

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

The Portion of

Yisro

January 24, 2008

Dedicated

L' Neshimas Rav Avraham David Mordechai z'l ben Harav Yosef z'l,
Tzierel Feiga Bas Shraga Fievel,
Devorah Bas Shalom
By their Children and Grandchildren
Devorah and Yossi Pelow

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

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Yad Avraham Institute
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B"H

Yisro

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. Why Did the World Remain Silent?

The Torah states, **“Yisro, the Priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G'd said to Moshe and to Israel...”** Rashi cites Chazal, “What did Yisro hear that caused him to abandon his status and glory to follow the Jewish people into the desert? The splitting of the Sea and the battle against the Amalekites.” Upon hearing about these miracles, Yisro was impressed to the degree that he understood that his status and glory in Midian had no value. Although the entire world was aware of the splitting of the Sea, as Chazal tell us that every body of water (including the water in a vessel) split at the time of the splitting of the Sea, only Yisro was compelled to join the Jewish people in the desert. Why was Yisro impacted in this manner while the rest of the world remained unaffected?

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Pharaoh had three advisors in his court – Yisro, Bilaam, and Eyov (Job). Initially when Bilaam had suggested enslaving the Jewish people and instituting the bondage, Yisro fled to Midian as a sign of protest, and Eyov had remained silent. Yisro could not stand by and witness this miscarriage of justice being perpetrated against an innocent people, especially after all that Yosef had done for Egypt as its Viceroy. Chazal tell us that because Eyov remained silent he was destined to his travails and suffering. In the merit of Yisro's sensitivity to the Jewish people, G'd endowed him with a special level of clarity that allowed him to fully internalize the events of the splitting of the Sea and the battle against the Amalekites that followed.

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that repentance is only possible through Divine Assistance. In order for one to be able to introspect and understand the wrong of his ways sufficiently, G'd must endow him with special clarity. Because Yisro had appreciated the

miscarriage of justice, he fled Egypt. Thus, G'd gifted him with special clarity that allowed him to become part of the Jewish people.

The verse refers to Yisro as **“the Priest of Midian”** and **“the father-in-law of Moshe.”** As the Priest of Midian, Yisro was proficient in every pagan belief. Through his own quest for truth he ultimately rejected paganism as Chazal tell us, “He worshiped every deity and rejected them all.” Yisro had the good fortune of being exposed to Moshe for many years as his father-in-law. At the incident of the burning bush, Moshe experienced prophecy. Before returning to Egypt, Moshe asked for Yisro's permission to leave. Yisro blessed him and allowed him to go forth as the Redeemer of Israel. As a result of rejecting idolatry and being exposed to the influences of Moshe, his son-in-law, Yisro had the capacity to process and internalize the events of the splitting of the Sea and the battle against the Amalekites that followed. The world at large, being of a pagan orientation, had no relevance to decipher these awesome spiritual events. Therefore, Yisro upon hearing what had transpired, abandoned all that he created in his life for the ultimate, while the world remained silent.

2. The Spiritual Capacity of the Jewish People After Witnessing the Ten Plagues

The Torah states, **“In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day they arrived at the desert of Sinai (to receive the Torah).”** The Midrash asks, “Why was the Torah not given to the Jewish people immediately after being redeemed from Egypt? G'd had said, **‘I will take this people out to serve G'd on this mountain...’** Meaning, when the Jewish people were redeemed they would worship G'd/receive the Torah immediately. Reb Yehudah Bar Shalom answers with an analogy. It is similar to a prince who is recovering from an illness. His father had said, ‘Let him fully recover before he resumes his regular Torah studies.’ After the Jewish people had left Egypt,

they were blemished (spiritually). G'd had said, 'It will take time for them to heal from their illness. Then they will receive the Torah.'

The Torah tells us that after the splitting of the Sea and seeing the remains of the Egyptians on the seashore, **“And they believed in G'd and Moshe his servant.”** If the Torah attests to the fact that they had reached this level of belief after the splitting of the Sea it is inferred that prior to this moment, although they had witnessed the ten plagues and the splitting of the Sea they were not yet at this level of belief. They needed to witness and be exposed to many more miracles. Even after witnessing the closing of the Sea and the singing of G'd's praises, the Jewish people complained and quarreled with Moshe at Marah. They were given the Manna, which was in its essence the food of angels in order to be spiritualized in advance of Sinai. As the Midrash states, “The Torah was given to those who had partaken of the Manna.”

During the three months that followed their redemption from Egypt, the Jewish people were exposed continuously to miracles and spiritual experiences in order to purge them from the impurity that they had absorbed in Egypt. It was only after they had sufficiently overcome their spiritual impediments that they had the capacity to stand at Sinai and declare unequivocally, “Naaseh V'Nishma- we will do and we will listen.”

Rambam in the Laws of Torah Study states, “One can only teach Torah to one who exhibits proper behavior. If one is living a life that is contrary to the ways of Torah, he must first be redirected to the proper path. He should be advised upon the straight path and mentored until his commitment to the way of Torah becomes solidified and permanent. It is only after this that you may bring him to the study hall and commence to teach him Torah. Chazal tell us that if one teaches Torah to an inappropriate student it is similar to throwing a stone at Marculos.” The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah explains that the pagan ritual of worshipping Marculos entailed placing a horizontal stone upon a vertical stone and then throwing stones at the structure. One would think that by stoning this idol, one is actually disgracing it; however, because it is its method of worship, it is considered bona fide idol worship. Thus, one would be subject to the death penalty. One may think that regardless of one's behavior or beliefs it would be beneficial to teach this individual Torah; however Chazal teach us differently. They equate it to the worshiping of Marculos, which is the antithesis of G'd's Will.

The only time one is permitted to teach Torah to another Jew is to first ensure that the person is on the

proper path and is committed to living a life consistent with G'd's Will. Similarly, the Jewish people being spiritually blemished/limited from their 210-year exposure to the impurities of Egypt were not prepared to receive the Torah at the time of their redemption. They needed to be brought back to the proper path by experiencing numerous miracles after leaving Egypt. Every day that the Jewish people were out of Egypt, they ascended to another level of spiritual purity. Since they had fallen to the 49th level of spiritual impurity in Egypt, (which is the lowest level before spiritual extinction), the Jewish people needed to extricate themselves from this impure state over a 49-day period. On the 50th day, they had advanced to a level of purity that made them worthy of to receive the Torah at Sinai.

3. Appreciating Something Within A Proper Context

The Torah tells us that after Yisro had gone into the desert to become part of the Jewish people, Moshe had shared with him in detail, every aspect of what had transpired at the time of the exodus -the destruction of the Egyptian army and how the Jewish people were miraculously saved. The Torah states, **“Yisro rejoiced over all the good that Hashem had done for Israel, that He had rescued them from the land of Egypt...”** It would seem that Yisro's rejoicing over the good that G'd had provided for the Jewish people was the proper response to the understanding of what had taken place. However, Sforno explains that the Torah is communicating something that is slightly critical of Yisro's response.

Sforno states, “When Yisro had heard how the Egyptians were destroyed, he did not rejoice over their destruction. He did not behave as one who is zealous over the honor that is afforded to his Maker as a result of the destruction of His enemies.” Upon hearing of the destruction of the Egyptians, who defied G'd, Yisro should have rejoiced that this insolent and evil entity had been vanquished. However, he did not rejoice over this fact, but rather, over the good that was afforded to the Jewish people. A person who lives only for G'd's Glory would have rejoiced over the destruction of evil rather than focusing on the beneficiary.

Every day we recite in the Amidah (in the blessing against the heretics), “And for the slanderers let there be no hope; and may all wickedness perish in an instant; and may all Your enemies be cut down speedily...” We supplicate G'd that His enemies should be

destroyed and that evil should come to an end. One would think that since requests of the Amidah are of personal nature, they should focus on the destruction of our enemies because of our own issues. Although it is true that the enemies of the Jewish people are also the enemies of G'd, our primary focus is G'd's Glory. We pray that G'd's enemies should be destroyed so that evil should not exist.

We say in the Avinu Malkeinu, "Our Father, Our King, avenge before our eyes the spilled blood of Your servants." We are supplicating G'd that we want to witness the destruction of our enemies. It is not because the nature of the Jew is to be (G'd forbid) bloodthirsty and seeking revenge, but rather we pray that those who have victimized the Jewish people throughout history should be eliminated only because by doing so, we be witness to the glorification of G'd.

The Torah tells us that G'd said, "My Throne is not be complete until the Amalekites are obliterated from under the heavens." The reason the Amalekites need to be destroyed is not because they are the enemies of the Jewish people and have persecuted them throughout history, but rather, G'd Himself says that His Throne cannot be complete without their annihilation. Their existence undermines G'd's Glory. Therefore, they must be destroyed.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we recite in the Amidah that G'd should instill fear upon all mankind. We also speak about the various classifications of devoutly righteous people who will rejoice, each one of them to his own level of piety, regarding G'd's revelation in existence and the vanquishing evil from the world. Yisro focused on the periphery/beneficiary rather than the essence of the accomplishment of the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. Thus, he fell short of his potential.

4. Circumcision, A Confirmation of the Essence of the Jew

King David writes in Psalms, "The dictates of G'd are straight (*yesharim*), they bring joy to the heart." Because the Torah in its essence is straight (*yashar*), it brings joy to the heart of the Jew whose essence is *yashar* (*straight*).

King Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes, "G'd had made man straight (*adam yashar*), but he sought out many intrigues." This is referring to the creation of Adam, who as the first human being, was created as a person with a straight/rational perspective. It was only because mankind

sought out intrigues that they became convoluted and warped. Had Adam not eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, he would have not forfeited his characteristic of "*yashar*."

The Gemara cites a verse from Yechezkel which states, "'You (the Jewish people) are called *adam* (man).' It is inferred from the verse that the nations of the world are not called *adam*." Meaning, the Jewish people are the only ones who possess the innate characteristic of Adam, before the sin. The words of Yechezkel, the prophet infer that the nations of the world do not possess the innate characteristic of Adam, which was "*yashar*." Because the Jewish people possessed the characteristic of "*yashar*" they embraced the Torah at Sinai without hesitation, unlike the nations of the world who rejected it, each for their own reasons. When the nations were offered the Torah, each had questioned G'd by saying, "What is written in it?" Meaning, they wanted to know if the Torah would conform to their lifestyle and value system. However, when the Jewish people were offered the Torah, they accepted it unequivocally by declaring "Naaseh v'nishmah- we will do and we will listen" because it touched upon their essence of "*yashar*."

When a Jew engages in Torah it brings joy to his heart because he has a commonality with the Torah Itself, which is "*yashar*." However, if the gentile were to study Torah, it would not affect him in this manner.

The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, "'G'd had hidden away for the *yesharim toshiya* (*something of a powerful nature*) ,it will perfect those who walk with completeness...' Reb Levy said in the name of Reb Shmuel Bar Nachman, 'G'd had waited 980 generations in order to give the mitzvah of circumcision to Avraham, our Patriarch.' Reb Yonason said in the name of Reb Yosi HaGlili, 'G'd waited 974 generations in order to give the Torah to the generation of the desert.' Why did He choose to give the Torah to them? It is because they were *yesharim*. It is because of this that the Jewish people received the Torah three months after leaving Egypt." The Jewish people were only worthy to receive the Torah because they had a commonality with the Torah Itself, which was "*yashar*."

G'd created the world to be the setting for the fulfillment of the Torah. Adam, was created as *yashar*, for the sake of embracing the Torah, which was *yashar*. Because he had failed, he no longer had relevance to the Torah. It was only after many generations, when the generation of the desert had attained the status of "*yashar*" were they worthy of being given the Torah.

The Brisker Rav asks, "If Chazal tell us that Avraham, our Patriarch observed the Torah in its entirety before it was given at Sinai, why did he not perform the mitzvah of circumcision before G'd commanded him to do so?" One who is not circumcised is classified as an "aareil", which means he is blocked/shut down to spiritually. This is because the foreskin is considered to be a covering and an impediment to one's spirituality. Thus, when it is removed, the Jew is able to address his spiritual potential. The Mishna in Tractate Niddarim tells us that if a gentile was circumcised he would still retain the status of "aareil" because their hearts are covered/blocked. It is because the gentile innately does not possess the characteristic of "yashar" that he is spiritually denied access to the Torah. Therefore, the act of circumcision for a gentile has no value. It does not impact upon his essence. Avraham waited until G'd commanded him to circumcise himself because the circumcision would have had no value to him unless he advanced and developed himself to attain the characteristic of "yashar."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh, based on the Zohar, explains that the reason G'd gave the mitzvah of circumcision to the Jewish people was to reinstate them to the level of Adam before he had sinned. Adam was created as a circumcised being, without a foreskin. It was only after he had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge that he developed the covering on his male organ. It was an expression of the impurity that he allowed to enter into his being. This caused him to become limited and convoluted. He had thus forfeited his characteristic of "yashar." Therefore, only the Jew, by being circumcised, is able to have relevance to the Torah, which is "yashar" because his essence is "yashar."

5. Elucidating G'd's Communication *(from Beshalach)*

The Torah states regarding the Manna, "**Moshe said (to the Jewish people), 'Eat it today, for today is the Shabbos for Hashem; today you shall not find it in the field. Six days shall you gather it, but the seventh day is a Shabbos, on it there will be none.'**" Moshe informed the Jewish people that they were to gather in the Manna from the fields every day except for the Shabbos because there would be no Manna to be found. He did not tell them that it was forbidden to gather it on the Shabbos, but rather, it would be a futile effort to do so.

The Torah continues, "**It happened on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, and they did not find. Hashem said to Moshe, 'How**

long will you refuse to observe My commandments and My teachings?..." G'd had rebuked Moshe and the entire Jewish people for not adhering to the commandment of not gathering the Manna on the Shabbos. Although Chazal tell us that only two Jews, Dasan and Aviram, had violated the word of Moshe, G'd rebuked the entire Jewish people and Moshe for what had taken place. Dasan and Aviram were Moshe's nemesis from the very beginning.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe had left the palace of the Pharaoh to see how his brothers were faring, he came upon an Egyptian who was beating a Jew to death. Moshe immediately responded by killing the Egyptian and thus sparing the Jew. Dasan and Aviram witnessed what Moshe had done and informed on him to Pharaoh. Consequently, Moshe was forced to flee to Midian. After Moshe had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt, Dasan and Aviram took every opportunity to undermine Moshe's authority. Nevertheless, G'd held Moshe and the entire Jewish people culpable for the failing of Dasan and Aviram. Why was this so?

Had Dasan and Aviram understood that if they were to transgress the Word of G'd they would face dire consequences from Moshe and the Jewish people, they would have not gone out. However, because Dasan and Aviram believed that Moshe and the Jewish people would not react to their public breach of the law, they chose to defy Moshe. Therefore, their transgression is a direct outgrowth of the passivity of Moshe and the Jewish people.

Sforno explains that had Moshe initially expressed the prohibition of gathering the Manna on Shabbos more clearly, Dasan and Aviram would not have transgressed. Moshe had only said that there would be no Manna on the Shabbos in the fields. Dasan and Aviram did not believe Moshe and chose to go out into the field. Because Moshe should have been more succinct in his communication, G'd held him culpable.

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, "Avtalyon said: Sages, be careful with your words... and the Heavenly Name is consequently profaned." When a Torah Sage expresses himself he should ensure that his communication is understood as he intends it to be. If his words are not correctly understood, it would cause that the law will not be implemented correctly. People will believe that their behavior is in conformance with Torah law when in fact it is not. This will ultimately bring about serious negative consequences- thus causing a desecration of G'd's Name.

The Gemara tells us that the basis for Tzadok and Baitus to reject the Oral Law and accept only the authenticity of the Written Law was because they had misunderstood one of the teachings of their rebbe. The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, "...Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward, but be like servants who serve their master not upon the condition of receiving a reward..." Tzadok and Baitus understood this to mean that when one serves G'd, he is not deserving of reward. This misunderstanding caused them to reject the tradition (Oral Law) that was communicated by the Rabbis, thus bringing about a desecration of G'd's Name that spanned many generations.

G'd's rebuke to Moshe in fact established a standard of clarity for a Sage who is responsible to communicate the Word of G'd. The Torah Sage must be sensitive to all aspects of his expression – that there should be no misunderstanding in what is meant to be communicated.