

פרשת יתרו

Parshas Yisro!

The Parsha of *Aseres HaDibros*!

Parshas Yisro is also the section that establishes the initial system of courts and judges that allowed Torah jurisprudence to function after the Torah was given¹.

However, our Parsha first begins with a lengthy description of Yisro's arrival at the encampment of Israel. It seems puzzling that all of that detail is vital for our eternal Torah knowledge. How are we to understand that ongoing narrative until we are introduced to the vital and basic Halachic information that the Torah shares with us subsequently?

When I read the initial teachings of our Parshas Yisro, regarding Yisro's arrival at *Machaneh Yisroel*, the encampment of Israel at Mt. Sinai², I am somewhat puzzled.

¹ The section of our Parsha that deals with the Torah court system is introduced by the following verse (Sh'mos Perek 18/Posuk 13):

וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה לְשַׁפֵּט אֶת הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה מִן הַבֹּקֶר עַד הָעָרֶב:
It was on the morrow and Moshe sat to judge the people and the people stood around Moshe from morning to evening.

Rashi writes:

וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת - מוצאי יום הכיפורים היה, כך שנינו בספרי, ומהו ממחרת, למחרת רדתו מן ההר.
It was on the morrow – this was the day following Yom HaKippurim. That is what we learn in Midrash Sifrei. What is 'the morrow'? It is the day after Moshe's descent from the mountain (Sinai).

That is, as Rashi continues, Moshe arrived at Machane Yisroel from Mt. Sinai on that first Yom HaKippurim with the second tablets of the *Aseres HaDibros*. Until that time, beginning with Rosh Chodesh Sivan, a number of months earlier, Moshe was involved with receiving the Torah, the *Eigel HaZahav*, bringing forgiveness for the people and the Second *Luchos*.

However, see Ramban and others who dispute this identification of 'the morrow' with the day following that first Yom HaKippurim.

² Whether or not Yisro arrived at Sinai prior to *Mattan Torah* or subsequently is a dispute among all the commentators throughout the generations.

The first Posuk of our Parsha reads (Sh'mos Perek 18/Posuk 1):

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה וְלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ כִּי הוֹצִיא ה' אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Yisro, the *Kohen* of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe heard all that G-d did for Moshe and for Israel His people - that Hashem took out Israel from Egypt.

All that the Posuk teaches explicitly is that Yisro's motivation to come to *Machaneh Yisroel* was the 'news' about the Exodus. Rashi expands on the reports that Yisro received.

We read:

וישמע יתרו - מה שמועה שמע ובא, קריעת ים סוף ומלחמת עמלק:

Yisro heard – What report did he hear that encouraged³ him to come? [He heard regarding] the splitting of the Red Sea and the war against Amalek⁴.

Perhaps Rashi understands that the Exodus about which Yisro heard and was motivated to leave his home and family included more than the events of the 15th day of Nissan, the day of the Exodus itself, and included the splitting of the Red Sea, which was the culmination of the Exodus⁵.

³ *Sifsei Chachamim* is the basis for this translation. He writes:

פירוש שבשבילה נתעורר לבא

This means- that because of the report he was aroused to wish to come to *Machaneh Yisroel*.

⁴ There are other opinions in this Midrash, and additional Midrashim, from which Rashi drew this commentary. Rashi's supra-commentators discuss this specific interpretation that Rashi adopted.

⁵ And thus, since the splitting of the Red Sea occurred on the seventh day from the Exodus (Rashi, Sh'mos Perek 14/Posuk5), that day became the Seventh Day of Pesach. Unlike *Sh'mini Atzeres* which has a status of a Yom Tov independent of Sukkos and does not require sitting in a Sukkah, taking Lulav and Esrog and does require its own *Birkas Shehecheyanu* (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim Siman 668/s'if 7) as well as having its own name, the Seventh Day of Pesach is not an independent Yom Tov, it does not have an independent name and the prohibition of *chometz* is as valid on the Seventh Day as it is on all the other days of Pesach. One does not make a *Shehecheyanu* on the Seventh Day of Pesach (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim Siman

However, it is not clear exactly what impression the war against Amalek made upon Yisro that would encourage him to join *Machaneh Yisroel*⁶.

Now we know that Yisro was considered to be a uniquely wise man. Later on in our Parsha, it was Yisro who suggested the judicial system in Israel that was adopted upon his recommendation.

Rashi explains that before he was given the name *Yisro* - יתרו, he was first given the name *Yeser* – יתר.

We read Rashi's commentary on that verse:

יתרו - שבע שמות נקראו לו...יתר, יתרו... יתר, על שם שיתר פרשה אחת בתורה (פסוק כא) ואתה תחזה. יתרו לכשנתגייר וקיים המצות הוסיפו לו אות אחת על שמו.

Yisro – Yisro was called by seven names...*Yeser* and *Yisro*.

He was called *Yeser* because he added a section to the Torah – You shall see the candidates for judges.

Yisro – when he converted and fulfilled the Mitzvos a letter (*vov*) was added to his name.

That is, even before he converted, Yisro's contribution to Torah was unique. And, rather than bestowing a completely new name upon him when he did convert, his earlier 'Jewish' name of *Yeser* was built upon and expanded to acknowledge his conversion.

Yeser was not discarded. Rather, the name *Yeser* served as a building block for the name by which he has been known throughout all generations.

Certainly, Yisro was an extraordinary person in the knowledge that he possessed and how he used that knowledge.

490/s'if 7). Recitation of that *B'racha* on that day would be a *B'racha L'vatala* – taking G-d's Name in vain!

⁶ We will deal with this question as we continue.

Yisro was also a courageous man as he left all that he had behind him and went out into the wilderness to a place unknown and to a people unknown.

His courage also reflected his beliefs for which he sacrificed greatly. Already in Parshas Sh'mos we had initial glimpses of Yisro's character.

We read there (Perek 2/P'sukim 16-20):

וּלְכַהֵן מִדְיָן שִׁבְעַת בָּנוֹת וַתִּבְאֲנָה וַתִּדְלֹגְנָה וַתִּמְלֹאנָה אֶת הַרְהָטִים לְהִשְׁקוֹת צֹאן אָבִיהֶן:
וַיָּבֹאוּ הָרְעִים וַיִּגְרְשׁוּם וַיִּקָּם מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹשֶׁעַן וַיִּשְׁקֵךְ אֶת צֹאנָם: וַתִּבְאֲנָה אֶל רְעוּאֵל אָבִיהֶן
וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִדּוֹעַ מִהֲרִתָּן בָּא הַיּוֹם: וַתֹּאמְרוּן אִישׁ מִצְרֵי הִצִּילֵנוּ מִיַּד הָרְעִים וְגַם דָּלָה דָּלָה
לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁקֵךְ אֶת הַצֹּאן: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל בְּנֹתָיו וְאִיוֹ לָמָּה זֶה עָזַבְתֶּן אֶת הָאִישׁ קְרָאֵן לוֹ וַיֹּאכֵל
לֶחֶם:

The Kohen of Midian had seven daughters and they came and drew from the well and they filled the troughs to water the sheep of their father. The shepherds came and drove them away; Moshe arose and saved them and he gave water to their sheep.

They came to Re'u'el their father and he said, 'Why were you so fast to come today?' They said, "An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds and he also drew much water and he watered the sheep." He said to his daughters, "and where is he? Why did you forsake the man? Call him and let him eat bread."

Rashi writes there:

וּלְכַהֵן מִדְיָן - רַב שְׁבֵהן וּפִירֵשׁ לוֹ מִעֲבוּדָה זָרָה וּנִידוּהוּ מֵאֲצִלָּם:

The Kohen of Midian – He was their religious leader and when Yisro stopped worshipping idols, they excommunicated him.

וַיִּגְרְשׁוּם - מִפְּנֵי הַנִּידוּי:

They drove them away – because of the excommunication.

Yisro was a man of principle. Once he decided that idolatry was incorrect, he disengaged from it and from his 'congregants'. He suffered because of his convictions but he did not waver.

Thus, since he was a discoverer, he came to the camp of Israel. He investigated and made his decision.

Yet, at the same time, it does not appear that he was totally decisive.

We read in our Parshas Yisro:

וַיְסַפֵּר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתְנֹו אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' לְפָרְעֹה וּלְמִצְרַיִם עַל אֹדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּצְלָם ה': וַיַּחֲדִי יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הִצִּילֹו מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְרוּךְ ה' אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פְּרַעֲהַ אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶת הָעָם מִתַּחַת יַד מִצְרַיִם: עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי גָדוֹל ה' מִכָּל הָאֱלֹהִים... לְקִיָּם כִּי בִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם: וַיִּקַּח יִתְרוֹ חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵהּ וַזְּבָחִים לָאֱלֹהִים... לְקִיָּם וַיְבֵא אֶהֱרֹן וְכָל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֶאֱכֹל לֶחֶם עִם חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה לְפָנָי הָאֱלֹהִים... לְקִיָּם:

Moshe told his father-in-law all that Hashem did to Par'o and to Egypt regarding Israel, all of the weariness that encountered them on the way and that Hashem saved them. Yisro was happy for all the good that Hashem did for Israel – that He saved the people from Egypt.

Yisro said, 'Blessed is Hashem Who saved you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Par'o – that He saved the people from under the hand of Egypt. Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the other gods because of the matter that the Egyptians plotted to do against Israel.'

Yisro, the father-in-law of Moshe, took burnt-offerings and [Sh'lomim⁷] offerings for G-d and Aharon and all of the elders of Israel came to eat bread with the father-in-law of Moshe, before G-d.

What did Yisro now learn that brought him to say עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי, 'now I know'⁸? Yisro was motivated based on what he heard – וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ – to join with Israel. He had already heard and had sufficient knowledge to make his courageous move. What new understanding did he receive?

Sifsei Chachamim synopsis the commentary of Mizrachi:

⁷ Rashi here.

⁸ The literal translation of עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי is 'now I *knew*'. Certainly such a phrase seems self-contradictory since 'now' means the present and 'I knew' means the past. Thus, some of the commentaries say it means 'now I know more that I knew before'.

However, we know that sometimes the Torah uses past and future tenses of verbs to refer to an ongoing process and thus עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי could mean something like 'I am learning new things'.

והרב אליהו מזרחי פירש מדלא אמר עתה ידעתי את ה' כי גדול וכו' שמע מינה שהכירו לשעבר אבל לא הכיר גודל פעולותיו על פעולות כל האלהות רק עכשיו אחר כל המעשים הללו:

The Mizrachi explains that since Yisro did *not* say 'now I know Hashem that is greater etc.', we understand that Yisro did know Hashem in the past. However, until his meeting with Moshe Rabbenu Yisro did not understand the superiority of G-d's actions over those of all the gods. [Yisro only understood it] now after all of these events [that Moshe told him].

Now, we are not surprised that Yisro learned something new from what Moshe Rabbenu had told him. It is reasonable to assume that there were many smaller events, parts of those greater events that Yisro would not have been able to know from the reports and 'news' of which he was aware.

That is, *quantitatively*, Yisro was lacking awareness of the scope of events that took place. For example, Yisro was likely to have heard of the ten plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea, however, it is just as likely that he did not know anything about the protection of the pillars of fire and cloud that protected Israel before their crossing of the Red Sea⁹.

⁹ We read in Parshas B'shalach (Perek 13/P'sukim 21-22):

וְהָיָה הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וְלַיְלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהַאֲרִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֵּת יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה:
לֹא יִמִּישׁ עַמּוּד הָעָנָן יוֹמָם וְעַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ לַיְלָה לִפְנֵי הָעָם:

Hashem went before them in the day with a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way and at night with a pillar of fire to give them light, to be able to go day and night. Hashem did not remove the pillar of cloud in the daytime or the pillar of fire in the night from before the people.

We continue (Perek 14/P'sukim 19-20):

וַיִּסַּע מִלֶּאֱרָא הַאֲנֹכִי... לִלְקִים הַהֵלֶךְ לִפְנֵי מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּלֶךְ מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּסַּע עַמּוּד הָעָנָן מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲמֵד מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם: וַיָּבֹא בֵּין מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִי הָעָנָן וְהַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיִּאָּר אֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְלֹא קָרַב זֶה אֶל זֶה כָּל הַלַּיְלָה:

The angel of G-d who went from before the camp of Israel and it went behind them and the pillar of cloud travelled from before them and it stood in back of them. It came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel and the cloud and the darkness lit up the night and this camp and that camp did not approach the other all of that night.

However, the difference between that which Yisro knew before he spoke to Moshe Rabbenu and that which he knew after he spoke with Moshe was far more than one which was quantitative, he didn't merely acquire *more* information.

Towards the end of our Parsha, after we learn of the giving of the *Aseres HaDibros*, we read (Perek 20/P'sukim 15-18):

וְכָל הָעָם רָאִים אֶת הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת הַלְפִידִם וְאֶת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת הָהָר עֹשֵׁן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם
וַיִּנְעוּ וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מֵרָחֵק: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֵתָּה עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה וְאַל יְדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ
אֲלֵינוּ...לְקִים פֶּן נָמוּת: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם אֵל תִּירְאוּ כִּי לְבַעֲבוֹר נִסוֹת אֶתְכֶם בָּא
הָאֵל...לְקִים וּבַעֲבוֹר תִּהְיֶה יְרֵאתוֹ עַל פְּנֵיכֶם לְבַלְתִּי תַחֲטְאוּ: וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם מֵרָחֵק וּמֹשֶׁה
נִגַּשׁ אֶל הָעֶרְפֶּל אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֵל...לְקִים:

All of the people saw the thunder and the torches and the sound of the Shofar and the entire mountain smoking; the people saw and they were moved and they stood at a distance.

They said to Moshe, 'You should speak with us and we will hear and G-d should not speak with us lest we shall die.'

Moshe said to the people, 'Do not fear because in order to raise you up¹⁰ G-d came and in order that His fear will be upon you in order that you will not sin.'

The people stood from afar and Moshe approached the dark cloud where G-d was.

This section is repeated to a great degree in Parshas Voeschanan where we again read regarding *Mattan Torah*. The Torah writes (D'vorim Perek 5/P'sukim 5, 20-24):

אֲנֹכִי עֹמֵד בֵּין ה' וּבֵינֵיכֶם בְּעֵת הַהוּא לְהַגִּיד לְכֶם אֶת דְּבַר ה' כִּי יִרְאתֶם מִפְּנֵי הָאֵשׁ
וְלֹא עֲלִיתֶם בְּהָר לְאָמַר:

¹⁰ The root word of נִסוֹת could be understood as being taken from נִסִּין, meaning a 'test' or from נִס, meaning a 'banner' that is raised upon high. Rashi explains that the meaning is according to the latter and he writes:

לְבַעֲבוֹר נִסוֹת אֶתְכֶם - לְגַדֵּל אֶתְכֶם בְּעוֹלָם שִׂיזָא לְכֶם שֵׁם בְּאוֹמוֹת שֶׁהוּא בְּכּוּדוֹ נִגְלָה עֲלֵיכֶם:

In order to raise you up – to aggrandize you in the world so that your reputation will go out among the nations that Hashem in His Glory was revealed to you.

וַיְהִי כְשִׁמְעֶכֶם אֶת הַקּוֹל מִתּוֹךְ הַחֹשֶׁךְ וְהָרָר בְּעַר בְּאֵשׁ וַתִּקְרְבוּן אֵלַי כָּל רְאִשֵׁי שְׁבֵטֵיכֶם וְזַקְנֵיכֶם: וַתֹּאמְרוּ הֵן הִרְאָנוּ ה' א...ל"קִינוּ אֶת כְּבוֹדוֹ וְאֶת גְּדֻלוֹ וְאֶת קְלוֹ שְׁמֵעֵנוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה רְאִינוּ כִּי יִדְבַר אֱלֹהִים לְקִים אֶת הָאָדָם וְחַי: וְעַתָּה לָמָּה נָמוּת כִּי תֹאכְלֵנוּ הָאֵשׁ הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת אִם יִסְפִּים אֲנַחְנוּ לְשִׁמֹּעַ אֶת קוֹל ה' א...ל"קִינוּ עוֹד וּמִתְּנוּ: כִּי מִי כָל בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע קוֹל אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים מְדַבֵּר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ כְּמִנּוּ וַיְחַי: קָרַב אֶתָּה וְשָׁמַע אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יֹאמֵר ה' א...ל"קִינוּ וְאֶת תְּדַבֵּר אֵלֵינוּ אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִדְבַר ה' א...ל"קִינוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעֵנוּ וְעָשִׂינוּ:

I Moshe was standing between Hashem and you at that time to tell you the Word of Hashem because you were afraid of the fire and did not ascend the mountain saying.

It was when you heard the voice from inside the darkness and the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me – all of the heads of your tribes and your elders. You said, ‘Behold, Hashem our G-d has shown us His Glory and His greatness and His voice we heard from the midst of the fire; this day we heard that when G-d talks with man, man can still live. Now, why should we die because this great fire will consume us if we continue to hear the voice of G-d anymore we will die? Which flesh that heard the voice of Hashem the living G-d speaking from the midst of the fire as we did and lived? You, Moshe, approach and hear all that Hashem our G-d will say and you will speak to us all that Hashem our G-d will speak to you – we will listen and we will do.

We see a number of differences between that which is written in Parshas Yisro and that which is written in Parshas Voeschanan and many of the differences can be attributed to the fact that Parshas Voeschanan also relates to the *לוחות שניות*, the second tablets that were given separately from the first.

Midrash Tanchuma (Parshas Miketz) writes:

לוחות הראשונות, על ידי שניתנו בגדולה נשתברו, שנאמר וכל העם רואים את הקולות אבל הלוחות השנים כשניתנו, לא ראה אותם אלא משה, שנאמר ואיש לא יעלה עמך וגו' (שמות לד/ג¹¹):

¹¹ The entire verse reads:

וְאִישׁ לֹא יַעֲלֶה עִמָּךְ וְגַם אִישׁ אֶל יִרְא בְּכָל הַהָר גַּם הַצֹּאן וְהַבָּקָר אֶל יָרְעוּ אֶל מוֹל הַהָר הַהוּא:
No man shall go up with you and no man shall be seen in any part of the mountain; also the sheep and the cattle shall not graze opposite that mountain.

The first tablets, since they were given with greatness, they were broken. [We learn of the greatness] as it is written, 'all the people saw the thunder'. But, with the second tablets – when they were given, no one saw except for Moshe as it says, 'No man shall go up with you'.

We continue to read the Midrash Tanchuma, but this time in Parshas Ki Tisa commenting on verses there (Perek 34/P'sukim 1-2) and contrasting them with what the Torah writes in our Parshas Yisro at the time of *Mattan Torah*.

We read there:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה פְּסֹל לָךְ שְׁנֵי לַחַת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֵׁינִים וְכַתְּבֵתִי עַל הַלַּחֹת אֶת הַדְּבָרִים
אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל הַלַּחֹת הָרֵאשֵׁינִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ: וְהָיָה נִכּוֹן לִבְקֹר וְעֲלִיתָ בְּבִקְרֹר אֶל הַר סִינַי
וְנִצַּבְתָּ לִּי שָׁם עַל רֹאשׁ הַהָר:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Carve out for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones and I will write upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets that you broke. You, Moshe should be ready for the morning and you shall ascend in the morning to Mt. Sinai and you shall stand erect there for Me at the top of the mountain.

The relevant verse in our (Perek 19/Posuk 16) Parsha reads:

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְּהֵיטֵב הַבְּקֹר וַיְהִי קִלְתֵּי וּבְרָקִים וְעָנָן כְּבֵד עַל הָהָר וְקוֹל שֹׁפָר חֲזָק
מְאֹד וַיִּחַרְדוּ כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּמַחֲנֵה:

It was on the third day when it was morning, there was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud upon the mountain and the sound of the Shofar became increasingly strong and the all the people in the camp trembled.

The Midrash reads:

פסל לך והיה נכון לבקר כך בראשונה ויהי ביום השלישי בהיות הבקר וגו' וכאן וגם
איש אל ירא, הלוחות ראשונות על שנתנו בפומבי לפיכך שלטה בהם עין הרע
ונשתברו וכאן א"ל הקדוש ברוך הוא אין לך יפה מן הצניעות שנאמר (מיכה ו¹²) ומה
ה' דורש ממך כי אם עשה משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת.

¹² The entire verse reads:

הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי אם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם א...ל'קיה:

Carve for yourself...and be ready for the morning. For the first tablets we read, 'It was on the third day when it was morning, etc.'

Here by the second tablets it says, 'also no man shall be seen'.

The first tablets were given publicly – therefore the *ayin ha'ra'* had control and the tablets were broken. Here, regarding the second tablets, Hashem said to Moshe, 'There is nothing nicer than *tzniyus*-modesty. This is as it says, 'What does Hashem seek from you – only to do justice, loving kindness and walking modestly.'

And there is another aspect which was said regarding the first *Luchos* and not said regarding the second, as we read in this week's Parshas Yisro (Perek 20/Posuk 19):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם כִּי מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם דִּבַּרְתִּי עִמָּכֶם:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'So you shall say to B'nei Yisroel, "You have *seen* that I Hashem spoke to you from the heavens.'

Rashi explains:

אתם ראיתם - יש הפרש בין מה שאדם רואה למה שאחרים משיחין לו, שמה שאחרים משיחין לו פעמים שלבו חלוק מלהאמין:

You have seen – there is a difference between that which a person sees and that which others tell him. That which others tell him –sometimes his heart is divided as whether to believe or not.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah (Perek 8/Halachah 1):

ובמה האמינו בו במעמד הר סיני שעינינו ראו ולא זר ואזנינו שמעו ולא אחר האש והקולות והלפידים והוא נגש אל הערפל והקול מדבר אליו ואנו שומעים משה משה לך אמור להן כך וכך, וכן הוא אומר (דברים ה/ד¹³) פנים בפנים דבר ה' עמכם, ונאמר

He, Hashem has told you, Man, that which is good and that which Hashem seeks from you – only to do justice, to love kindness and to walk modestly with Hashem your G-d.

¹³ The entire verse reads:

פְּנִים בְּפָנִים דִּבֶּר ה' עִמָּכֶם בְּהַר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ:

Face to Face Hashem spoke with you on the mountain from the midst of the fire.

(שם שם ג¹⁴) לא את אבותינו כרת ה' את הברית הזאת, ומנין שמעמד הר סיני לבדו היא הראיה לנבואתו שהיא אמת שאין בו דופי שנאמר (שם יט/ט¹⁵) הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן בעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך וגם בך יאמינו לעולם...

How did Israel believe in Moshe at Mt. Sinai? It was because our eyes saw, not from a stranger, our ears heard, not from someone else, the fire and the thunder and the torches and Moshe approached the dark cloud and the voice speaks to him and we hear, 'Moshe, Moshe, go and say to them this and that'.

And it says, 'face to face Hashem spoke with you'. And it says, 'Not with our fathers did G-d make this covenant '.

How do we know that *Maamad Har Sinai* alone is the proof that Moshe's prophecy is true without any room for doubt? It is as it says, 'Behold I Hashem am coming to you in the thickness of the cloud in order that the people shall hear when I Hashem speak with you and also in you will they believe forever.'

Rashi and Rambam teach us that as trustworthy and reliable that he may be, the one who informs us about a matter is never as believable as when the person himself knows the information for himself, personally.

Such a principle does not reflect poorly on our interlocutor. We may truly vouch for his integrity and honesty. Nonetheless, there is room for doubt and that doubt has a justification as part of human nature. That is an aspect of Creation.

Thus, as Rambam writes (ibid. Perek 7/Halachah 7):

¹⁴ The entire verse reads:

לא את אבותינו כרת ה' את הברית הזאת כי אתנו אנחנו אלה פה היום כלנו חיים:
Not with our fathers did Hashem make this covenant –but with us, those who are here today – we are all alive.

¹⁵ The entire verse reads:

ויאמר ה' אל משה הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן בעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך וגם בך יאמינו לעולם ויגד משה את דברי העם אל ה':
Hashem said to Moshe, "Behold I am coming to you in the thickness of the cloud in order that the people should hear when I speak with you and also in you, Moshe, you will be believed forever.

...שנצטוינו לחתוך את הדין (דברים יט/טו¹⁶) על פי שני עדים כשרים ואף על פי שאפשר שהעידו בשקר הואיל וכשרים הם אצלינו מעמידין אותן על כשרותן...

We have been commanded to decide the law according to what two witnesses who are *kosher* [say. This is so] even though it is possible that they testified falsely. [The reason that we accept their testimony despite this doubt is] that since they were *kosher*, we keep that as their status as being fit to testify [and to accept their testimony].

If such doubt is part of Creation then there is justification for it and that is why Hashem gave the Torah in such a demonstrative way, with greatness and publicly.

That is, we cannot say that G-d 'erred' in giving the first set of *luchos* in a manner with which the Midrashim found fault. *Mattan Torah* 'had' to be done in public and with great fanfare so that Israel would know without a doubt that Hashem appointed Moshe Rabbenu as His *shliach* to transmit His Will.

However, once that was done there was no longer any necessity to copy the circumstances of that event and thus the issues associated with the public nature and the fanfare of *Mattan Torah* were not repeated at the giving of the second tablets. Once such repetition was unnecessary it would have been wrong to do it because of the attendant problems which were connected to such a revelation.

When we now return to Yisro we can certainly understand what he meant when he said עתה ידעתי, *now I know*.

Of course Yisro knew before as well. However, his exposure to more details added to his knowledge qualitatively. His level of acceptance was raised in a way that did not exist earlier. When someone is exposed to greater and greater reliable information then the level of their acceptance grows in a corresponding manner¹⁷.

¹⁶ The entire verse reads:

לא יקום עד אחד באיש לכל עון ולכל חטאת בכל חטא אשר יחטא על פי שני עדים או על פי שלשה עדים יקום דבר:

One witness shall not arise against a person for any type of transgression or for any type of sin that a person might transgress; according to the word of two witnesses or the word of three witnesses shall the matter be validated.

¹⁷ Of course, if Yisro was at Sinai prior to *Mattan Torah* and he was present for the Revelation, then his level of belief no longer possessed any doubts. If Yisro was not

Yisro, the individual and the Parsha, has what to teach us from the long narrative that begins our Parsha.

Yisro was a great believer. It is clear that he did not doubt that which he heard regarding the miracles that occurred to Israel. Otherwise he would not have had the motivation to come.

It is also clear that it is not enough to 'hear'. Although the Parsha begins with the words *וישמע יתרו*, 'Yisro heard', the Midrash that Rashi cites finds it necessary to add on to Yisro's hearing and writes:

מה שמועה שמע ובא

What did Yisro hear that motivated him to come to *Machaneh Yisroel*?

There may be those who would think that if Yisro already was convinced enough to come to *Machaneh Yisroel* it would not be necessary to add on to his knowledge. After all, he heard; he came!

The Torah makes it quite clear, though, that such an attitude is improper. Moshe knew why Yisro came and yet he spent considerable time teaching his father-in-law details, specifics and nuances of which the latter was unaware.

If Yisro arrived only after *Mattan Torah*, he did not merit 'seeing' that Hashem spoke with Moshe. And neither do we. But just like Moshe Rabbenu saw fit to teach Yisro more than he already knew, so we, *vis a vis* ourselves and others, cannot be satisfied because we are already committed Jews, already observing Mitzvos. We deserve to be exposed to greater knowledge, greater understanding so that we can say, like Yisro:

עתה ידעתי

Now, I know better, quantitatively and qualitatively, than that which I already knew in the past.

And if this true of our personal search for knowledge and understanding of Torah, it must also be true for the efforts that we make on behalf of others: our children, our students, our fellow Jews.

present for *Mattan Torah* then it is likely that he might have retained some reservations.

But there is another aspect to consider when we seek to enhance, quantitatively and qualitatively, the knowledge of others so that their commitment to G-d and His Torah should be ever-increasing.

That is the aspect of the second event that motivated Yisro to come to *Machaneh Yisroel*- the war against Amalek.

Seemingly, that war should have been a discouraging factor, one that would deter Yisro from making the journey and the commitment that was connected to it.

The Exodus was a huge success. The Egyptians were punished, pulverized and destroyed as that event concluded with the splitting of the Red Sea.

The battle with Amalek, on the other hand, was not a resounding success.

We read in last week's Parshas B'shalach (Sh'mos Perek 17/Posuk 8):

וַיָּבֹא עַמְלֵק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרִפְדִּים:

Amalek came and fought with Israel at *Refidim*.

The need to say that 'Amalek came' requires explanation. Why wasn't it sufficient to say that Amalek battled Israel, why was the preface of *עמלק ויבא* necessary?

The answer is found in the other instance where the Torah relates to this event – in Parshas Ki Setze in D'vorim. We read there (Perek 25/Posuk 18):

אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדַרְךְךָ וַיִּזְנֹב בְּךָ כָּל הַנְּחָשָׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עֵיף וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֶל־לְקִיָּם:

Amalek happened to you on the road; he attacked you from behind – [killing] all of the weak ones who were in back of you; you were tired and weary; Amalek did not fear G-d.

The word *קרך* which we translated not incorrectly as 'happened' has many explanations. One of those explanations that Rashi brings reads:

דבר אחר לשון קור וחום, צננך והפשירך מרתיחתך, שהיו כל האומות יראים להלחם בכם ובא זה והתחיל והראה מקום לאחריים. משל לאמבטי רותחת שאין כל בריה יכולה לירד בתוכה, בא בן בליעל אחד קפץ וירד לתוכה. אף על פי שנכחה, הקרה אותה בפני אחריים:

Another explanation - קרר is from the word referring to cold [as in 'cold and hot']. Amalek cooled you off, made you lukewarm from your boiling hot temperature.

[This means] that all of the nations were afraid to fight against you, Israel, and this one *came* and started up with you and demonstrated that this could be done by others, too.

The parable is that of a scalding tub of water that no one was able to enter because of its intense heat. Some low-level person comes and jumps into the tub. Even though he was burned badly, he cooled the tub off so that others could enter into it.

And the final verse of Parshas B'shalach (ibid. Posuk 16) is not uplifting either. Hashem says to Moshe:

וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי יָד עַל כֶּסֶף... הַמִּלְחָמָה לְה' בְּעַמְלֵק מִדֹּר דָּר:

Hashem said, 'Because the Divine Hand is upon the throne of G-d, the war of Hashem against Amalek is for generation to generation.

Rashi writes:

כי יד על כס'... ה - ידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא הורמה לישיבע בכסאו להיות לו מלחמה ואיבה בעמלק עולמית, ומהו כס', ולא נאמר כסא, ואף השם נחלק לחציו, נשבע הקדוש ברוך הוא שאין שמו שלם ואין כסאו שלם עד שימחה שמו של עמלק כולו...

The Divine Hand is on the throne of G-d – the Hand of Hashem is raised to take an oath on His throne that He will have a war and hatred against Amalek forever.

Why does it say כס' instead of the complete word כסא and why is G-d's Name divided into two with only the first two letters written, *yud* and *heh* and not the final two letters, *vov* and *heh*?

The meaning is that Hashem took an oath that His Name is incomplete and His Throne is incomplete until the name of Amalek will be blotted out completely.

The battle has not terminated. The struggle continues, the Torah proclaimed. And we know that it continues to this very day.

I believe that this is precisely what Yisro thought regarding the war with Amalek and it was that understanding that served as a secondary motivation for him to join with Israel.

If we hear that all is good, if we hear that everything is perfect and that there are no bumps on the road, we have a reason to be suspicious. We can think, often correctly, that someone is 'sweet-talking' us, avoiding difficult issues so as not to dissuade us from being loyal to Torah.

Such an approach may work with those who are simplistic, but will not be successful for the ones who are more sophisticated. And, Yisro was anything but simple.

When we learn Torah there are things that we do not understand. Not only that, there are issues that seem to contradict values that we hold dear and the reconciliation can be trying and difficult.

If we truly believe, then we know that the questions are part of the understanding of Torah, not just the answers.

My Rebbe Rav Zelig Starr ZT"l instructed us 'not to ruin a good question with a bad answer. If you have a good question, write it down and put it in your pocket and when the opportunity comes, you will find an answer.'

I heard in the name of the late Satmar Rov, *Rav Yoelish ZT"l* that he responded to another *Odom Godol* who re-read a Rambam because of a new scientific discovery:

פון א קשיא שטארב'מן נישט

A question doesn't kill!

And in our Parshas Yisro, 'a question' was the convincing aspect that brought Yisro to a decision that the Exodus alone was unable to accomplish. The 'question' was the success that Amalek had after Israel's unlimited success at the Exodus and the need for G-d to have a relentless and ongoing war with Amalek –rather than decimating them immediately.

And with this understanding, we can gain a perspective, on what Rashi writes in our Parsha (Perek 18/Posuk 13):

ואין פרשה זו כתובה כסדר

The sections of our Parsha are not written in historical order¹⁸.

Why did the Torah write about Yisro's arrival to the encampment of Israel before teaching us the Ten Commandments?

The answer is that the need to seek, to learn, to understand, to comprehend, to question and to seek answer for the questions, is an attitude that is a prerequisite to the study of Torah.

The more that we truly believe that Torah is Divine the more we will know that there are limits to our understanding. That limit to our understanding does not mean that we raise our hands in defeat.

The contrary is true. We need to test our limits. We do not raise our hands in defeat and give up before attempting. We keep on until we cannot understand any more – and then we begin once more¹⁹.

The first verse in Parshas Bechukosai (Vayikro Perek 26/Posuk 3) reads:

אם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ וְאֶת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעִשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם:

If you will go in My statutes and observe My Mitzvos and do them.

Since each of the three phrases of this verse seem very similar, Rashi has to tell us:

אם בחקתי תלכו...מה אני מקיים אם בחקתי תלכו, שתהיו עמלים בתורה:

If you will go in My statutes – How do I understand this phrase? You have to toil in Torah.

Why should בחוקותי, My 'statutes' refer to 'toiling' in the study of Torah?

The answer is clear. G-d has not told us what our limits are in what we can attain in the study of Torah. That is a *chok*, it is hidden from us and we can only know our limits by toiling and seeing how much we can achieve. And when we come to that

¹⁸ See the continuation of this Rashi and his supra-commentators as well as the other Meforshim to learn what aspects are specifically out of order as well opinions that differ with Rashi.

¹⁹ Some 45 years ago, an Admor quoted Adlai Stevenson who was a U.S. Senator and presidential candidate, who said, 'If man's reach cannot exceed his grasp, then what is heaven for?'

highest level of our personal attainment – to begin to toil once again. That is G-d's *chok* regarding our Torah learning, understanding and comprehension.

The introduction to Parshas Yisro is an introduction to our approach to Torah: never be satisfied with what we know, never say 'enough', never ignore the questions and the difficulties and always seek to achieve the maximum, quantitatively and qualitatively, so that we can know Hashem in an even greater way and can fulfil his Torah to the limit of our abilities and beyond.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock