



Parshat HaShavuah

יתרו

YITRO

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כ"ב שבט תשע"ג

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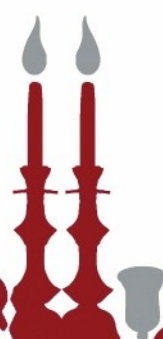
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Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

1-2

THE GAME OF INCHES

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

CHAIM OHAYON ('16)

2

This week's parsha is a "big event" parsha; in this week's parsha we read the עשרת הדיברות. What is very surprising regarding the עשרת הדיברות is their timing. One would have thought that as soon as בני ישראל leave מצרים and cross the ים סוף, the experience of מצרים would become a distant memory and we would be prepared as a nation to receive the תורה.

ARIEL HAAR ('13)

2-3

ELIANA FELDAN ('13)

4

However, the תורה tells us:

“בחדש השלישי לצאת בני-ישראל מארץ מצרים ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני” —“And in the third month from when בני ישראל left מצרים, on that day they came to the Sinai Desert.”

Why does Hashem not give בני ישראל the תורה as soon as they are out of danger? Does Hashem not want to give His most precious and honorable gift to בני ישראל right away?

I would like to suggest that perhaps Hashem wants to teach us a valuable lesson regarding our relationship with the תורה. This Sunday is one of the biggest sporting events of the year. For many who never watch football during the regular season, something about this big event draws thousands upon thousands of viewers nationwide. For some it is the commercials, but for many others it is the long-awaited game. What draws so many people to this event is the fact that after a long and hard season it all comes down to one game, a game of inches.

Inch by inch the team moves farther and farther down the field. Inch by inch the players move towards a touchdown and one step closer to that glorious victory.

We live in an environment of instant gratification. If we do not get what we need in 10 seconds, it's too slow. If something is not "right now," it is already too late.



Continued page 2





Rabbi Hochman continued

However when it comes to תורה, instant gratification just doesn't work. תורה cannot always be received and comprehended in a split second. For some people it takes a few minutes, for others a few hours, a few months, or even years. תורה is a lifelong journey, and just as the Super Bowl teams play hard all season to finally reach this one penultimate day, so too we push ourselves, "inch by inch" until we are able to receive the תורה.

בני ישראל need to journey a little further before they are able to receive the תורה. They can't expect to get such a precious gift right away. Neither should we. Our journey towards learning תורה should be undertaken with pride and joy, knowing that we will ultimately reach the "end zone," we just have to take it inch by inch until we get there.

TRUST AND BELIEVE

CHAIM OHAYON ('16)

This week's parsha begins with Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, coming to meet the Jews in the desert. During Yitro's visit he realizes that Bnei Yisrael's system of asking questions and resolving dilemmas is very inefficient and unfair to Moshe.

This results in the proposition that Moshe should appoint wise people to answer the questions in his stead, with only the most difficult questions reaching Moshe himself. This revolutionary system has become a model for countless other judicial systems. This suggestion from Yitro—a former idol worshiper—highlights the importance of trusting others. Sometimes other people can bring an entirely new perspective to the table and enlighten us with new and fresh ideas. If we open ourselves up to other people's ideas and perspectives, who knows what we can accomplish?

THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

ARIEL HAAR ('13)

Moshe and his wife Tziporah, the daughter of Yitro, have two sons. The names of the children tell the story of Moshe's wandering before returning to Egypt as Hashem's messenger to redeem the Jewish people: "The name of the first was Gershom, because he said, 'I was a stranger in a strange land.' The name of the other was Eliezer because 'the Lord of my father helped me and rescued me from Pharaoh's sword.'"

The origin of Eliezer's name is stated directly: "because the Lord of my father helped me and rescued me from Pharaoh's sword." But the origin of Gershom's name—"because he said, 'I was a stranger in a strange land'"—includes the words "he said," which seem superfluous. Why could the Torah not have simply stated, "because I was a stranger in a strange land?"

The Baal Haturim explains that these words allude to a midrash in Parshat Shemot. The midrash states that Yitro gave Moshe permission to marry Tziporah only on the condition that he deliver his firstborn son to be trained for the priesthood of Midyan. Moshe complied and allowed Yitro to have his firstborn son, Gershom.

Continued page 3





Haar continued

Why does Moshe have to give his firstborn to Yitro? Because Yitro has reminded him that he is a stranger in a strange land and is not in a position to reject his prospective father-in-law's conditions to the marriage. Therefore, the words "because he said" allude to Yitro's reminder that Moshe is a foreigner in Midyan.

The Baal Haturim further explains that Moshe believed that giving up his son was the right thing to do. He wanted to bring Yitro closer to Hashem and the Jewish people, and he felt he could accomplish this by marrying Tziporah. Even though he had to agree to Yitro's terrible condition, Moshe believed his father-in-law would ultimately come around. But what was Yitro thinking?

According to the Midrash, Yitro is a real truth-seeker. He comes to the realization that the avodah zarah of Midyan is nonsense. He then travels all over the world to investigate the sects of different kinds of avodah zarah, and rejects all of them. Then he returns to Midyan, resigns from his high office, and renounces avodah zarah altogether.

Yet here is the mystery: he places this condition on Moshe's marriage to Tziporah after he renounced all avodah zarah! Why would he insist that his grandson be trained for the priesthood of the Midyanite avodah zarah when he has already determined it is worthless?!

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, a former Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva, offers an insight into Yitro's mentality. He believes that the best way to arrive at the truth is through journey of discovery, just as he has done. Yitro believes that the Torah is definitely the truth, but he has learned this by experiencing what all other cultures have to offer and determining that the Torah is superior.

This is also how he wants his grandson to discover the truth. He does not want him brought up in one narrow ideology, sheltered from all other cultures and ideologies. Better that he should use the inquiring mind he would inherit from his grandfather and then follow in his grandfather's footsteps, starting in the priesthood of Midyan and then eliminating one false ideology after the other until he discovers the truth of the Torah. This would be intellectually fulfilling and satisfying. His grandson will know he has made his own decision, and he will be comfortable with it.

Yitro comes to Judaism through rational investigation. Therefore, he makes the serious error of directing his grandson toward the priesthood of the Midyanites. Yitro wants him to investigate for himself, to find the system that appeals to his reason. This is not the way of the Torah. We do mitzvot because we are obligated to do them—because we are servants of Hashem obligated to obey Him; not because we choose to do these things, but rather because we have decided they represent the truth. We only apply reason to recognizing Hashem; afterwards, it is all obedience.

Based on a Dvar Torah by Rabbi Frand



THE GOLDEN MEAN ELIANA FELDAN ('13)

This week we read about the climax of the Exodus story, the reason Hashem takes us out of the bondage of slavery and creates a free nation: *Matan Torah*. Bnei Yisrael are instructed to camp by the foot of the mountain, undergo an intense spiritual and physical cleansing, and prepare for the Divine revelation that has been promised.

But, when looking at the structure of this week's parsha, you cannot help but notice its beginning; a brief but prominent anecdote about Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, how he brings Tziporah and her sons to the *midbar*, and how he helps Moshe by suggesting a more practical and efficient justice system. Would you not think that after the renowned and miraculous stories of the ten plagues, the mass exodus from Egypt, the splitting of the sea, Hashem would continue on with the story of the Divine revelation, rather than pausing to insert a story seemingly able to fit in elsewhere? Clearly there is a message that can be learned by this story's placement, one that needs to be learned before we read the *Aseret Hadibrot*.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand in his "*Rabbi Frand on the Parshah 2*" explains in the name of Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz that Yitro has the "super power" of *koach habikores*, being critical. While to many that may seem not a power but a curse, Yitro is able to use it to find the balance between possible extremes. He is neither too critical nor too kind—he is able to judge each case with the exact amount of criticism it deserves.

So then why here, in the moment before Bnei Yisrael are able to receive the basis of their religion, their playbook to building a relationship with their Creator, does Yitro play such a central role?

The answer can be found in Bnei Yisrael's first action as a united people with the Torah as their guide: *chet haegel*, the sin of the golden calf. The moment they have all been waiting for finally arrives and bam, the first thing they do is sin.

Hashem understands human nature, and understands that humans have the tendency to sin. While none of us are perfect, we must each strive to be. And so before Hashem provides for us the "rules and regulations" in striving for perfection He first gives us a hint to the golden key of success: *koach habikores*.

Each individual, as well as the community as a whole, is unable to grow without the ability to look back and evaluate our actions with the proper amount of criticism. Beating yourself up and losing hope after one mistake is not going to allow for perfection in being close to Hashem, and neither will blowing off your mistakes and not taking them seriously. The way to success is to be able to take a step back and evaluate both our mistakes and our triumphs—and with that hopefully we will be able to reach the true potential within each of us.

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