

WITNESSING HIS MAJESTY

A Fulcrum To Eternity

Original Painting By:
YORAM RAANAN

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Yisro

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Weely Video: Extrication & Transition

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Rejoicing For The Victim & Not The Glory

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Oriented To Absorb & Embrace Truth At All Costs

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The Pre-Qualification To Be Worthy

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1. The Jews came to Sinai on the first day of the third month.
2. Torah: "On THIS day" rather than "THAT" day; When studying Torah, experience it as new and 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, one of the Books of Moses.
8. He planted flax to make nets in order to trap deer and use their hides to make parchment.
9. R' Chiyah then recorded the written law on the parchment he made.
10. Why didn't R' Chiyah just 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 first 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 repentant.

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Emerging Empowered From the Abyss

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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 tenth plague; Egypt was decimated and reduced to rubble.
4. The Jews were driven out because the 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. Gemara: Pharaoh's 3 advisors: Bilaam, Yisro & 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 the 49th level of spiritual impurity.
10. To purge and detoxify from this extreme impurity is an impossibility.
11. Gemara: 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

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1. One of Yisro's seven 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 two 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 and behavior of the past 40 years.
9. He said to the 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 forty days and nights studying Torah without bread or water.
12. What Yisro saw as a belittlement of their honor was needed to elevate and expose them to an unequalled dimension of holiness.
13. G-d endorsed Yisro's plan because ultimately Moshe would have withered.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Yisro



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Yisro's Relevance to Truth

Torah: “Yisro, the Priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d said to Moshe and to Israel...”

Rashi citing Chazal: “What did Yisro hear that caused him to abandon all of his glory to join the Jewish people in the desert? The splitting of the Sea and the battle against the Amalekites.” Upon hearing these events, Yisro was affected to the degree that he chose to abandon his life’s accomplishments to become part of the Jewish people. Although the entire world was aware of the miracle of the splitting of the Sea, as Chazal tell us that every body of water in the world split (including the water in a vessel) at the time that the Sea had parted, only Yisro was drawn to become part of the Jewish people. What unique characteristic did Yisro possess that allowed him to have such a degree of clarity that no one else had?

Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin: Pharaoh initially had three advisors in his court – Yisro, Bilaam, and Eyov. When Bilaam had suggested to enslave the Jewish people and impose bondage upon them, Eyov remained silent, however, Yisro fled to Midian as a sign of protest. He could not tolerate this level of injustice that was going to be perpetrated, especially after all that Yosef had done for Egypt as its Viceroy. Because he possessed the characteristic of truth, Yisro could not tolerate the injustice that was about to be brought upon the Jewish people.

Torah: “The priest of Midian (Yisro) had seven daughters; they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father’s sheep. The shepherds came and drove them away. Moshe got up and saved them and watered their sheep. They came to Reuel (Yisro) their father. He said, “How could you come so quickly today?” They replied, “An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds, and he even drew water for

us and watered the sheep.” He said to his daughters, “Then where is he? Why did you leave the man? Summon him and let him eat bread!”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: When *Yisro* said, “offer him bread” he was alluding to the fact that *Moshe* should be considered as a potential husband for one of his daughters. How was *Yisro* able to sense and evaluate *Moshe* to be unique and exceptional person? *Yisro* the sheik of *Midian*, was not a person of ordinary ability. He was an individual who was astute and had a profound ability to make an accurate evaluation. *Yisro*, being initially one of the advisers to Pharaoh, who was the monarch of the most advanced civilization in the world, is an indication of his special capacity.

Maharal of Prague z’tl: Although *Moshe* had put his life in jeopardy when he rescued *Yisro*’s daughters from their attackers, he did not seek any remuneration or acknowledgement for his assistance. *Moshe*’s behavior was something that was out of the ordinary. Under normal circumstances, a person who offered this degree of accommodation would have returned together with those who he had assisted, so that he would be compensated or minimally be acknowledged for what he had done for them.

Yisro, recognizing the unparalleled humility of this unknown rescuer caused him to ask his daughters, “why did you not bring him back? Because of his uniqueness, he should be considered to be a potential husband for one of you.” *Yisro* was able to recognize that *Moshe* was special and unique because he himself was special. Since *Yisro* possessed the characteristic of truth, he was able to appreciate the rescuer as a person who did things with a just purpose.

Chazal: *Yisro* had worshiped every deity in existence and ultimately concluded that they were all false and there was only One G-d. Despite the ridicule of his community, *Yisro* remained firm in his belief. He was not willing to compromise on his characteristic of truth for the sake of acceptance. Through the process of searching for truth, he had honed and perfected his capacity for truth. Thus, when he had heard of the events of the splitting of the sea and the war against the Amalekites, he recognized G-d as the Omnipotent Being. When he had heard what had been done to *Amalek*, who was truly evil, he chose to become part of the Jewish people regardless of the degree of sacrifice.

Open Our Hearts to Your Love

Torah: Before the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai, “*Hashem* called him (*Moshe*) from the mountain, saying, ‘So shall you say to the House of *Yaakov* and relate to the Children of Israel, ‘You have seen what I did in Egypt, and that I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me. And now, hearken well to Me and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure...You shall be to Me a kingdom of *Kohanim* and a holy nation.’”

Rashi: The words, “You have seen...” mean, “It is not through tradition. Nor is it through words that I am relating this to you. It is not something that was communicated to you through witnesses, but rather, you saw for yourselves what I have done to the Egyptians. How many sins did they transgress and were culpable even before they engaged with you! However, I only brought retribution upon them when they engaged with you.” *Rashi*’s words regarding of the verse “You have seen...” is similar to what *Rambam* writes in *The Fundamentals of Torah*.

Rambam: The Sinai experience was something that was not communicated to the Jewish people as part of a tradition. Nor was it related to them by a third party (such as *Moshe*), but rather every Jew witnessed how G-d openly communicated to *Moshe* saying, “Tell them this and that...” Although their words are similar, there is a fundamental difference between what the Jewish people had witnessed at Sinai and what they had seen in Egypt. At Sinai they experienced the receiving of the *Torah* as a prophecy in a wake state, which cannot be attributed to anything but G-d Himself, while what they had seen in Egypt were revealed miracles that were witnessed by them. These miracles could be interpreted as coming about through witchcraft.

G-d wanted to give the Jewish people an understanding of their special relationship with Him. He did so by punishing the Egyptians only after they had enslaved the Jewish people, despite their previous culpability. It was important for the Jewish people to appreciate and understand His special love for them so that they could commit themselves to the covenant that was going to be presented to them at Sinai. If the Jewish people adhere to the Will of G-d then they will be qualified to be “...a kingdom of *Kohanim* and a holy nation.”

We see from the *Torah* that the Jewish people's understanding of G-d's love for them was a precursor to for them to be taken as His people. If G-d only communicated to them that they will be "a kingdom of *Kohanim* and a holy nation" it would not have been sufficient to elicit their total dedication to Him. They needed to have a capacity to appreciate the value of the opportunity at hand. G-d therefore instructed *Moshe* to first tell the Jewish people how He punished Egypt on their behalf and how they were transported on the wings of eagles. It was only after the Jewish people would internalize the unique level of love that G-d has for them, were they be able to commit themselves sufficiently to His Will.

The dimension of revelation that the Jewish people witnessed at the time of the splitting of the Sea was an expression of G-d's Kingship as the Supreme Being who Reigns over all existence. Regardless of the awesomeness of the miracles that the Jewish people witnessed in Egypt, they were not privy to His Majesty of Kingship. It was because G-d had shown them His Kingship that they declared, "This is my G-d'.... *Hashem* shall reign for all eternity" No prophet had ever witnessed (other than *Moshe*) the Kingship of G-d.

Chazal: "There is no king without subjects." When the Jewish people saw the Kingship of G-d they simultaneously understood and appreciated His concern and love for them. Without the Jewish people, the King cannot fully reign because he would have no subjects. It is only the Jewish people who declare themselves as G-d's subjects and acknowledge Him as their King.

Vilna Gaon z'tl: There is a difference between a king and a ruler. A king understands and appreciates that his viability as king is dependent upon having dedicated subjects. Thus, he is concerned for their welfare and responds to their needs. In contrast, a ruler rules and dictates regardless of the physical condition of the masses. Thus, the revelation of G-d's Kingship at the Sea demonstrated His love and concern for them. Because they were able to internalize G-d's love, they were able to make the ultimate commitment to adhere to His Will at Sinai.

We say in the blessing that precedes the *Shema*, "With abundant love have You loved us *Hashem*, our G-d, with exceeding great pity have you pitied us....Blessed are you...Who chooses His people Israel with love."

We then recite the *Shema* which is the unconditional acceptance of the yoke of heaven. We pledge to dedicate every aspect of our life to G-d and His service. It is a level of commitment that is all encompassing and profound. It is only because we are able to understand and internalize the unparalleled level of love that G-d has for us, that we can dedicate ourselves completely to His Will.

The Unlimited Capacity of the Jew

Torah: "Yisro, the Priest of Midian...heard..."

Midrash citing a verse from the Song of Songs: "'The fragrance of Your oils are good...' What is the meaning of this? You (G-d) had given the fragrance of Your mitzvos to mankind. You had given *Adam* one *mitzvah* (not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge). To *Noach* and his offspring, You gave them six *mitzvos*. However, we who came to Sinai, You showered upon us *mitzvos* as something being poured out of a barrel. You poured upon us the fragrant oil of Your Name."

At Sinai, G-d saturated the Jewish people with 613 mitzvos as one who pours out oil from a barrel that does not have a narrow spout but rather the oil comes forth from the barrel like a deluge. Thus, it saturated the Jewish people with *mitzvos*. This is the fragrance of all the good oils of G-d.

We say in the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer) of *Yom Tov*, "You have chosen us from all the peoples; You loved us and found favor in us; You exalted us above all the tongues, and You sanctified us with Your *mitzvos*..." G-d sanctified the Jewish people with the *mitzvos* of the *Torah* as one pours fragrant oil from a barrel.

Zohar: "The Jewish people, the *Torah*, and G-d are One." The *Torah* is the ultimate illuminator.

King Solomon in Proverbs: "*Neir mitzvah v'Torah ohr* (the *mitzvah* is fuel and the *Torah* is the illuminator.)" The *Torah* is G-d's wisdom that has the capacity to illuminate all existence. G-d is infinite with no limitations. The only thing in existence that reflects G-d's characteristic of being unlimited is the *Torah* itself.

Eyov: "The *Torah* is longer than the earth and wider than the sea..." The *Zohar* is stating that just as G-d is unlimited, so is His *Torah*, which is His wisdom. It is something that cannot be quantified. The Jewish

people who are the recipients of the *Torah* are also unlimited. The soul of the Jew has an unlimited capacity because of its relevance to G-d and the *Torah*. The Jew can only assume the G-dly profile of being unlimited through the study of *Torah* and the observance of its mitzvos.

Torah: "...You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem your G-d." Meaning, G-d wants the Jewish people to assume His profile of holiness because only in that context can they cleave to Him. By establishing the commonality of holiness through the study of *Torah* and the performance of *mitzvos*, the Jew can cleave to G-d, Who is infinite.

We see from the *Midrash* that at Sinai, the Jewish people were saturated with *mitzvos* as one pours fragrant oil from a wide-mouthed barrel. We say in the third blessing of the *Amidah*, "You are holy and Your Name is holy, and the holy ones praise You every day..." Some commentators explain that "the holy ones" refers to the Jewish people and the angels. True praise only comes from a source that has relevance and reflects the one who is being praised. Since the Jewish people's classification is holy, they are the most qualified to praise G-d.

When *Yisro* heard about the miracles that G-d performed on behalf of the Jewish people, he understood that they were journeying to become part of the Infinite G-d through the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai. He abandoned the glory he had achieved in *Midian*, to become part of the Jewish people so that he too should reflect the characteristic of "unlimited."

G-d's Unending Love for His Children

Torah: "*Yisro*, the Priest of *Midian*...heard..."

Rashi citing the *Gemara*: "What did *Yisro* hear? He heard about the splitting of the Sea and the battle with *Amalek*." Other than the Sinai event, the greatest revelation of G-d's Presence was at the splitting of the Sea. If this is the case, it is understood why *Yisro* would be moved by an event of such magnitude. However, what was so compelling about the battle with *Amalek* that caused him to abandon his glory in *Midian* to join the Jewish people in the desert?

Midrash: "What did *Yisro* hear? He heard about the defeat/downfall of *Amalek*." In the context in which

Rashi cites *Chazal*, he explains, "He had heard about the battle with *Amalek*." It is unclear from this if *Yisro* had heard about the battle or about the victory of the Jewish people. What was so compelling about hearing that the Jewish people had defeated *Amalek*? One could say that since *Amalek* was the personification of evil, the Jewish people represent good in existence were able to defeat evil. As G-d had said, "My Throne is not complete until the *Amalekites* are obliterated from under the heavens." They are the antithesis to G-d's Presence. Since the Jewish people were able to defeat the *Amalekites*, who are the enemies of G-d, *Yisro* was compelled to join them in the desert.

Torah: "*Moshe* told his father in law everything that *Hashem* had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for Israel's sake— all the travail that had befallen them on the way— and that *Hashem* had rescued them."

Rashi: "The travail refers to the difficulties that came upon them at the Sea and *Amalek*..." What was the travail at the Sea? Before the Sea split they were being pursued by Pharaoh and his army. What was the travail of *Amalek*? Seemingly, when they were attacked by *Amalek* there was a question if they would be victorious or not? Despite all of the travails, G-d rescued the Jewish people.

Yisro understood that the success of the Jewish people was not determined by their physical mite, but rather, they needed to have a special merit to be worthy of Divine Assistance. However, seemingly, since they were idolaters in Egypt they were not worthy of Divine Assistance. The plagues that came upon Egypt, which were revealed miracles could be understood as a punishment of the Egyptians who had defied G-d.

The splitting of the Sea on the other hand was undeniably for the sake of the Jewish people. Although they were idolaters, to no less a degree than the Egyptians, G-d nevertheless split the Sea for them and rescued them from Pharaoh and his army. G-d did this because they are His beloved children, the descendants of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*. Despite the fact that they had complained and expressed themselves in a manner that indicated that they lacked faith, G-d nevertheless performed miracles on their behalf. This open demonstration of love and concern impacted upon *Yisro*.

After the splitting of the Sea, although Jewish people had experienced untold revealed miracles and revelation of His Presence, they complained against G-d and said in *Rephidim*, “Is G-d in our midst or not?” In *Rephidim* they also were lax in their *Torah* study and *mitzvos*. One would think that for demonstrating such a lack of faith and ingratitude, despite all that G-d had done for them, G-d would have let them be destroyed by *Amalek*.

G-d nevertheless rescued the Jewish people and gave them the ability to be victorious because of their special relationship with Him. Regardless of their behavior, He treats them as His children, even before Sinai. *Yisro* had heard about the level of mercy that G-d had demonstrated towards His people even before they received the *Torah*. This special relationship between G-d and the Jewish people caused him to abandon his life’s accomplishments to join the Jewish people in the desert.

The Vulnerability of the Jewish People to Amalek (from Beshalach)

Torah: “Because of the contention of the Children of Israel and because their test of *Hashem*, saying, ‘Is *Hashem* among us or not?’ *Amalek* came and battled Israel in *Rephidim*...”

Rashi cites *Midrash*: “Why is the attack of *Amalek* juxtaposed to the portion of the *Torah* before it? G-d says to the Jewish people, ‘Although I am always amongst you and I am ready to attend to all your needs, you ask the question, ‘Is G-d in our midst?’ I swear on your lives that a dog will come to bite you and you will call out to Me. Then you will know where I am.”

Midrash: “To what is this analogous? A child was riding on the shoulders of his father. Every time the child saw something that he desired he said to his father, ‘take it for me.’ His father fulfilled his request once, twice, and three times. The child, while sitting on his father’s shoulders was approached by another person who asked him, ‘Where is your father?’ The child answered, ‘I do not know where he is.’

“When his father heard this, he said to his son, ‘You are sitting on my shoulders and I have given you everything that you requested- and you say I do not know where my father is?’ The father threw his child to the ground and was subsequently bitten by a dog.”

Since the child was no longer attached to the father (under his protection), he became vulnerable, and was thus bitten by the dog.

Because the Jewish people asked, “Is G-d among us or not?” despite the fact that G-d had taken them out of Egypt with revealed miracles and continuously provided them with all of their needs, *Amalek* attacked them. Because the Amalekites attacked the Jewish people after they left Egypt, there is a positive commandment to obliterate their memory from existence.

Torah: G-d said, “My Throne is not complete until the Amalekites are obliterated from under the heavens.” Why is the attack of the Amalekites unforgivable? *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who depict the Amalekites as “the fool who jumped into the scalding bath. Although he is scalded by the hot water, he nevertheless cools down the bath for others.”

After the Splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian armies for the sake of the Jewish people, the world stood in awe and fear of them. No nation would dare engage with G-d’s people after witnessing His retribution. Despite this, the Amalekites attacked the Jewish people without any concern for the consequences of their actions. They are likened to the fool who jumped into the scalding bath and is burned. Nevertheless, the consequence of that action diminished the aura of the Jewish people in the eyes of the world.

The Jewish people are G-d’s representation in existence because they are His children. It was by attacking the Jewish people, the Amalekites attempted to destroy G-d’s Presence in the world. They are responsible for bringing about the most profound desecration of G-d’s Name ever to be perpetrated. They attacked the Jewish people only because of they could not tolerate His Presence. They therefore must be obliterated.

It is important to note, that the Jewish people were only vulnerable to the attack of *Amalek* because of certain events that had taken place previously. We see from *Chazal* that it was only because they Jewish people had questioned, “Is G-d in our midst or not?” that *Amalek* was able to attack them.

Chazal: In *Rephidim*, the Jewish people were lax regarding G-d and their *Torah* study, thus warranting to be attacked by the Amalekites. The enemies of the

Jewish people are constantly waiting for the moment to attack them. It is only because Divine Protection that the Jewish people are spared.

If the Jewish people study *Torah* diligently, they will be protected. If they should fail in this area or demonstrate a lack of faith, G-d will withdraw His protection, causing them to be vulnerable to attack. The perpetrators of the desecration of G-d's name were the Amalekites; however, it was the spiritual deficiency of the Jewish people that precipitated that desecration.

The obligation to obliterate *Amalek* is not because they attacked a helpless people, but rather it was because they were opposed to what the Jewish people represent. Through the Jewish people, G-d established His Presence in existence. *Amalek* is the antithesis of holiness and goodness. They thus attempted to minimize, uproot, and even obliterate His Presence.

King Solomon in Proverbs: "A deprecator (letz) you should smite, but a fool will become wise."

Midrash: "A deprecator you should smite" is referring to *Amalek* and "a fool will become wise" is referring to *Yisro* (the father in law of *Moshe*). The *Torah* tells us that after *Yisro* had heard all that G-d had done on behalf of the Jewish people, he chose to abandon his position of glory as the sheik of *Midian* to join them in the desert. Although the vulnerability of the Jewish people to *Amalek* was due to their own spiritual failing which caused them to forfeit Divine Protection; nevertheless, it was *Amalek's* hate and disdain for G-d that caused them to attack.



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