

**Wembley Synagogue**

תרו

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Yitro

וישמע יתרו כהן מדין חתן משה את כל אשר עשה אלקים - And Yitro the priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moshe heard everything that Hashem had done (18:1) Rashi explains that Yitro heard about the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek, and this is what inspired him to come and join the Jewish nation. The commentators question why these two incidents specifically influenced Yitro. What common denominator did they have? In the war with Amalek, all the Jews were united; they fought as one people. At the splitting of the sea, there were actually twelve divisions, with each tribe entering the sea in its own channel. Hashem performed a miracle and made the walls between the channels transparent, in order that the tribes would be able to see each other. Each was interested in knowing that the neighbouring tribes were passing through the sea safely. Yitro was impressed by these occurrences, for they both stressed the unity of the Jewish nation. (Source: Something to Say)

Very few Sidrot are named after people, yet this Sidra which teaches us about the Jewish People's acceptance of the Torah at Sinai, is named after Yitro. By what right did Yitro deserve that this notable Sidra bear his name? In taking Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, Hashem performed many miracles and wonders. After living through unparalleled events, the Jewish people encamped at Sinai. The time had come to receive the Torah. At this time Yitro, who was Moshe's father-in-law, joined them. Rashi tells us that Yitro decided to do so because he heard about the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek. The whole world heard about these earthshaking events (*"Peoples heard, they were agitated 15:14*). All the waters of the world split at the same moment Hashem split the sea for Bnei Yisrael. Egypt, a vast and powerful kingdom, was now in ruins, defunct as a power and as a nation, its army drowned in the sea. Amalek, a large nation that outnumbered Bnei Yisrael many times over, launched a premeditated attack as soon as the Children of Israel left Egypt. Bnei Yisrael's victory was phenomenal. A tribe of slaves defeated a warrior nation! Each event on its own should have been enough to cause thousands upon thousands of people to join the Jewish people as they made their way to accept Hashem's Torah on Mount Sinai. Remarkably Yitro was the only person who came. (Source: Rav Scheinberg on Chumash Shemot)

עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי גָדוֹל ה' מִכָּל הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי בְדַבַּר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם - Now I know that G-d is greater than all the deities (which I, Yitro have worshipped in the past) for with the same thing that they plotted (i.e. to drown the Jewish babies in the water, He punished them drowning the Egyptians in the sea) (18:11)

Yitro was impressed with the fact that Egypt's punishments corresponded exactly to their crimes. For example, they drowned Jewish babies in the Nile, and were punished by drowning in the sea. It is interesting to note that the Torah uses the term "that they plotted" rather than the term "that they did." Yitro was able to see that the Egyptian people were punished in a fitting way for all the schemes "that they plotted," not just for those that they were actually able to carry out. Yitro was privy to all the Egyptian schemes because he had formerly been an advisor to Pharaoh. He eventually fled the country because of his anguish over the Egyptian plots against the Jews. Since he saw that Egypt received fitting punishments for even the schemes that they were unable to carry out, he praised G-d for judging them "with the things that they plotted." (Source: Brisker Rav - P'ninim MiShulchan Govoha)

אֲנִי חֹתֵנְךָ יִתְרוֹ בָּא אֵלַיךְ - I your father-in-law Yitro am coming to you (18:6)

The Sforno explains that Yitro sent this message ahead of his arrival since the Gemara Pesachim 112a says אַל תִּכְנַס לְבֵית דָּבָר כֹּל שָׂפוֹן לְבֵית חֲבֵרְךָ - do not enter your home suddenly (unannounced), how much more so the home of your friend.

עַתָּה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי אֵימְצֵךְ וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים עִמָּךְ - Now, listen to my voice, I will advise you, and Hashem will be with you... (18:19)

Yitro saw that his son-in-law was judging the Jewish people single-handedly. He chastised him that this task is exhausting and overwhelming, and advised him how to set up a judicial system, utilising the various scholars among the Jews. Yitro then concluded, "And Hashem will be with you." What is the meaning of this statement?

The Gemara Sanhedrin 17a states that if a prophet is overworked and overburdened then he will lose his ability to receive prophecy. Yitro advised Moshe to listen to his advice in order that "Hashem will be with you." In the light of the above, this remark can be understood as follows. Moshe was overworked. Yitro was warning him that he must reduce his workload or else Hashem will not be with him, since Hashem will not communicate with anyone who is not in the proper frame of mind. (Source: Yalkut HaUrim, in the name of Maamar Avraham quoted in Shabbos Delights)

וְאַתָּה תִּחַזֵּק מִכָּל הָעָם אַנְשֵׁי חַיִל יִרְאַי אֱלֹקִים אַנְשֵׁי אֱמֶת שְׂנֵאֵי בָצַע - And you shall select from among the entire people, men of wealth who are G-d fearing, men of truth who despise monetary gain (18:21) Why, asked the Kotzker Rebbe, did Moshe appoint "leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifty and leaders of tens"? Was he not afraid that perhaps such an appointment might offend some of them if they would be appointed to a post of lesser status than that of their fellows? However, answered the Rebbe, remember that the Torah describes these individuals as being "men of truth." A "man of truth" knows not to be offended by seeing someone else receive a higher position than the one he holds. (Source: A Shabbos Vort)

..... וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹקִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה - And G-d spoke all these words, saying, I am... (20:1-2) The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 2b) relates that before giving the Torah to the Jewish people, Hashem offered it to the nations of the world, who refused it because some of its laws did not please them. Why did Hashem reveal to the Jewish people that He offered the Torah to the nations of the world and that they refused to accept it? Doesn't this cast the Jewish people in a bad light? Hashem actually intended to convey a very important message regarding the sanctity of Torah. The people of Yishmael refused to accept the Torah because it contained the commandment, "You shall not steal," and the character trait of Yishmael was, "His hand will be extended against all people" (Bereishit 16:12). The people of Eisav declined the Torah because it included the commandment, "You shall not kill," and Eisav was told by Yitzchak, "You will live by your sword" (Bereishit 27:40). Apparently, the entire Torah suited these nations, except for one commandment. If so, should they not have accepted the Torah and disregarded the single law which they could not contend with? Hashem was thus emphasising that the other nations realized that the Torah is comprised of 613 totally unified *mitzvot*, and the slightest omission takes away from the Torah in its totality: A Torah of 612 *mitzvot* is not an abbreviated Torah, but no Torah at all! After this introduction Hashem's question to the Jewish people concerned their willingness to accept the whole Torah of 613 *mitzvot*, to which they unequivocally responded, "We will do and we will listen — we accept the Torah in its entirety."

וַיֹּאמֶר חִתּוֹן מִשֵּׁה אֱלֹוֹ לֹא טוֹב הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה - Moshe's father-in-law said to him, "the thing that you are doing (judging the people on your own) is not good." (18:17) Isn't Yitro's suggestion obvious? Why didn't Moshe think of it?

Abarbanel says that Moshe knew very well that a nation needs leadership, and that it cannot be provided by a single individual since he will wear himself out. Yet, Moshe preferred waiting for Hashem to institute His own system rather than doing so himself based on mere human understanding, and meanwhile he was willing to face a short period of overwork. Thus Yitro's advice added nothing new to what Moshe already knew. Nevertheless, because Moshe respected Yitro, he accepted his advice graciously.

וַיְהִי קִלְת וּבְרָקִים וְעָנָן כָּבֵד - There was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud (on the mountain... and the people trembled) (19:16)

Why didn't Hashem give the Torah on a calm, serene day? When Hashem offered the Torah to the Jewish people, they accepted it without hesitation. Some Jews responded eagerly, thinking that Torah would make life pleasant and effortless. To dispel this theory, Hashem brought thunder and lightning, hinting that in the years to come, there would be difficult periods. Jews would suffer and be tortured for their adherence to Torah. Adherence to Torah would help the Jewish people endure the most difficult times and ensure the perpetual existence of the Jewish people (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

לִי מִזְבֵּחַ אֲדָמָה תַעֲשֶׂה לִי - You shall make an earthen altar for Me (20:21)

Sefer Niflaot Hatorah says that Hashem is telling us that He does not need fancy silver or gold buildings, temples or magnificent edifices. Rather a plain simple *mizbeach* – altar, place of worship, even if made of earth is fine, as long as it is made with sincerity.

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 4.49pm



Shabbat ends: 5.54pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson
Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html