

WITNESSING HIS MAJESTY

A Fulcrum To Eternity

Original Painting By:
YORAM RAANAN

Weekly Torah Video Series: Parshas Yisro

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Emerging Empowered From the Abyss

1. Yisro heard many things resulting in his leaving Midian to become part of the Jewish People.
2. Midrash: The greatest of all the miracles was that G-d took the Jews out of Egypt.
3. The Jews left Egypt after the 10th plague; Egypt was decimated and reduced to rubble.
4. The Jews were driven out because Egyptians believed they were all dying.
5. This is similar to a prison's walls that are destroyed so prisoners are able to escape.
6. Gemarah: Pharaoh's 3 advisors: Bilaam, Yisro and Job.
7. When the bondage was suggested by Bilaam, Yisro fled in protest.
8. Yisro understood the spiritual impurities of Egypt.
9. The Jews became pagans there, falling to 49th level of spiritual impurity.
10. To purge & detoxify from this extreme impurity is an impossibility.
11. Gemarah: Even if a devout pagan repents, G-d will cause him to die; ultimately he will return to pagan ways.
12. G-d wants him to die in a repentant state.
13. When Yisro heard the Jews were taken out of Egypt as a spiritual people to receive the Torah he was astounded.
14. This miracle was truly greater than the others.

A Critical Expose Yields a Sophisticated Judicial System

1. One of Yisro's 7 names: "Yeser" – To Add.
2. Yisro suggested a hierarchy within the infrastructure of the judicial system.
3. Yisro observed Moshe adjudicating great numbers of claims and disputes from morning until evening.
4. Yisro had 2 critical points regarding this manner of adjudication.
5. It is not befitting the Jewish People for Moshe to sit and the prospective defendants stand and wait their turn.
6. And the enormous physical burden will cause Moshe to wither.
7. He suggested a hierarchy of courts; only the most difficult questions will be brought to Moshe.
8. 36 days prior to Moshe's passing he recounts the events & behavior of the past 40 years.
9. He said to Jews: "When the judicial system was put into place you embraced it wholeheartedly."
10. Would it not have been better to learn from one who studied Torah in a physically deprived state?
11. Moshe spent 40 days and nights studying Torah without bread or water.
12. What Yisro saw as a belittlement of their honor was needed to elevate & expose them to an unequalled dimension of holiness.
13. G-d endorsed Yisro's plan because ultimately Moshe would have withered.

The Pre-Qualification To Be Worthy

1. The Jews came to Sinai on the 1st of the 3rd month.
2. Torah: "On THIS Day" rather than "That" day; When studying Torah, experience it as new & vibrant.
3. Wherever this principle is alluded to was post Sinai; here it is prior to Sinai.
4. If this is so (the Torah has not yet been given), what does one experience as if it is "new"?
5. Torah: "They travelled from Refidim and came to Sinai desert."
6. Midrash: Torah juxtaposes Refidim to Sinai– As at Sinai they were in a repentant state, so too when leaving Refidim.
7. Gemara: R'Chiyah chose 5 students to teach– each one, 1 of the Books of Moses.
8. He planted flax to make nets to trap deer for their hides to make parchment.
9. He recorded the written law on the parchment he made.
10. Why didn't he purchase the parchment from the market?
11. When studying or teaching Torah it must be done in the purest context from its inception.
12. Even prior to the giving of the Torah on the 1st of the month, one had to anticipate the special moment and so experience the study of Torah.
13. One must be worthy at the location; and one must be a repentant.

Weekly Torah Commentaries Series: Parshas Yisro



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Torah, the Spiritual Sustenance of the Jewish People

The Torah states prior to the attack of Amalek, **“The entire assembly of the Children of Israel journeyed. They encamped in Rephidim and there was no water for the people to drink. The people contended with Moshe and they said, Give us water that we may drink! Moshe said to them, why do you contend with me? Why do you test G-d?”**

G-d had provided the Jewish people with the Manna and the quail because they needed sustenance; however, in Rephidim, although they needed water to survive, it was not to be found. If G-d provided the Jewish people with their other needs, why did He not provide them with water in Rephidim, which is essential for life?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh cites the Gemara in Bechoros, which explains why the location in which the Jewish people camped is referred to as Rephidim. It is because the Jewish people were lax in their study of Torah (rafu yadeihem min haTorah.) Because the Jewish people were not sufficiently engaged in the study of Torah, Amalek attacked them in their location.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues and explains that since the Jewish people were not sufficiently engaged in the study of Torah, which is compared to water, G-d did not provide them with water in Rephidim, measure for measure. Since they were not engaged in the spiritual water (Torah), which is necessary to sustain the spiritual life of every Jew, G-d withheld the physical water which is necessary to maintain physical life.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that G-d created the nighttime period so that the Jew will have time to dedicate himself to Torah study. During the daytime period, because one is engaged in earning a livelihood, he is not able to engage in Torah study. However, in the nighttime period, when one is no longer occupied with his physical labors, one can engage in Torah study without distraction.

The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that the winter rains cause the produce and crops to grow in the spring and summer. During the winter months, when the nights are longer, one has more time available to study Torah, which is compared to water. We thus see the correlation between the spiritual (water) and the physical (water). Just as the winter season is a time of physical rain so too is it a time to engage in Torah study, which is spiritual water.

The Torah tells us that the physical rain is a direct outgrowth of one's Torah study. In the Portion of Bechukosai it states, “If you will be dedicated to My Torah, the rains will come in their time, and the earth will give forth its bounty.” Similarly, G-d withheld water from the Jewish people in Rephidim because they did not sufficiently engage in Torah study.

Another consequence of the insufficient engagement of Torah study is that it precipitated the attack of Amalek. In order to combat Amalek, Moshe chose Yehoshuah Bin Nun to lead the Jewish people in battle. Why did he choose Yehoshuah?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that Moshe recognized the source of the failure, which led to the attack of Amalek. He understood that the Jewish people were not sufficiently engaged in the battle of Torah, and therefore they were subject to the physical battle with Amalek.

Moshe understood that the one who was most qualified to lead the battle was Yehoshuah Bin Nun because he did not leave the tent of Moshe for a moment. He was continuously engaged in Torah study, as it is indicated that he never disengaged from his teacher Moshe, regarding the study of Torah.

Since the Jewish people failed in the area of Torah study, which brought about the attack of Amalek, Yehoshuah, because of his intense involvement in Torah was the one most qualified to defeat Amalek.

The Torah states regarding the blessing that Yitzchak our Patriarch gave to his son Yaakov, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov; the hands are the hands of Esav." The Midrash in Eichah explains that what Yitzchak had actually said to Yaakov was that as long as the Jewish people utilize their voice as Yaakov had done for Torah study and prayer, they will be protected.

Yaakov is known as the Patriarch who represents Torah study as it states, "He was the perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah)." However, if the Jewish people do not properly utilize their voice for Torah study and prayer, then the hands will be the hands of Esav; the Jewish people will fall prey to the dominion of Esav.

Since the Amalekites are the descendants of Esav, when the Jewish people are not sufficiently engaged in Torah study, they will be vulnerable to their attack. Moshe understood that because Yehoshuah was truly an embodiment of the "Voice of Yaakov", he was thus chosen to lead the Jewish people in battle against Amalek.

The Spiritualization of the Jew

The Torah states that after the Jewish people sang the song of the Sea, they came to Marah. **"They came to Marah, but they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter; therefore they named it Marah. The people complained to Moshe, 'What shall we drink?'... G-d showed him a tree and he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There (in Marah) G-d established for (the nation) a Decree and an Ordinance, and there He tested them."**

Rashi cites Chazal, "Marah was the first location in which the Jewish people were given a number of portions of the Torah for them to engage in. What were the portions that they were given? The laws of Shabbos, the laws pertaining to the Red Heifer (Parah Adumah), and laws pertaining to monetary issues (Dinim)."

Before the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the classification of the Jewish people was "Noahides." They were not yet bound by the laws of the Torah. G-d gave them these three areas of law in Marah, not so that they should be obligated to observe them, but rather, only for them to engage in their study.

Why was this important at this particular moment? Chofetz Chaim, in the introduction to his work Chofetz Chaim, cites Reb Chaim Vital who explains that just as there are 248 parts to the human body, there are 248 spiritual components that comprise the Jewish soul.

The Midrash tells us that the 248 (RAMACH) positive commandments in the Torah correspond to the 248 parts of the human body. Identically, the positive commandments correspond to the various components of

the soul. Each positive commandment corresponds to a particular part of the Jewish soul. For example, when a Jew dons tefillin, it provides spiritual nourishment to that corresponding component of his soul.

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin states, "Great is the study of Torah because it brings one to action (to fulfill the mitzvos)." When one engages in Torah study, it enables him to actualize the fulfillment of mitzvos.

Although the performance of each positive commandment provides spiritual nourishment for a particular part of the soul and sanctifies it, the study of Torah, which initiates the performance of that mitzvah, is greater than the actualization of the mitzvah itself. As it states, "The study of Torah is the equivalent of all of the mitzvos combined (talmud Torah keneged kulom)."

While the performance of a mitzvah only affects one aspect of the soul, which corresponds to that mitzvah, when one studies Torah, it sanctifies and nourishes the entire soul. Since the study of Torah is the equivalent of performing all of the mitzvos, by engaging in the study of the mitzvos that were given to them at Marah, the Jewish people were able to spiritualize themselves through their study.

By elevating and sanctifying the entire soul through the study of Torah, the Jewish people would be able to have a full capacity to internalize and process holiness. This was a prerequisite for the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. The Jewish people needed to be sanctified in order to be qualified to fully internalize the Sinai experience and what was transmitted to them there.

Yisro's Unique Characteristic of Truth

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."**

There is an argument in the Gemara in Tractate Zvachim between Reb Yochanon and Reish Lakish as to what actually drew Yisro into the desert to join the Jewish people. One opinion is that it was hearing about the splitting of the Sea, and the other opinion is that he heard about the battle of Amalek.

Rashi, however, cites both opinions mentioned in the Gemara as one. "What did Yisro hear that caused him to abandon all of his glory and prominence to join the Jewish people in the desert? The splitting of the Sea and the battle against the Amalekites."

Upon hearing these two events, Yisro was moved and affected to such a degree that he chose to abandon his life's accomplishments to become part of the Jewish people. It is understandable that after hearing about the splitting of the Sea, which was greatest revelation of G-d's Presence that had taken place since the beginning of Creation, Yisro would be inspired to join the Jewish people in the desert. However, why did the battle against Amalek affect Yisro to the point that he was willing to become part of the Jewish people?

The battle of the Amalekites was due to the spiritual failing of the Jewish people, which caused them to be vulnerable to be attacked by a wandering band of people. What did Yisro see in this event that would motivate him to abandon his position of glory in Midian to join the Jewish people in the desert?

Chazal tell us that Yisro had worshipped every deity in existence. He was proficient in every form of idol worship and its theology. After investigating and studying every form of worship, Yisro concluded that the only truth is monotheism. There is only One Supreme Being. Yisro

refuted the basis to believe that there are independent powers that dictate existence.

Yisro heard about the splitting of the Sea and the dimension of G-d's revelation. He also heard how the Jewish people had declared their belief and faith in G-d and Moshe His servant as the Torah states, **"and they had faith in G-d and Moshe His servant."**

Ramban writes that the only other event, other than Sinai, that the Jewish people had reached such a unique level of faith was at the spitting of the Sea, which preceded the Sinai event.

Ksav Sofer (son of Chasam Sofer) explains Rashi who links both opinions cited in the Gemara regarding what Yisro had heard. He explains that Yisro was taken aback when he had heard that after the splitting of the Sea, when the Jewish people had achieved such an advanced level of belief in G-d, that they were attacked by Amalek. They were attacked by Amalek because they had asked the question when they were in need of water in the desert, **"Is G-d in our midst?"**

How was it possible for them to express themselves in such a manner after witnessing G-d's Presence at the splitting of the Sea in such a revealed and palpable manner?

Yisro understood from what he had witnessed regarding the Jewish people that although he had refuted every position of idolatry and come to the conclusion that monotheism is the only truth, he realized that he was not secure in his monotheistic beliefs unless he was in a supportive spiritual environment that would support and safeguard those beliefs. He understood that despite all that the Jewish people had witnessed at the Sea, they were still vulnerable to a regression in belief and faith, which precipitated the attack of Amalek. Thus, Yisro understood his own vulnerability to spiritual regression. He therefore chose to abandon Midian and join the Jewish people in the desert, regardless of the cost factor.

The Torah tells us that Yisro came to join the Jewish people in the desert. Although he had all of the glory of the world in Midian, he left it to go into a desolate location to hear the words of Torah. What does this reveal about Yisro?

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us prior to the bondage, Pharaoh had three advisors in his court: Yisro, Bilaam, and Iyov. When Bilaam had suggested enslaving the Jewish people and imposing bondage upon them, Iyov remained silent. However, Yisro fled to Midian as a sign of protest. He could not tolerate the injustice that was going to be perpetrated upon an innocent people, especially after all that Yosef had done for Egypt as its Viceroy.

By fleeing Egypt, it was an indication that Yisro was willing to sacrifice for the sake of truth. It is because he fled Egypt due to his characteristic of truth that he merited to come upon the ultimate truth of G-d. He was the only human being in the world who was able to process and appreciate what had happened to the Jewish people at the splitting of the Sea and the battle of Amalek that followed.

Although the entire world had heard what Yisro had heard, he was the only individual to be moved to join the Jewish people in the desert. It is also because of his characteristic of truth that he merited to have Moshe to be his son in law, who is the ultimate man of truth as the transmitter of the Torah.

Straightness, an Inherited Trait from the Patriarchs

The Torah states, **"In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt..."** Chazal tell us that G-d gave the Jewish people the Torah at Sinai in the third month (the month of Sivan) after they had left Egypt.

The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, **"G-d had hidden away for the straight (yesharim toshiya - something of a powerful nature); it will perfect those who walk with completeness."**

Reb Yonason said in the name of Reb Yosi HaGlili that 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 (straight). It is because of this that the Jewish people received the Torah three months after leaving Egypt.

One who is considered to be straight (yashar) is an individual who maintains his objectivity in all situations and does not allow his personal conflict of interest to interfere with his service of G-d.

The Gemara in Tractate Yevamos tells us that there are characteristics that are unique to the Jewish people. The Jewish people possess the characteristics of mercy, shame (conscience), and the propensity to do acts of kindness (gemilas chasodim). These characteristics are innate in every Jew because they are part of the spiritual gene pool that was inherited from the holy Patriarchs.

Where do we find that the Jewish people possessed the characteristic of yesharim (straight) which was a pre-requisite to receive the Torah? The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah cites a verse from the Book of Yehoshuah that refers to the Book of Bereishis as Sefer Ha Yashar (The Book of the Straight Ones).

The Gemara explains that this is because the Book of Bereishis is primarily devoted to recounting the lives and deeds of the Holy Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov who were yesharim (straight). We see that the Holy Patriarchs possessed the innate ability to not allow their personal conflicts of interest to interfere with their service of G-d. Therefore, the Jewish people, as the spiritual descendants of the Patriarchs inherited the characteristic of yashar.

King David writes in Psalms, "The dictates of G-d are straight; they bring joy to the heart." The Torah itself is straight; therefore, if one is corrupted in his heart, he will have no relevance to the Torah.

If a non-Jew studies Torah, in addition to it being prohibited, it will not bring joy to his heart because he has no commonality with the Torah. It is only when one who has a commonality with it, that it will bring joy to the heart.

Because the Jew inherited the characteristic of yashar from the Holy Patriarchs, he has relevance and a commonality with the Torah itself. Thus the Jew will experience joy in his heart when he engages in its study because his essence has relevance to the Torah. This is the reason one is not permitted to engage in the study of Torah when he is in a state of mourning.

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. However, after he chose to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, he corrupted himself and the world. He became convoluted and thus forfeited his characteristic of yashar.

Since mankind descends from Adam, it has no relevance to the characteristic of yashar. Therefore, mankind has no relevance to the Torah, which itself is yashar because there is no commonality with it.

Since the Holy Patriarchs possessed the characteristic of yashar, they reinstated the relevance to the Torah that had been forfeited by Adam. Therefore, unlike the nations of the world who descend from Adam who forfeited the characteristic of yashar, the Jewish people descend from the Patriarchs who reinstated this characteristic. Thus, they were the only ones qualified to receive the Torah.

Why Yisro was Able to Appreciate G-d

The Torah tells us that after Moshe had shared with Yisro, his father in law, every aspect of the miracles that the Jewish people had experienced in Egypt and the splitting of the Sea, Yisro responded, **“Baruch Hashem! Blessed is Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt.”**

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that although Moshe and the Jewish people were the direct beneficiaries of the revealed miracles of the exodus, they did not say “Baruch Hashem” as Yisro did.

The Gemara states, “We learned in the name of Rav Papius, It is something unbecoming (and a blemish on their record) that Moshe and the 600,000 Jewish males above the age of 20 who left Egypt did not say Baruch (Blessed Hashem) while Yisro said Baruch.”

After witnessing the splitting of the Sea, the Jewish people acknowledged G-d by declaring, **“This is my G-d and I will exalt Him...”** Chazal tell us that G-d’s presence was so palpable that the lowly maidservant was privy to a level of revelation that even the prophet Yechezkel was not.

In the song of the Sea, which was sung by Moshe and the Jewish people after the splitting of the sea, they articulated, acknowledged, and extolled every aspect of what they had witnessed.

If they had articulated in such detail all the good that G-d had done for them, why is it a claim against the Jewish people that they did not say “Baruch Hashem”? Seemingly, acknowledging G-d in such a level of detail that they had done should be considered the equivalent of declaring Baruch Hashem.

Although the Jewish people articulated in detail every aspect of the miracles of which they were beneficiaries, they did not have a sufficient level of appreciation for what G-d had done for them to say “Baruch Hashem”. It is only when one has a sense of indebtedness for being the beneficiary of something, that one says words of thanks.

Why did the Jewish people not have that sense of indebtedness that Yisro had, which caused him to say “Baruch Hashem”? After being the beneficiaries of the greatest revealed miracles that had taken place in existence, it was truly unbecoming for the Jewish people not to thank G-d as Yisro had done.

The Torah tells us that after saying Baruch Hashem, Yisro continues, **“Now I know that Hashem is the greatest of all the gods.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Yisro said, “I have always recognized G-d, but now I know that He is greater than all other deities.”

From this we learn that there was no deity that Yisro had not worshipped. Yisro, however, came to the realization through his understanding that all other gods were false. Because Yisro had delved in and experienced every form of idol worship, he was able to appreciate the truth when he came upon it.

When he had heard from Moshe about all that the Jewish people had experienced, it confirmed to the core of his being that what he had come upon through his understanding was true. As a result, Yisro experienced joy and a sense of thanks that caused him to say “Baruch Hashem” since he recognized the difference between the false gods that he had rejected and the Omnipotent One.

The Jewish people, on the other hand, did not engage in all of the forms of idolatry like Yisro had. They descended from the Holy Patriarchs, and although they were involved in the idol worship in Egypt, their essence was always attached to the truth of G-d’s presence. Unlike their brethren, Moshe and the entire tribe of Levy never worshipped idolatry or had relevance to it in Egypt. They thus only experienced and internalized the truth of G-d. Therefore, when they were exposed to truth through the revealed miracles, although it was a more advanced level of understanding of truth, it was different than what Yisro had experienced.

Having a more advanced level of experience of truth is not as powerful as experiencing truth for the first time after intellectually understanding its existence. Thus, the Jewish people were not as moved and impacted as Yisro was by the revealed miracles. Despite this, it was inappropriate for the Jewish people not to have said “Baruch Hashem”.



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