

## פרשת יתרו

Our Parshas Yisro appears to be comprised of two very separate and distinct sections. The first section deals with the advent of Yisro to *Machaneh Yisroel* and his advice to Moshe Rabbenu regarding the establishment of a hierarchal judiciary. That advice will allow easy access to judgment on the one hand and a process by which the most complicated issues will be reached the highest authority for adjudication and decision-making.

The second section is, of course, *Mattan Torah*.

Are these two sections in fact separate or is there an underlying thread that connects them both?

Let us start from the beginning.

What does the Halachah teach us when you are reunited with someone about whom you care very much and have been out of touch for a long time?

Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim Siman 225/s'if 1) writes:

הרואה את חברו לאחר שלשים יום אומר: שהחיינו, ואחר שנים עשר חדש מברך:  
מחיה מתים<sup>1</sup> והוא שחביב עליו הרבה ושמח בראייתו.

One who sees his friend [only] after thirty days [since he last saw him] recites the *Shehecheyanu B'rachah*. After twelve months, he recites the *Mechayeh HaMeisim Bracha*.

The blessings are recited only if he loves him very much and is happy when he sees him.

In *s'if koton* 3 Mishnah B'rurah writes:

אומר שהחיינו וכו' - וכל אלו הברכות הוא בשם ומלכות ואפילו ברכת מחיה מתים:

---

<sup>1</sup> In *s'if koton* 4, Mishnah B'rurah points out that the blessing of מחיה המתים is recited *instead* of שהחיינו, not in addition to it.

*He recites Shehecheyanu* – all these B'rachos are complete with Hashem's Name and saying that He is *Melech Ho'Olom*, including *Mechayeh HaMeisim*<sup>2</sup>.

It would seem easier to understand why *שהחינו* is recited than why *מחיה המתים*. The former is a blessing of joy that is recited on Yomim Tovim and other times when we mark annual occasions on our calendar. It is also recited when we have a particular moment of joy. The circumstances in this Halachah are certainly ones of joy.

However, the recitation of *מחיה המתים* seems questionable. Why is that *bracha* appropriate when you have not seen a loved one for a year?

Mishnah Brurah explains (s'if koton 4):

וטעם ברכה זו כתב בחידושי אגדות לפי שבכל שנה האדם נידון בראש השנה ויום הכיפורים אם למות אם לחיים ואם רואהו אחר ראש השנה ויום הכיפורים זה ואחר כן אין רואה אותו עד אחר ראש השנה ויום הכיפורים הבא הרי עבר עליו דין אם למות אם לא ועל כן אומר ברוך מחיה מתים שניצול מדין מיתה בראש השנה ויום הכיפורים.:

---

<sup>2</sup> That is, he says:

ברוך אתה ה' א...ל"קיני מלך העולם מחיה המתים:

We are familiar with this blessing in the Amida and know that there the in consists only of:

ברוך אתה ה' מחיה המתים:

The reason why that B'racha, and all the other blessings of the Amida, does not have the words: *א...ל"קיני מלך העולם* is that it is considered connected to the opening Blessing of the Amida, *Ovos* and its lengthy beginning is considered as the beginning of all the subsequent B'rachos that follow it.

The subsequent B'rachos are each called:

בברכה הסמוכה לחברתה:

A contiguous blessing.

However, in the instance of the Shulchan Aruch when *מחיה המתים* is said independently and not part of the *Amida*, it requires the complete text of a B'racha which includes *שם ומלכות*.

The reason for the recitation of this Bracha, writes the Maharsha in his *Chiddushei Aggados* is that annually a person is judged on Rosh Hashanah and Yom HaKippurim for death or for life. And if he sees him after this Rosh Hashanah and Yom HaKippurim and then doesn't see him again until after the next Rosh Hashanah and Yom HaKippurim, his friend has been judged whether for death or for life. And therefore when he sees him after that passage of time he recites *Baruch Mechayeh HaMeisim* for the fact that his friend was saved from death on Rosh Hashanah and Yom HaKippurim<sup>3</sup>.

In fact, these blessings are no longer recited for the circumstances noted<sup>4</sup>. When one knows about the other's welfare through communications or mutual friends and acquaintances then the concern is removed, even without seeing the other directly.

---

<sup>3</sup> It would seem that there are instances in which the Bracha of *מחיה המתים* could be recited before 12 months have passed as well as instances that it would not be recited even if 12 months have passed.

If one saw his friend prior to Rosh Hashanah and then did not see him again until thirty days past Rosh Hashanah and Yom HaKippurim, why wouldn't he recite *מחיה המתים*? The judgement took place and the loved one who is so worried about his beloved friend's welfare could legitimately be concerned that the decree upon his friend was death.

However, in this instance we can easily understand why the Halachah says 12 months following Rosh Hashanah and Yom HaKippurim.

Even if there was such a decree that the person would die, he would not necessarily die on the day that the decree was made. He could die anytime during the new year and therefore Chazal said 'twelve months'.

On the other hand, if the year following Rosh Hashanah and Yom HaKippurim would be a leap year, with 13 months, it would be more than 12 months until the next Rosh Hashanah and therefore it would seem that in such an instance the bracha of *מחיה המתים* should not be recited until thirteen months have elapsed.

However, I did not find any source that supports my speculations.

<sup>4</sup> See *Piskei Teshuva* to this s'if in Shulchan Aruch. It should be noted that Mishnah Brurah does not say that these blessings are no longer recited for the circumstances described.

Nonetheless, the Halachah expresses the feelings and longings that we have for those for whom we care greatly.

Even when the necessity of such brachos doesn't arise, we all know what it is like to be united with someone who is dear to us and with whom we have not had significant communication for an extended period of time.

We want to catch up on each other's life. We want to know about their welfare, their family, their job. When there are acquaintances and friends that we have in common, we check about their welfare as well.

And that brings us to our Parshas Yisro, a wondrous Parsha in which the entire Torah is brought to us through the vehicle of the Revelation on Sinai<sup>5</sup>, the appointment of Moshe Rabbenu as the uniquely exclusive *Shliach* of HaKodosh Boruch Hu and the giving of the *Aseres HaDibros*.

A significant amount of time had passed since Moshe saw his father-in-law. The period of the plagues until the Exodus lasted some 12 months and depending on exactly when Yisro came to the wilderness to join with Israel, there are additional months as well.

We know that momentous events occurred in the interim and Moshe Rabbenu, son-in-law of Yisro, had much to tell; he was at the center of events. So whether or not the various blessings involved were recited, the meaningfulness of that reunion cannot be questioned.

---

<sup>5</sup> We read in Parshas Mishpotim (Sh'mos Perek 24/Posuk 12):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֵלַי הַהָרָה וְהִיָּה שָׁם וְאָתַנָּה לְךָ אֶת לַחַת הָאֶבֶן וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי לְהוֹרֹתָם:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Ascend to Me to the mountain and be there and I will give you the tablets of stone and the Torah and the Mitzvah that I wrote to teach them.

Rashi writes:

את לחת האבן והתורה והמצוה אשר כתבתי להורתם - כל שש מאות ושלוש עשרה מצות בכלל עשרת הדברות הן, ורבינו סעדיה פירש באזהרות שיסד לכל דבור ודבור מצות התלויות בו:

*The tablets of stone and the Torah and the Mitzvah that I wrote to teach them* – all of the 613 Mitzvos are included in the *Aseres HaDibros*. Rabbenu Saadia Gaon explained each of the *Dibros* together with the specific Mitzvos that are attached to it.

And what does the Torah tell us that will enable us to anticipate what these two great people will discuss?

Our Parsha begins with a description of Yisro's motivation to join with Israel.

We read at its beginning (Sh'mos Perek 18/Posuk 1):

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹהֵן 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 Israel out of Egypt.

Rashi tells us what specifically Yisro heard that provided him with the motivation to join with Israel.

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

*Yisro heard* – What report did he hear and then came? He heard about the splitting of the Red Sea and the war with Amalek<sup>6</sup>.

Yisro was not only motivated by G-d's miracles that were performed for Israel alone. The verse writes Moshe prior to Israel and that teaches that as a proud father-in-law<sup>7</sup>, Yisro was particularly interested in the central role that Moshe played in the events leading up to the Exodus, in the Exodus itself and in all of the events that occurred subsequently.

What does the Torah tell us of Moshe's dialogue with Yisro?

We read (Posuk 8):

---

<sup>6</sup> There is a number of opinions in Chazal as to what precisely was Yisro's motivating factor was. Those opinions impact upon the chronology of events as to when Yisro arrived in the encampment of Israel.

<sup>7</sup> Rashi writes to Posuk 1:

חתן משה - כאן היה יתרו מתכבד במשה אני חותן המלך ולשעבר היה משה תולה הגדולה בחמיו, שנאמר (שמות ד/יח) וישב אל יתר חותנו:

*The father-in-law of Moshe* – Here [when Yisro came to the wilderness] Yisro was honored by being Moshe's father-in-law; 'I am the father-in-law of the king'. In the past, Moshe ascribed *his* importance to *his* father-in-law as it says, 'Moshe returned to Yeser his father-in-law.

וַיְסַפֵּר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתְנֹו אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' לְפָרְעֹה וּלְמִצְרַיִם עַל אֹדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מָצְאתֶם בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּצְלַם ה':

Moshe told his father-in-law all that Hashem did to Par'o and to Egypt on behalf of Israel, all of the weariness that encountered Israel in their travels and that Hashem saved them.

Isn't something missing here? Where does Moshe address the issue that was primary to Yisro – Moshe's role in the history that was being made? Where was mention of Moshe's control over nature during the plagues? Where was mention of Par'o seeking Moshe and begging him to take Israel out of Egypt? Where was mention of Moshe at the Red Sea and at the war with Amalek?

Since we have learned Chumash many times and we have focused upon the unique nature of Moshe Rabbenu, we are not surprised.

Perhaps Yisro was disappointed about not being regaled with Moshe's heroism but Moshe was not disappointed for not having recounting it.

Almost automatically our minds go to the Posuk at the end of Parshas B'ha'alo'secha which pithily tells us of Moshe' uniqueness.

We read (B'midbar Perek 12/Posuk 3):

וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עֲנִיו מְאֹד מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה:

The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any other person upon the face of the earth.

However, such a reference may not be accurate.

We hinted above that the exact time of Yisro's arrival at *Machaneh Yisroel* was a matter of dispute –did he arrive prior to *Mattan Torah* or afterwards?

If Yisro arrived after *Mattan Torah* and, thus, his conversation with Moshe occurred subsequently, then it is the same Moshe who is described in Parshas B'ha'alo'secha as the Moshe in our Parsha: Moshe after *Mattan Torah*.

We can be certain that as great as was the potential of Moshe Rabbenu from birth and as much he realized that potential, activating and actualizing it, his days and weeks upon Mt. Sinai were certainly transformative.

If that is the case, Moshe's extraordinary character that is given expression in his omission of any self-references in his talk with Yisro can be more easily understood.

On the other hand, if Yisro arrived prior to Mattan Torah<sup>8</sup> and, thus, the dialogue between Yisro and Moshe happened prior to Mattan Torah, in that case, then even then, prior to the unique Divine inspiration that Moshe received on Sinai, Moshe withheld any self-praise and self-aggrandizement, then he is even more impressive. And, certainly, Moshe became even greater when he was in the presence of the Shechinah for the duration of three forty-day periods of time.

And that impressive nature of Moshe Rabbenu even prior to Mattan Torah is given expression once again, but even more subtly, in this opening section of Parshas Yisro.

We read in our Parsha (Posuk 12):

וַיִּקַּח יִתְרוֹ חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה וּזְבָחִים לַאֲלֹהִים... לִיקִים וַיָּבֵא אֶהָרֹן וְכָל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֶאֱכֹל לֶחֶם  
עִם חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה לְפָנָי הָאֵל... לִיקִים:

Yisro the father-in-law of Moshe took a burnt-offering and other offerings for G-d; Aharon and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with the father-in-law of Moshe before G-d.

Rashi notes that someone is missing from this description. He writes:

ויבא אהרן וגו' - ומשה היכן הלך, והלא הוא שיצא לקראתו וגרם לו את כל הכבוד,  
אלא שהיה עומד ומשמש לפניו:

*Aharon came* – Where did Moshe go? Wasn't he who went out to greet Yisro and wasn't he the one who brought him all of the honor<sup>9</sup>?

---

<sup>8</sup> The support of such a hypothesis is found in the Rashi we quoted above. We learned there that Yisro came because he heard about the splitting of the Red Sea and the battle with Amalek.

If Yisro had come after *Mattan Torah* we would have expected him to be particularly motivated by the Giving of the Torah at Sinai. Since Yisro's motivation is not related to *Mattan Torah*, there is support for saying that he came prior to Mattan Torah.

<sup>9</sup> We read in this first section of Parshas Yisro (Posuk 8):

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לְקִרְאֵת חֵתָנוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ וַיִּשְׁקוּ לוֹ וַיִּשְׂאֲלוּ אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וַיָּבֵאוּ הָאֱהָלָה:

But Moshe was standing and serving them.

Moshe was not the first distinguished personage to give unique honor to his guests by acting as their waiter. He was preceded by another great person, Avraham Ovinu.

We read at the beginning of Parshas Vayera (B'reishis Perek 18/Posuk 8):

וַיִּקַּח חֲמֵאָה וְחֵלֶב וּבֶן הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לְפָנֵיהֶם וְהוּא עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ  
וַיֹּאכְלוּ:

Avraham took butter and milk and the young cow that he prepared and he placed it before them and Avraham stood nearby to them under the tree and they ate.

Such was the greatness of the hospitality of Avraham Ovinu. His *hachnosas orchim* knew no boundaries.

However, we can find a distinction between the act of Avraham serving and between the act of Moshe serving.

The Torah tells us that Avraham served; the Torah does not tell us that Moshe served.

Were it not for the attentive eye of Chazal and the Meforshim we may not have attended to the fact that the Torah omits Moshe's name from the guests at the banquet. And, even if we would have noticed it is certainly possible that we could have dismissed the question of 'where was Moshe?' We might have said, 'of course he was there'. After all Yisro wanted to celebrate the greatness of his son-in-law together with the greatness of the Ribbono Shel Olom.

---

Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law and he bowed down to him and he kissed him and the man asked his friend regarding his welfare and they came into the tent.

Rashi writes:

יֵצֵא מֹשֶׁה - כְּבוֹד גָּדוֹל נִתְכַבַּד יִתְרוֹ בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה, כִּיּוֹן שִׂיֵּצָא מֹשֶׁה יֵצֵא אַהֲרֹן נֹדֵב וְאַבְיָהוּא, וּמִי הוּא שְׂרָאָה אֶת אֱלוֹ יוֹצֵאִין וְלֹא יֵצֵא:

*Moshe went out* – Yisro was honored with great honor at that time. When Moshe went out, Aharon and his sons *Nadav* and *Avihu* went out.

Who would see these great persons going out and not go out after them?

And thus, the Torah hid,<sup>10</sup> inconspicuously, Moshe's act of humility.

---

<sup>10</sup> I believe that we are permitted to wonder out loud if it was Moshe himself who 'hid' his role at that festive dinner.

We can wonder so because Moshe Rabbenu went to great length to diminish his importance.

When *Eldad and Medad* were prophesizing about Moshe's death and Yehoshua told Moshe to stop them, Moshe's response was clear as we read in Parshas B'ha'alo-secha (B'midbar Perek 11/Posuk 29):

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה הֲמִקְנָא אֶתְּהָ לִּי וַיְמִי יִתֵּן כָּל עַם ה' נְבִיאִים כִּי יִתֵּן ה' אֶת רוּחוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם:  
Moshe said to Yehoshua, 'Are you being jealous for me? Would it be that all of Hashem's people would be prophets, that Hashem would place His spirit upon them.'

We read the very first Posuk in Sefer Vayikro (Perek 1/Posuk 1):

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו מֵאֵהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר:  
He call to Moshe; Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed saying:

If one looks in the Sefer Torah, and it is noted in many printed Chumashim, the last letter of the word ויקרא, the *alef*, is written smaller than the other letters.

*Ba'al Haturim* explains:

אל"ף דויקרא זעירא. שמשה היה גדול ועניו לא רצה לכתוב אלא "ויקר" לשון מקרה כאילו לא דבר הקדוש ברוך הוא עמו אלא בחלום כדרך שנאמר בבלעם (במדבר כג/ד) כאילו לא נראה לו השם אלא במקרה (מדרש אותיות קטנות), ואמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לכתוב גם האל"ף ושוב אמר לו משה מחמת רוב ענה שלא יכתבנה אלא קטנה יותר משאר אלפי"ן שבתורה וכתבה קטנה:

The *alef* of the word *Vayikro* is written small. Moshe who was great and humble only wanted to write ויקר, without the *alef*, and that would imply 'G-d happened to him', meaning 'unplanned' as if Hashem only spoke with him in a dream [but not פנים אל פנים, 'face to face']. That is the way Hashem spoke with Bil'am [where it does say ויקר]. Thus it would be as if Hashem only appeared to Moshe with less than the full force of the highest level of prophecy.

Hashem told Moshe to write the letter *Alef*. But Moshe replied and said, due to his great humility, that he would write the letter *alef* smaller than the other *alefim* in the Torah. And that is what he wrote.

If Moshe 'got away' with writing the letter *alef* the way he wanted, so as to minimize his importance, is it completely implausible to think that he wanted to hide his role of 'waiter' in the banquet that was made for Yisro?

We have an additional support to show the Torah's emphasis on the unique character of Moshe in our Parsha. We read (Posuk 8) that Moshe went out to greet and welcome his father-in-law:

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לִקְרַאת חֹתָנוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ וַיִּשָּׂק לוֹ וַיִּשְׂאַלוּ אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֲהָלָה:  
Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law and he bowed down to him and he kissed him and the man asked his friend regarding his welfare and they came into the tent.

Now the Torah has not defined its antecedents so I don't know who bowed down to whom and who kissed whom. Is such an identification possible?

Rashi says 'yes' and writes:

וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ וַיִּשָּׂק לוֹ - איני יודע מי השתחוה למי, כשהוא אומר איש לרעהו, מי הקרוי איש, זה משה שנאמר והאיש משה:

*He bowed down to him and he kissed him* – I do not know who bowed down to whom. [I can learn the answer to this question from] what it says, 'the *ish*-man bowed down to his friend'. Who is called *ish* – it is Moshe as it is written, 'the man Moshe'.

Moshe was the leader. He took Israel out of Egypt. Moshe's feats were a major factor in Yisro's coming to the Israelites. Nonetheless, Moshe humbled himself before his father-in-law even though the former's objective prestige far surpassed that of the latter.

At the very beginning of this essay we asked if there was a connection between the first part of Parshas Yisro, the advent of Yisro, and the second part – the Revelation on Har Sinai.

In order to pursue that question, let us examine one particular Posuk regarding the Revelation.

We read (Perek 19/Posuk 20):

וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיִּקְרָא ה' לְמֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה:

---

And, of course, the sign of Moshe's honest and sincere humility was that he clearly wrote that Avraham served his guests as their waiter.

Hashem descended upon Mt. Sinai, to the top of the mountain, and He called to Moshe to the top of the mountain and Moshe ascended.

In fact, no one can understand this verse fully because the concept of Hashem 'descending' is incompatible with the sense that Hashem is everywhere, as the Posuk in Sefer Yeshaya (Perek 6/Posuk 3) reads:

וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל זֶה וְאָמַר קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה' צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ:

This heavenly creature called to that heavenly creature and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Hashem of Hosts; the fullness of the entire world is His Glory.'

And of course this verse must be compatible with the Posuk in Yechezkel that seems to contradict what Yeshaya says. We read there (Perek 3/Posuk 12):

וַתִּשְׁאֲנֵי רוּחַ וְאָשְׁמַע אַחֲרַי קוֹל רַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל בְּרוּחַ כְּבוֹד ה' מִמְּקוֹמוֹ:

The wind raised me and I heard from in back of me a voice, a great noise, 'Blessed is the Glory of Hashem from its place.'

Is He everywhere or is He here? That is the question that begs to be asked and that will frustrate anyone who truly thinks that they will find the complete answer.

So, too, in our Posuk, a perusal of the Meforshim and the Midrashim yield the accurate sense that such knowledge is beyond us. The Midrashim and the Meforshim clearly indicate that our knowledge is greatly limited, especially in the sphere of attempting to understand G-d as He is.

Perhaps Rabbenu Bachye captures the above idea best when he writes:

וירד ה' על הר סיני. לשון ירידה בהקדוש ברוך הוא בכל מקום הוא ענין הראותו וגלוי בהשגת השכל והוא כלשון: (בראשית יח/א<sup>11</sup>) "וירא אליו ה'", האמור באברהם וכן תרגם ואתגלי כתרגום וירא, אבל אחז הכתוב לשון ירידה כי גלוי שכינה אל התחתונים ירידה היא אצל מעלות הגבוה. ובאור "וירד ה'" בכאן, שנראה ה' המיוחד לעיני כל העם, כי כן הזכיר למעלה (פסוק יא<sup>12</sup>) "כי ביום השלישי ירד ה' לעיני כל

<sup>11</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פְּתַח הָאֵהָל כְּחַם הַיּוֹם:  
Hashem appeared to Avraham in the Plains of Mamre and Avraham was sitting at the opening of his tent in the heat of the day.

<sup>12</sup> The entire verse reads:

וְהָיוּ נְכִימִים לַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כִּי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יָרַד ה' לְעֵינֵי כָל הָעָם עַל הַר סִינַי:

העם", כי מתוך שראו הכבוד (להלן כד/יז<sup>13</sup>) "כאש אוכלת בראש ההר" ידעו והבינו כי שם ה' המיוחד, ואל הכוונה הזאת נאמר "וירד ה'", לא שיראו ה' המיוחד שהרי כתיב: (להלן לג/כ<sup>14</sup>) "כי לא יראני האדם וחי".

*Hashem descended on Mt. Sinai* – the expression of ‘descent’ in reference to HaKodosh Boruch Hu always means that His sighting and His revelation are by the mind’s perception. That is what it says, ‘Hashem appeared to him’ that is said in regard to Avraham. So, the *Targum* of ‘He appeared’ is ‘He revealed Himself’.

The Torah chose to use the term descent because the Revelation of the Shechina to the lower levels is a descent vis a vis the upper levels.

The meaning of “Hashem descended’ here is that the One G-d appeared before the entire nation. And that is what is written in an earlier Posuk in this section, ‘because on the third day Hashem will descend before the eyes of the entire People’.

That is, since they saw the Glory of Hashem as ‘a consuming fire at the top of the mountain’ they knew and understood the One unique Name of G-d, Hashem. And it is for that purpose that the Torah wrote that ‘Hashem descended’. It is not to say that the People saw the One unique G-d because it is written, ‘Man will not see Me and live’.

Rashi writes here:

---

They shall be ready on the third day because on the third day Hashem will descend before the eyes of the entire people on Mt. Sinai.

<sup>13</sup> The entire verse reads:

וּמַרְאֵה כְבוֹד ה' כְּאֵשׁ אוֹכֵלֶת בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָר לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

And the vision of the Glory of G-d was like a consuming fire at the top of the mountain before the eyes of B'nei Yisroel.

<sup>14</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת פְּנֵי כִי לֹא יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחָי:

Hashem said, ‘You will not be able to see My face because man cannot see me and live.

וירד ה' על הר סיני - יכול ירד עליו ממש, תלמוד לומר (שמות כ"ט<sup>15</sup>) כי מן השמים דברתי עמכם. מלמד שהרכין שמים העליונים והתחתונים והציען על גבי ההר, כמצע על המטה, וירד כסא הכבוד עליהם:

*Hashem descended upon Mt.Sinai* – I might think that He literally went down – therefore it is written, 'Because from the heavens I spoke with you.

This [paradox] teaches that Hashem bent down the upper and lower heavens and he covered them upon the mountain, like the covers on the bed, and the *Kisei HaKavod* descended upon them.

While we do not know, and cannot know, the exact meaning of this verse, we do understand that it tells us that Hashem became uniquely close to Israel.

By what mechanism does the Shechinah come close to us?

Some of us have learned together, and others among us are currently learning, *Aley Shur II* who, while not relating to our specific questions, provides us with the means with which to approach our question.

In the Perek entitled <sup>16</sup>קירבה וזרות בתורה, 'Closeness and Estrangement in The Torah', Rav Shlomo Wolbe ZT"l describes the way in which we can realize that closeness to Hashem which is available for us.

Rav Wolbe cites the Gemara in Masseches Shabbos (105 b) that sharply criticizes a person who destroys things in a fit of anger and fury. The Gemara says that if someone repeatedly loses control and commits repeated destructive acts, at the end, eventually, he will worship idolatry.

The Gemara writes:

מאי קראה – (תהילים פא/י) לא יהיה בך אל זר ולא תשתחוה לאל נכר, איזהו אל זר שיש בגופו של אדם - הוי אומר זה יצר הרע.

---

<sup>15</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם כִּי מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם דִּבַּרְתִּי עִמָּכֶם:  
Hashem said to Moshe, "This is what you shall say to B'nei Yisroel, "You saw that I spoke to you from the heavens'.

<sup>16</sup> מערכת התורה פרק א

What Posuk teaches us of this terrible progression? It is the verse, 'You should not have *in you* a foreign god and you should not bow down to a foreign god.' What foreign god is *in* the body of man? That is the *Yetzer Ha'ra'*.

Noting that זר means 'a stranger', Rav Wolbe teaches that the *Yetzer Ha'ra'* introduces estrangement into man – an estrangement from G-d, that in its extreme, will lead to עבודה זרה, a service to idols, a service that is inherently estrangement from HaKodosh Boruch Hu! He writes (Page 83):

בכל מידה רעה יש זרות.

Within every bad attribute of behavior – there is estrangement.

That is, bad *middos* lead to estrangement, being distanced from Hashem.

It is certainly clear, then, that good *middos* bring us closer to Hashem as they remove the causes of estrangement from within us.

In fact, Rambam has already taught this idea in the Seventh Perek of his *Shemonah Perakim*, his introduction to Masseches Ovos. Let us learn the first part of that Perek:

הפרק השביעי - במחיצות ועניינן.

*The Seventh Chapter – the Mechitzos-Barriers and About Them*

הרבה ימצא במדרשות ובהגדות, ויש מזה בתלמוד, כי מן הנביאים מי שיראה את ה' מאחורי מחיצות רבות, ומהם מי שיראהו מאחורי מחיצות מעטות, לפי ערך קרבתם אל ה', ועילוי מדרגתם בנבואה. עד שאמרו, שמשא רבנו ראה את ה' מאחורי מחיצה אחת מלוטשת, רצוני לומר: שקופה, והוא אומרם: "הסתכל בספקלריא המאירה עינים". ו'ספקלריא' שם המראה העשויה מגשם שקוף...

It is found extensively in Midrash and Aggadah, and some in the Talmud, that among the prophets there are those who will see Hashem with many barriers in-between [and their vision will be relatively blurred] and there are those who will see Him with few barriers in-between [and their vision will be relatively clearer]. This is all proportional to their closeness to G-d and the height of the level of their prophecy.

To show the extent to which the barriers can be minimized, Chazal said that Moshe Rabbenu saw Hashem with only one barrier in-between, and that barrier was 'shiny'. That means that it was transparent. That is the meaning of what Chazal meant when they said that 'Moshe saw through an *aspaklaria*-window that enlightened the eyes.' An *aspaklaria* is a mirror that is made from transparent material...

והכוונה בזה הענין, מה שאומר לך. והוא, שאנו כבר בארנו בפרק השני, כי המעלות - מהן מעלות שכליות ומהן מעלות מידות. וכן הפחיתויות - מהן פחיתויות שכליות...ומהן פחיתויות מידות, כרוב התאוה, והגאווה, והכעס, והקנאה, והעזות, ואהבת הממון, ומה שדומה להן, והן רבות מאד. וכבר זכרנו החוק בידיעתן בפרק הרביעי. ואלו הפחיתויות בכללן, הן המחיצות המבדילות בין האדם ובין ה' יתעלה. אמר הנביא, מבאר זה: (ישעיה נט/ב<sup>17</sup>) "כי אם עוונותיכם היו מבדילים ביניכם לבין א...ל'קיכם". יאמר, כי חטאינו, והן אלו הרעות, כמו שזכרנו, הן המחיצות המבדילות בינינו ובין יתעלה.

The intent of the above is that which I say to you. That is, we have already explained in the second chapter that there are two types of levels that people can reach, some are intellectual levels and some are *middos*-behavioral levels. And, there are ones of lowness.

There is lowness in intellect...and lowness in *middos* – such as excessive desires, conceit, anger, jealousy, brazenness, the love of money and similar things – and they are many.

And we already mentioned the need to know the lowness of *middos* in the fourth Perek.

These low levels, all of them, are the *mechitzos*-barriers that separate man from Hashem.

That is what the prophet says, 'But it is your sins that separate between you and your G-d.' He means that because of our sins, and those are the bad

---

<sup>17</sup> The entire verse reads:

כִּי אִם עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם הִיוּ מַבְדִּילִים בֵּינְכֶם לְבֵין אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְחַטָּאוֹתֵיכֶם הִסְתִּירוּ פָנִים מִכֶּם מִשְׁמוֹעַ:  
But it is your iniquities that were separating between you and your G-d and your sins hid the Divine Face from you so that you could not hear.

*middos* as we explained, they are the *mechitzos*-barriers that separate between us and Him Yisborach.

And now we have the initial explanation and reply to our question:

Besides the inherent teachings of the first part of Parshas Yisro, and they are many, there is another lesson that is evident if we search for it: the exceptional *Middos* of Moshe Rabbenu. Those exceptional *Middos* were the means by which the *Mechitzos*-barriers were removed almost totally so that G-d could 'descend' to the top of the mountain and the Revelation could occur.

However, one may protest and say that the Revelation should have been for Moshe Rabbenu alone; *he* was the one who broke down the barriers and removed them. It was *his* vision that was one that 'enlightened the eyes'.

However, the Revelation was not for Moshe Rabbenu alone. All of Israel perceived the Revelation! Where do we learn that they broke down the barriers and removed the *Mechitzos*?

We read Rambam's Hilchos Mamrim (Perek 2/Halachah 4):

ויש לבית דין לעקור אף דברים אלו לפי שעה...כיצד בית דין שראו לחזק הדת ולעשות סייג כדי שלא יעברו העם על דברי תורה, מכין ועונשין שלא כדין...כדי להחזיר רבים לדת או להציל רבים מישראל מלהכשל בדברים אחרים עושין לפי מה שצריכה השעה, כשם שהרופא חותך ידו או רגלו של זה כדי שיחיה כולו כך בית דין מורים בזמן מן הזמנים לעבור על קצת מצות לפי שעה כדי שיתקיימו כולם...

Beis Din has the authority to uproot even these things<sup>18</sup> temporarily. For example: If Beis Din sees the need to strengthen religious observance and to make a fence so that the general populace does not violate the Torah, they can give lashes and administer punishments not according to the normative Halachah, in order to bring back the masses to religious observance or to save the masses from stumbling and erring in other matters – this can be done according to the needs of that time.

---

<sup>18</sup> See the previous Halachos in Rambam there.

Just like the doctor will amputate a person's hand or a foot so that the entire person will live, so does Beis Din teach at various times to violate some Mitzvos temporarily so that all the Torah can be fulfilled.

Radbaz writes there:

כשם שהרופא חותך וכו'. אין המשל הזה צודק אלא אם כן אנו רואין את כל ישראל כאילו הם גוף אחד ואף על פי שגופין מחולקין הם כיון שנשמותיהם ממקום אחד חוצבו הרי הם כגוף אחד כי הנשמה היא עיקר, ודע זה...

*Just like the doctor amputates etc.* – This parable is correct only if we view all of Israel as being 'one body'. And even though it is true that they are separate bodies, since their souls are hewn from the same place, they are like one body because the *neschama* is that which is significant.

What does the Torah famously teach us in the Posuk that connects the first section of Parshas Yisro with its second section?

We read there (Perek 19/Posuk 2):

וַיִּסְעוּ מִרְפִּידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְּבַר סִינִי וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַּר וַיַּחֲנוּ שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגְדַת הָהָר:

Israel traveled from Refidim and they came to the Wilderness of Sinai and they encamped in the wilderness and Israel encamped their opposite the mountain.

We note the word וַיַּחֲנוּ, encamped is in the singular whereas the other three verbs in the verse are written in the plural: וַיִּסְעוּ, וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ.

We also note that the final phrase of the Posuk seems entirely superfluous. Since the verse says that they encamped in the wilderness, the words נֶגְדַת הָהָר, 'opposite Mt. Sinai' could have been appended to that phrase, obviating the need for the final phrase that Israel encamped opposite the mountain.

But the *p'shat* begins with Rashi's note on the switch from the plural to the singular. We read:

ויחן שם ישראל - כאיש אחד בלב אחד, אבל שאר כל החניות בתרעומת ובמחלוקת:

*Israel encamped there* – like one person with one heart. But the other encampments were with anger and dissent.

How did Israel deserve to be opposite Mt. Sinai, preparing to receive the Torah in a few days' time? They were united. What united them – the absence of anger and dissent.

Anger and dissent are what Rambam discusses as lowness of *middos*. They are what Rav Wolbe discusses as the ingredients of estrangement from G-d.

They removed those lowly *middos* at Sinai.

It is true that we do not see evidence of such a removal on the part of Klal Yisroel but we do see that evidence on the part of Moshe Rabbenu.

Since in general Israel is like 'one person because of the uniting power of our *neshamos*,' as Radbaz explained, Moshe Rabbenu's *Middos* became the uniting factor for Israel, since they were **אחד בלב** and he raised Israel to the level where Hashem could meet them as He descended.

Such was the power of Moshe Rabbenu that the Torah allows us to see at the beginning of Parshas Yisro, a power that let him lead Israel, lead us, to receive the Torah by the unprecedented, and never to be equalled, Revelation at Mt. Sinai.

The strength of Moshe's character is still in our midst. It is in our *neshamos* and it can be imported from the great people who are our contemporary leaders, as long as we wish to be **אחד בלב**.

As Moshe Rabbenu told Israel at the end of his life (D'vorim Perek 30/Posuk 14):

כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלַי הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִי וּבְלִבִּי לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ:

Because this matter is very close to you; it is in your mouth and your heart to do it.

We can come close to Hashem. We can take down barriers; we can banish estrangement.

**בפיך ובלבך** – we have the potential and it is within our control to actualize it.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock