



פרשת יתרו
Parshat Yitro



Ashreinu אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



THE GIFT OF RENEWAL
RABBI AKIVA WOLK

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ARIELLA GREENBERG (22')

ATARA KEEHN (23')

JUDAH BERMAN (21')

NAOMI REICHENBERG (22')

After the parsha describes Yitro joining Moshe and the Jewish people in the desert, we are told of their preparations for Matan Torah. As a preamble,

the pasuk says:

בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּיוֹם הַזֶּה
בָּאוּ מִדְבַר סִינַי

“In the third month after the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai” (Shmot 19:1).

The word (month) comes from the root חודש, (new). Rav Soloveitchik, in a 1974 speech, pointed out that the Torah here is reflecting a third re-

newal experienced by the Jewish people. The first or renewal, was political. They were freed from slavery, no longer under the jurisdiction of their Egyptian masters. The second חודש was psychological in nature. Leaving Egypt allowed them to transform from a nation with a slave mindset to that of a free people, in charge of their own time and direction. Now we have בחודש השלישי, the third renewal, which afforded the Jewish people free will to serve Hashem through Torah and Mitzvot.

The concept of renewal and the experience that it affords us is a very powerful one. There are countless opportunities for renewal that, if we seek them out and take advantage of them, can transform our lives. Each morning we have a chance to “create” ourselves anew. Each month, with the new moon, we can turn the page on the past and look forward to the future. Each Rosh Hasha-

na we have the challenge to take stock of the person we have become and make necessary changes. For us, returning from winter break is another one of those moments of חודש, renewal. It is a time that we can recommit ourselves to our learning and growth. We can put half of the school year in the books, renew our efforts, and look towards a brighter future.

May the חודש השלישי experienced by the Jewish people in this week's parsha be a catalyst for our own individual renewals and continued success.

TAKE THE HELP

ARIELLA GREENBERG (22')

In this week's parsha, Parshat Yitro, we learn a valuable lesson about guidance. The Torah tells us:

וַיֹּאמֶר חִתָּן מֹשֶׁה אֵלָיו לֹא־טוֹב הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה

“And Moshes' father-in-law said to him, the thing you are doing is not right” (Shmot 18:17). Yitro was speaking about the fact that Moshe had overburdened himself with the tremendous responsibility of acting as a judge for all of Bnei Yisrael. The phraseology used to describe what Moshe is doing, לא־טוֹב הַדְּבָר, is used only one other place in the Torah; in Bereishit, the pasuk says:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים לֹא טוֹב הֵיטִיב הָאָדָם לִבְדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה לוֹ עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ

“The Lord, God said, It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him” (Bereishit 2:18).

Hashem decided to create Chava so that Adam would not be alone because, “it is not good for one to be alone”. These two places where the phrase is used both describe instances where the situation being deemed “not good” is a sit-

uation where someone is alone. This teaches us that unity and lack of isolation are strong values in the Torah. Additionally, the word *chayim*, life, is plural, teaching us that life is not something that can be experienced singularly. We must make ourselves a community of people in order to truly experience the beauty of living. This point is demonstrated in Pirkei Avot:

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אוֹמֵר, עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רֵב, וְיִקְנֶה לְךָ חֲבֵר

“Yehoshua ben Perachia used to say: appoint for yourself a teacher, and acquire for yourself a companion” (Avot 1:6). This mishna shows us the value of finding a teacher and a friend for ourselves. While being independent and self-sufficient are important qualities, it is equally important to acquire the resources for help and to ask for it when need be. The Torah and our rabbis realized this value, and so did Yitro. Even Moshe, who was described as *Ish Ha-Elokim*, had to delegate and lessen his burden in order to be a better leader. When he recognized that he needed help, he sought it out. We can learn from this to make sure not to become overburdened and to seek out guidance when necessary whether it be from teachers, friends, family, rebbeim, or, of course, from Hashem. Have a wonderful Shabbos!

STRONG FOUNDATION

ATARA KEEHN (23')

Rabbi Elya Lopian, a giant of the Mussar movement, points out that it is strange that among all of the commandments, having good character traits is not mentioned. Rabbi Lopian explains that this is similar to a person who hires a contractor to build him a house. Even though he does not explicitly mention that a foundation will be built, it is implied within the agreed price because it wouldn't be possible to build a house without it. Good character traits are also a prerequisite to being able to receive the Torah. The power of the Torah is that it forces us to be more thoughtful, kind, and truthful.

There's a pasuk in Tehillim that says:

אֱמֶת מֵאֶרֶץ תִּצְמַח וְצִדִּיק מִשָּׁמַיִם נִשְׁקָף

“The truth will sprout from the earth and righteousness will look down from heaven” (Tehillim 85:12).

One of the grandchildren of the Baal Shem Tov wrote that one can only perceive truth after having made himself humble. By lowering yourself to the earth you allow the truth to sprout. We learned this great trait from Moshe in this week's parsha. It begins

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לְקִרְאֵת חֲתָנוּ...

“and Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law...” (Shmot 18:7) Moshe didn't pay attention to the fact that he was the great leader of the Jewish nation. Instead, he went to greet his father-in-law. The Sforno explains that small-minded people cannot recognize that they are beholden to other people. Righteous people, however, never forget because they understand it was only through the input of others that they achieved their greatness. That is why Moshe never forgot what his father-in-law, Yitro, did for him. One of the true signs of greatness is being able to recognize one's debt of gratitude. Being truly great by thinking of those around us is something that we can all aspire towards.

HOLD BACK

JUDAH BERMAN (21')

One of the foundational ideas my father has taught me about life is that it is nearly impossible to force someone to do something if they don't want to, and it is even harder to make them think in a specific way. And yet, in this week's parsha, this ideal is challenged.

In Parshat Yitro, the Jewish people are famously presented with the Ten Commandments. Unlike Moshe's recount of the Commandments in Sefer Devarim, the Commandments in Sefer Shmot happened in the present, just a short

while after the Jews had left Egypt. The entire people gathered around Har Sinai, and Moshe and Hashem delivered the foundational address of the Jewish people. Among these tenets were several key ideas, such as that Hashem is the only God, there are no others like Him, you should not make an image of Him, etc. All the commandments are unique and special, but the last one really makes you think. God tells the Jewish people “You shall not covet” and thus finishes the Ten Commandments.

This last commandment poses a small problem. How in the world can God tell us to adjust our mindset? Sometimes we can't control ourselves or simply impulsively want things that other people have!

I heard an answer to this question several years ago during a Shavuot night shiur at about four o'clock in the morning. The phrase that Hashem uses in the Torah for not coveting is **לֹא תַחַמַּד** -- “You shall not covet.” That root word, however, doesn't always mean to covet. Elsewhere in Tanach, it can be more accurately translated as “take.” So is the Torah telling us that we shall not take? We already have a commandment against stealing! The rebbe who gave this shiur explained that the real meaning of “take/covet” is a point directly before stealing. Often, when we want something or are jealous of something our friend has, the feeling immediately goes away. However, there are times where the feeling grows to the point that we can't bear it, and we proceed to steal. The Torah isn't telling us that we can't want things, rather, it's instructing us to reflect and reject our need for stealing before it actually happens.

Coveting and stealing are basic components of being human. As humans, it is hard for us not to take what we want. However, when we are able to be happy with what we have and be disciplined enough to appreciate it, that is when

we fulfill Hashem's expectations to the utmost.
Good Shabbos.

BRING FORTH LIGHT

NAOMI REICHENBERG (22')

This week's parsha, Parshat Yitro, contains an extremely famous and highly important pasuk:

וְאַתֶּם תְּהִי־לִי מַמְלַכַת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר
תְּדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

'You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."

The Sforno explains that we, Am Yisrael will be a kingdom of priests, a fact that will be known and understood by every nation. The reason every nation will specifically know about Bnei Yisrael is because of the Aseret Hadibrot that follow shortly after our original pasuk. We know of the concept of being an *ohr l'goyim*, a light unto other nations, but specifically here it seems as though Hashem is saying, "Yes, I am about to give you the Aseret Hadibrot, but do you know what your true *tafkid* is? Do you know what words I will command Moshe to tell you even before the Aseret Hadibrot because they are so important? I am telling you that your *tafkid* is to be a *mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh*. I am telling you that when the world is in a dark place, be the light!" The Chizkuni says that we get this privilege of being a *mamlechet kohanim* because of the *Aibeshter's* love for us. It is our literal job to make sure that there is light in this world. This pasuk confirms that we will forever have a tremendous purpose. Being a *klal* means something. It is more than simply keeping the mitzvot! We are here for a purpose that has the utmost value.

Every day Hashem is still fond of us and especially when we exhibit the characteristics of being a *mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh*. *Im yirtzeh* Hashem we should all be *zoche* to be the light in many people's lives and may we be *zoche* to see the building of the Beit Hamikdash because of that achievement.

Have a tremendously *heilige* Shabbos!

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