracles that Hashem performed for the Jewish people at the Reed Sea and in the battle against Amalek, Yisro came to convert and join the Jewish people. The Torah seems to emphasize that there was something unique and significant about Yisro hearing of these miracles.

Rav Moshe Alshich explains that while the entire world heard about these miracles, and everyone was filled with awe and fear of the Jews, only Yisro chose to do something about it – to come and convert. Proper hearing doesn't merely connote the ability to detect and process sound waves-it requires an understanding of the message being conveyed.

Rav Shalom Schwadron likens the difference to two people walking down the train tracks. When the conductor of an oncoming train notices them, he begins to sound a shrill warning whistle. Both men hear the whistle. One is a simple farmer who has never before seen a train, and therefore continues walking, enjoying the view and the sounds of the whistle, while the other understands the warning being expressed and immediately flees from the oncoming danger.

While both men physically "heard"

the sound of the whistle, only the second one can be said to have properly heard and understood the message.

Similarly, although the nations of the world heard of the miracles which Hashem performed for the Jews in Egypt and in the desert, the news went in one ear and out the other, failing to penetrate and change them. Only Yisro internalized the message, understanding what was required of him and acting accordingly.

During World War I, many of the Jews of war-torn Poland fled to take refuge in Austria. One year on Shabbos Chanuka, Rav Moses Flesch, the Rav of a shul in Vienna, gave a speech about the strength and determination of Yehudis, a heroine of the Chanuka story. He continued by noting that while yeshivos had spread throughout Europe and a proper Jewish education was available to many boys, there was unfortunately no similar option

for Jewish girls, who were forced to attend public school and received only a very rudimentary religious education.

Lacking a solid background, the girls were all too often swept up in the anti-religious movements of the time. Rav Flesch stressed the need for a modern-day Yehudis to step forward and establish a suitable system of formal education for Jewish girls, so that they would be equipped with the information necessary to remain religious in a modern world.

While everybody in the packed shul heard his inspiring words on that fateful day, only one girl up in the crowded Ezras Nashim (women's section) truly "heard" the message – her name was Sarah Schneier, and she was inspired by his address to establish the modern Beis Yaakov movement, giving Jewish girls the opportunity to receive a proper Jewish education.

Many times in life Hashem sends us personal messages and wake-up calls. Although we always hear the information being presented to us, we often choose to ignore the call to action which is required. At those times, let us "hear" the lesson of Yisro and of Sarah Schneier and understand the actions and changes that we are required to undertake.

Dedicated to the memory of Charles "Chuck" Tennant (Yosef ben Carol). Chuck was a remarkable person who will be sorely missed and fondly remembered for his incredible pursuit of truth and goodness. May his memory be a blessing.

Parsha POINTERS

Talking Points | PARSHAS YISRO

RABBI ELAZAR MEISELS

1. MEASURE FOR MEASURE

"Yisro said, 'Blessed is Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and the hand of Pharaoh...Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the other gods, for [by the] very matter in which [the Egyptians] had conspired against them!'" 18:10-11

Than All The Other Gods - Yisro was familiar with every form of idolatry and had served every one of them [at one point or another.] – Rashi For the very matter in which they had conspired against them! – The Egyptians sought to destroy the Jewish nation [by drowning their children] in water and they themselves ended up perishing by drowning in water. - Rashi.

That the Egyptians were punished by G-d came as no surprise to Yisro. What stunned him, and reinforced his awareness of G-d's omnipotence, was the fact that He struck them in precisely the manner that they had sought to strike the Jews. Idolatry is based on the assumption that the manifold forces in nature compete with and seek to overpower one another, since each wields power in one area only and is defenseless in the others. By punishing the Egyptians through water, G-d demonstrated that not only wasn't He vulnerable in that area as they had suspected, to the contrary, He was capable of utilizing it to overpower and annihilate them.

2. THE MANDATE OF JEWISH UNITY

"In the third month from the Exodus... they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai...and encamped in the wilderness, and Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain." 19:1,2

And Israel encamped there – The verb "encamped" is in the singular, in contrast to the previous verbs. This is to teach that the entire assembly encamped like a single person, with one heart. – Rashi

Jewish unity is not merely a desirable condition for the Jewish people. Rather, it is a prerequisite for the Jewish nation to partake of the Torah and its numerous benefits. Until this point, each encampment was filled with strife and disunity and thus, there was no possibility of giving them the Torah. Now that they had resolved their differences and stood as one harmonious unit, they were deserving of receiving the Torah, which requires a concerted effort to fulfill the will of Hashem.

3. THE POTENTIAL TO BE LEADERS

"You shall be to me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation, these are the words that you shall speak to the Jewish people" 19:6

A kingdom of ministers - Leaders – Rashi A kingdom of ministers – You shall be to Me, My special portion [dedicated to serving

Me in this world] – Rabbeinu Bachya Had the Jewish people been meritorious, they could have each been a Kohen Gadol. This elevated status will be restored to them in the End of Days. – Baal HaTurim

Our decision to assume the weighty moral responsibilities of the Torah endowed us all with the potential to be exceedingly great. How firmly we would adhere to the strictures of the Torah would determine our success at attaining this lofty goal. The potential is there eternally, and although the promise that we would collectively attain it will not be fulfilled until the Messianic Era, every person is capable of individually pursuing and achieving this noble quest. To strive for less is to shortchange oneself of the unique rank accessible only to the Jewish people.

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Parsha AT-A-GLANCE

PARSHAS YISRO

Yisro, Moshe Rabbeinu's father-in-law, hears all that has happened to Bnai Yisroel. He brings Tzipora, Moshe's wife, and their two sons to the desert to be reunited with Moshe. Moshe elaborates on all the marvelous events of the Exodus from Egypt. Yisro offers sacrifices to Hashem, and he and the notables of Bnai Yisroel eat together.

The next day, Yisro sees that Bnai Yisroel wait on line all day to seek advice from Moshe and to have him settle their disputes. Yisro suggests that Moshe appoint a capable group of men to assist him in judging the people. Moshe selects a group of judges who will bring to his attention only the most difficult matters.

On Rosh Chodesh Sivan, Bnai Yisroel arrive at Har Sinai. The nation is imbued with a spirit of devotion and unity. Moshe carries Hashem's message to the people that if they will be loyal to Him, they will be His special treasure, a nation of priests and a holy people. Bnai Yisroel unanimously and enthusiastically accept this destiny. They are instructed to prepare themselves for three days to receive the Torah directly from

Hashem Himself. They are warned not to overstep the boundaries set for them.

A dense cloud covers Har Sinai. Amid lightning and thunder, Moshe is called to ascend the mountain where he is given another warning to the people. Moshe feels it is superfluous, but Hashem insists, and he descends the mountain to be sure the people understand. When all is ready, Hashem speaks to His beloved people and reveals to them the Aseres Hadibros, the Ten Commandments. It is the only time in history that an entire nation hears the voice of Hashem speaking to its' assembled multitude. The people are shaken by the experience, and beg Moshe to be the intermediary for them, lest they die. Moshe assures them that Hashem seeks only to raise

them to an exalted status, and to place His imprint upon them so that they do not sin.

The parsha ends with a command to build an alter for Hashem which is to be placed on the ground, not raised on columns. The alter is to be built of stones, but they may not be fashioned with metal tools. Access to the top of the alter will be by means of a ramp, not steps, in order to insure the maximum degree of tznius (modesty).

Please pray for a
speedy recovery

**Tova Rivka bas
Esther Rochel**

**Michael ben
Sophie**



PartnerTALK

RABBI ELAZAR MEISELS

Dear Rabbi: I recently came across the verse in the Torah [Vayikra 19:18] that instructs us against bearing a grudge or taking revenge. Although it seems straightforward enough, I find it almost impossible to observe—taking revenge would seem to be such a natural reaction to someone who really harmed me. Am I missing something, or is this one of those laws that asks us to deny the reality of human nature? Jed N.

Dear Jed,
Thank you for your very thought-provoking question. The truth is that although it may appear to defy human nature, I believe that this is only because the full meaning of the verse is not understood. The full text of the verse is, “Do not take revenge, nor bear a grudge against another Jew, you shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem.” The verse does not ask us to simply forget the offense committed, but it explains why we are being asked to do so as well. It predicates it on the obligation to love another Jew as you love yourself.

Clearly, this is no simple matter, and the commentaries discuss what the exact parameters of this obligation are. However, the verse makes it clear that it is precisely this love that precludes the possibility of bearing a grudge or taking revenge against another Jew. Why is this, and how can one obtain this deep affection for another Jew that empowers him to forgo the instincts and pleasures of revenge?

The Chafetz Chaim, in his classic work, “Shmiras HaLoshon”, provides insight [Chelek 1, Shaar HaTevunos, Perek 6]. He quotes the Talmud

Yerushalmi which offers a powerful analogy to explain this idea. Imagine someone walking in the woods whose leg became entangled in a fallen tree limb and caused him to trip and fall. Would he become incensed at his leg and begin striking it with his arms? Will he start to kick it with his other leg? Would he bear a grudge against his leg for causing him this agony? Surely not! It is impossible to separate the leg from the arm and view them as separate entities that one would bear ill will toward the other.

The Jewish people are referred to in Divrei HaYomim [1:17:21] as a single entity, “And who is like your nation Israel, one nation in the land.” This comparison is not merely symbolic. The mystics teach that although every Jew appears in this world as an individual, in reality, we are all merely extensions of a central unit called the Jewish soul that resides in the spiritual world. At its’ core in the spiritual world, this soul is a unified entity, which branches out and manifests itself in the physical world as individual human beings. The separateness, however, is illusory. In reality, no Jew is independent of the others. Once a person recognizes that at

his core, he is one with each and every Jew, the obligation to love another Jew as yourself is self-understood. It’s as natural as the expectation that the arms and legs feel and act in unison. They’re one and the same: parts of a greater whole.

When one Jew acts foolishly or even harmfully toward another Jew, it should not be perceived as an act of aggression against that individual. Rather, the Torah teaches us to view the aggressor as the leg that became entangled and caused the person to trip and fall. The victim is like the arm, and thoughts of grudges or revenge are obviously inappropriate.

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TABLE TALK

FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBOS TABLE

א The Talmud relates (Avodah Zara 2b) that before giving the Torah to the Jews at Mount Sinai, Hashem first offered it to the other nations of the world, all of whom refused. How can we make a blessing every morning thanking Hashem for choosing us from all of the nations and giving us His Torah (אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתו) when it was only presented to us after every other nation declined the offer?

ב The Talmud recounts (Shabbos 88a) that when the Jewish people were encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai, Hashem lifted the mountain above them like a barrel and threatened them that if they don't accept the Torah, 'שם תהא קבורתכם' – there will be your burial place'. What is the metaphor of a barrel? If Hashem's intention was to intimidate them, being buried by a mountain seems a lot scarier than being buried by a barrel!

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Hey, I Never Knew That!

Amazing Insights About the Weekly Parsha OZER ALPORT

Q Why did Moses wait for Yisro and his family to come on their own to re-join him instead of sending a messenger inviting and encouraging them to come?

A The Alter of Novardok explains that when it comes to Jewish outreach, one will only be successful if the other party is open and prepared to hear what one has to say. Before the showdown between the true prophet, Elijah, and the prophets of the idol baal at Mount Carmel, Elijah first rebuked the Jews (Melachim 1 18:21), "how much longer will you continue straddling both sides of the fence?" Even though he was about to perform open miracles which would result in a tremendous sanctification of Hashem's name, he knew that if the people weren't in the right mindset then his efforts would be in vain. He therefore prepared the people to be influenced by delivering words of chastisement. Similarly, Rabbi Shlomo Margolis explains that Moses knew that the entire world heard of the miraculous events of the splitting of the Reed Sea and the giving of the Torah. He recognized that if Yisro wasn't inspired to come on his own, that would be an indication that he wasn't open and prepared to be influenced, and there would unfortunately be no purpose in sending for him.

Q The Arizal, one of the greatest mystics of all time, writes in the name of the Holy Zohar that Moses was a gilgul (reincarnation) of Hevel (Abel), and Yisro was a gilgul of Cain. As all mystical teachings are alluded to in the actual text, where is this fascinating fact hinted to?

A Rav Chaim Vital notes that this is hinted to by the letters beginning the words **אני חתך יתרו** – I am your father-in-law Yisro – which spell the word **אחי** – my brother. Part of Yisro's mission in this world was to atone for the sin of Cain in killing Hevel, which he did in several ways. Firstly, he gave his daughter in marriage to a gilgul of Hevel, Moses, which allowed Hevel the descendants which were denied him through his murder (see Bereishis 4:10). The sacrifice brought by Cain did not find favor in Hashem's eyes (Bereishis 4:5), so Yisro corrected this by bringing proper sacrifices to Hashem (18:12), which were enjoyed not just by him but by Aaron and the elders of the generation. Finally, the Chida writes that while the Torah doesn't recount the final conversation between Cain and Hevel when they were in the field prior to the murder, the Targum Yonason ben Uziel (Bereishis 4:8) records that a part of it was Cain's blasphemous claim that there is no Divine judge or process of judgment regarding our actions in this world. He rectified this by suggesting to Moses (18:19-23) the concept of establishing a proper system of courts and judges!

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