

discipline. He questions everything; he analyzes everything. The more one develops a capacity for analytical thinking, the greater his objectivity, allowing him to control his emotions – rather than being controlled by them.

When one delves into the intricacies of Torah, he discovers its eternal nature, thus perceiving its Divine Author. *Rav Simchah* explains that in order to enable us to understand Torah, which is a creation that is fathomless and endless, Hashem gave us an accompanying gift: automatic adjustment. He compares this to a mother who is nursing her child. A newborn infant lacks the strength or the capacity for as much nourishment as a two-year-old child requires. Does the mother “measure” her child’s intake? Hashem created it so that the milk is automatically supplied commensurate with the individual child’s capacity to receive. The *Chovos HaLevavos* views this as one of the wonders of Hashem’s Creation.

Torah is very much the same. A *rebbe* who teaches Torah with a focus on the students developing an understanding of the lesson will be blessed by Hashem, similar to a nursing mother. The *rebbe’s* explanation will adjust “itself” to the student, and the student will grasp it on his own individual level. This is because Torah is the product of Divine authorship and, thus, not given to the usual parameters and limitations inherent to secular scholarship.

I would like to end with what I feel is a captivating story which *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl*, relates that encapsulates so much about Torah. A young man came to *Aish HaTorah* as a graduate of Yale University, hailing from a totally secular background, but he ended up spending a year at the *yeshiva* and returning home a Torah-observant Jew. *Rav Weinberg* asked him what motivated him to come to the *yeshiva* in the first place. He explained that he had majored in the Russian language in college. Upon graduating, he decided to test his skills in Russia. While in Moscow, he was told that there was going to be a Jewish celebration in front of the Great Synagogue. That evening, 50,000 Jews gathered in front of the Great Synagogue to dance on *Simchas Torah!*

This was a most haunting experience. Muskovites are a dour lot. No one dances in the street. Yet, here were thousands of Jews dancing with genuine joy! What happened? To find the answer to this pressing question, he became friendly with a group of refuseniks who were learning and teaching Torah throughout Moscow. He joined their classes. Although far from erudite himself, he noted that one of the teachers knew very little. This, however, did not prevent him from teaching.

He asked the “teacher,” “How long have you been learning Torah that you feel proficient to teach it?”

The reply was, “Six months.” For six months, he had attended two to three classes a week, and he was now teaching Torah to others.

“How can you know enough to teach?” he asked.

The fellow looked him squarely in the eyes and said, “I risked my life to learn what I know. My teacher risked his life

to teach me. How can I not teach it? Whatever I have learned is so precious and represents so much that I am willing to risk my life to pass it on.”

It was the power of that message that brought that young man to *Yerushalayim* and the beginning of his life of Torah observance.

Va’ani Tefillah

שיר חדש – שירו לך' שיר חדש
Sing to Hashem a new song.

As David *HaMelech* approaches the conclusion of *Sefer Tehillim* he calls for a “new” song. **Horav Avigdor Miller, zl**, explains that *shirah*, song, is an awakening of the mind by means of emotions and excitement of the senses and intellect. This is expressed through song. What is a “new” song? Apparently, it must be an additional sensation of Hashem. This can occur in one of two ways: either one recognizes Hashem’s power and wisdom in some new phenomenon, previously neglected by us; or by an increasing awareness of some phenomena which we had previously studied. In any event, we derive from here that one should not become complacent in his awareness of Hashem. He constantly bestows kindnesses on us, which obligate us in new songs. The purpose of all life is to praise Hashem. Therefore, one should utilize all the days of his life for this purpose. It is not enough to “have praised.” One must continue praising by delving deeper and studying more, so that his awareness of *gadlus ha’Borei*, the greatness of the Creator, becomes greater and deeper, thereby facilitating recurrent and everlasting esteem and tribute.

In memory of
Meir Bedziner
ר' מאיר בן בצלאל הלוי ז"ל
נפטר כ"ד שבט תשס"ד
on his yahrzeit.

Reb Meir loved people and was beloved by all.
His sterling character and pleasant demeanor were the hallmarks of his personality.

He sought every opportunity to increase the study of Torah and that it be accessible to all.

היה זכרו ברוך
The Bedziner and Meltzer Families

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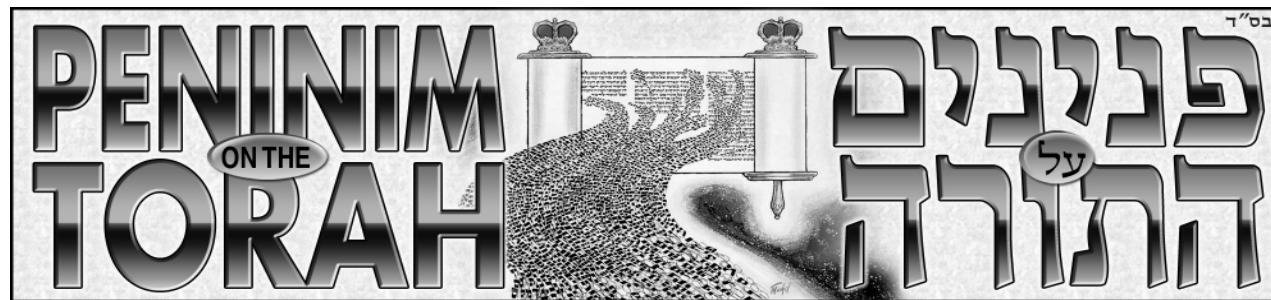
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Parashas Yisro

תש"ע

פרשת יתרו

TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

ישמע יתרו כהן מדין חתן משה את כל אשר עשה אלקים למשה ולישראל
Yisro, the minister of Midyan, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G-d did to Moshe and Yisrael. (18:1)

ויספר משה לחתנו את כל אשר עשה ד' לפניה ומצרים את כל התנאה אשר מצאתם בדרך...

Moshe related to his father-in-law everything that Hashem had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for Yisrael's sake – all the travail that had befallen them on the way. (18:6)

Yisro had been living in Midyan, away from what was happening to Pharaoh and his people in Egypt. News travels fast, and suddenly Yisro became aware of the emerging Jewish nation: how they were liberated from hundreds of years of bondage; how they survived the travail and how they marched out of the country. He heard how the Red Sea miraculously split for them, granting them salvation and destroying their Egyptian oppressors. Yisro also became aware of the battle with Amalek, in which the Jewish people triumphed over the nation which would become their archenemy. All of this inspired Yisro to leave the comfort of his home and travel out to the wilderness in order to join the nascent Jewish nation. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* greeted his father-in-law, he immediately began to relate to him all of *Klal Yisrael's* experiences, the incredible miracles that Hashem had wrought for them, and their salvation which He had catalyzed.

We wonder why Moshe found it necessary to reiterate the story. Clearly, Yisro was aware of all that had taken place. That was why he had come in the first place! He came because he heard; he was there, because he was aware. The **Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh** asks this question and explains that Yisro had heard generalities. He now wanted to hear the nuances, every single detail spelled out. He wanted specifics.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, cites *Targum Yonasan* who teaches that the tent where Moshe took Yisro was the *bais medrash*. Even though Yisro had heard what Hashem had done for the Jewish people, he had heard it all before and formulated it in his mind. The decision to join the Jewish nation was predicated upon Yisro's own logical conclusions. He had not had the benefit of viewing these events through the prism of Torah. Yisro had not yet been availed the Torah perspective on these occurrences. While events which take place before our very eyes may point in one direction, under the lens of the Torah they might represent a completely different perspective. Yisro was

missing the Torah's view, so Moshe took him to the *bais medrash* to teach him the Torah's view on the miracles.

Yisro achieved an elevated spiritual plateau on his own, but-- without a Torah perspective-- he was standing on a precarious perch. Many people get turned on to Judaism through artificial stimulation – a *kumsitz*, a *Shabbaton*, an emotional gathering. It does not last unless it is concretized with Torah study. Seeing is believing only if one sees through the correct lens.

There is another dimension to viewing everything through the prism of Torah. **Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl**, says, “The distance between the heart and the mind is greater than the distance of heaven to earth.” Every individual is comprised of the heart, which is the seat of emotion, and the brain, which represents one's intellect. In order for the soul to achieve its purpose, the heart and the brain must work in harmony. We need both. Emotions motivate us to observe; passion drives our observance. Without intellect, we often fail to understand the truth about Judaism. We have questions that need answers which emotion cannot provide. Likewise, intellect alone will lay the groundwork for a cold, insipid relationship with *Yiddishkeit*.

Yisro heard about the miracles. He was on an emotional high. His enthusiasm was piqued, but how long would this stimulation last? At what point would he confront issues that were likely to undermine his positive “feelings”? How much pain could he sustain before the positive feelings would begin to falter? An intellectual understanding of Judaism prepares him for challenges to the heart, as the heart helps him overcome the challenges to his intellectual belief. Moshe told Yisro, “You heard; we saw, but-- without sitting and learning in the *bais medrash*, without intellectual appreciation of *Yiddishkeit*-- your stimulation could begin to wane.”

Horav Yerachmiel Krohm, Shlita, takes a different, albeit practical, approach. Let us analyze why Yisro felt he had to leave Midyan in order to journey out to the barren wilderness to be with the Jewish nation. Yisro was a truth-seeker. His entire life was comprised of one long search for the truth. He was not the only one to have heard about the wonders and miracles that accompanied the exodus of the Jewish nation from Egypt. Many other nations heard, but it left no lasting impression on them. It was like a dream that dissipates once one wakes up. Yisro heard, reflected, and decided to respond to it. He left home and journeyed to the wilderness. He wanted to join this nation.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* came out to greet his father-in-law – he and the rest of *Klal Yisrael*. After all, when Moshe went out to greet someone, everybody followed along. What an incredible honor this was for Yisro. Moshe understood the tremendous danger that confronted his father-in-law. Yisro had heard about all of the wonderful things that had occurred, but the Egyptian exodus was not all a positive experience. The Jews had had to overcome much adversity, pain and travail. Confronting their masters at the banks of the Red Sea was a fearful experience. Battling with Amalek was terrorizing.

In other words, most of the miracles were either preceded or accompanied by adversity. The *manna* descended from Heaven on a daily basis, but this did not mean that the people did not worry every night lest they would not have breakfast waiting by their door the next morning. Judaism is about man's daily struggle with his fears, inclinations, ego and demons. One for whom the Torah is his guide has something to hold on to, to lean on during periods of uncertainty. *Olam Haba*, the World to Come, is the ultimate reward for a life of virtue, but the pathway to the Eternal World of Truth is through this world.

Moshe was concerned that Yisro might only look at one side of the coin. In order to develop a clear perspective on Judaism, the world has to view the nation through the prism of reality. He, therefore, related the “rest of the story” to Yisro. Yes, we won – but not without a fight. We live above the rules of nature. Our existence is miraculous. We travel through the travail; we survive the vicissitudes. It is all through Hashem's intervention – if we are deserving.

Reality eludes many of us. It is so much easier to live in a dream world in which everything works out, no one becomes ill, children are perfect, money is always available. Regrettably, it does not always work that way, and it is important that we be realistic about this when presenting Jewish life and observance to someone who is newly initiated. *Rav Krohm* takes us into the field of education, illustrating how too much of the “positive” can defeat our purpose and undermine our goals.

A student presents potential for achievement. The *rebbe* responds with encouraging comments and excellent grades. He continues to motivate with positive reinforcement, painting an impressive picture of: how far the student can go; all the benefits of being a successful student; how the schools will line up to accept him; and the wonderful opportunities that will avail themselves. The *rebbe* fails to mention the challenges that appear along the way, hardships he will have to overcome. He convinces the student to continue his education in a specific *yeshivah gedolah* without mentioning that the student will be one of many such special students in this *yeshivah*. It will require diligence far beyond what he has demonstrated in the past in order to maintain his present level of achievement. In other words, it is very easy to present a rosy picture, but is it honest? In order to prevent an illness, one often must be inoculated with a strain of that illness, so that he can build up immunity to it. So, too, must we present the entire picture, so that our students will be prepared and immunized.

Moshe related it all to Yisro, because he wanted his father-in-law to make an intelligent decision based upon a clear picture of the reality of Jewish life. When one knows what the future has in store, then the present does not weigh him down. Yes, it will not be easy, but look at the finish line: *Olam Haba*.

יָרַד מֹשֶׁה מִן הָהָר אֶל הָעָם

Moshe descended from the mountain to the people. (19:14)

Rashi cites the *Mechilta* that comments: “Moshe did not concern himself with his personal affairs at all. He immediately went from the mountain to the people.” It seems like a great sacrifice, but spiritual leadership demands nothing less than total devotion to the *klal*, community. When we think about it, what really were the personal affairs of Moshe *Rabbeinu*? Did he really spend that much time at home? **Horav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv, Shlita**, tells us that Moshe's “personal affairs” were unlike ours. He cites the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Melachim* 12:4, who says: “The great sages and the prophets did not desire the days of *Moshiach* because this would allow them to rule over the world...They sought this idyllic period because they would then be free to study Torah and plumb its wisdom...so that they could merit life in the World to Come.”

This teaches us, opines *Rav Elyashiv*, that Moshe's idea of personal affairs was none other than sitting and learning, so that he would merit *Olam Haba*, the World to Come. His personal life was Torah – and nothing else. Yet, he gave it all up, so that he could be free to address the needs of *Klal Yisrael*. He sacrificed his own *ruchniyus*, spirituality, so that *Klal Yisrael* would grow spiritually. This was his greatest sacrifice.

I remember *Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl*, relating that after his father, *Horav Zalman, zl*, came to *Eretz Yisrael* and settled there, his goal was to sit and learn all day and not involve himself in anything else. *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, called upon him to chair the *Chinuch Atzmai*, Torah Schools for Israel, the nascent educational system that adhered to Torah standards. It was this organization that allowed observant children to receive a Torah education. At first, *Rav Zalman* demurred claiming that he had no strength; he wanted to devote his time totally to Torah study. *Rav Aharon* asked him to be *moser nefesh b'ruchniyus*, literally, sacrifice his own spiritual dimension, so that Jewish children could receive a Torah education. *Rav Zalman* agreed. He gave up the opportunity for personal spiritual elevation, so that *Klal Yisrael* would benefit.

The *Ponevezzer Rav, zl*, *Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl*, was the architect of Torah in *Eretz Yisrael*, post World War II. After losing his wife and all but one son in the Holocaust, he managed to escape and emigrate to *Eretz Yisrael*. He could have felt sorry for himself, but instead he channeled all of his energies into the task of rescuing and comforting his grief-stricken brethren. In what seemed at the time to be a wild dream, he purchased a large parcel of land in the growing town of Bnei Brak, with plans to build a *yeshivah*. This was the cornerstone, the beginning of the *Ponevez Yeshivah* and the Torah empire which he established. He lived with the vision of a rebuilt *Klal Yisrael*. He did not rest, as he globetrotted around the world, raising funds for his manifold projects. He answered the call of the people. He listened with his heart, as he saw the pleas expressed by the tearful eyes of the broken survivors. He sacrificed his *ruchniyus*, so that others could benefit. He once pointed to the outside façade of the *Yeshivah* building and remarked, “Each brick is another *shverer*, difficult, *Rambam* that I could have explained.” He gave up his own learning to allow others to study *Rambam*. Yes, he limited his own opportunities, but he enabled so much more to be achieved.

לֹא תַחַמְדוּ בֵּית רֵעֵךְ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֵךְ

Do not covet your fellow's house...not anything that belongs to your fellow. (20:14,15)

If we were to explore which transgression in the Torah encompasses all others, from which prohibition should one

distance himself the most, the responses would vary. Some would have an intellectual twist; others would focus on the philosophical; and yet others would address the ethical. We might be able to narrow it down. *Chazal* teach us that the *Aseres Ha'Dibros*, Ten Commandments, encompass the entire Torah. They serve as the foundation for the *Taryag*, 613 *mitzvos*. Therefore, all we must do is figure out which of these Ten Commandments carries the greatest weight, which one incorporates all of the others. In his *Even Sheleimah*, the **Gaon, zl**, *m'Vilna* points out that the very last commandment, *Lo sachmod*, Do not covet, encompasses all the other commandments as well. **Horav Chaim Vital, zl**, comments that this is why it is the last of the commandments. It encompasses all of the others. One who covets -- who is envious of what others possess, and is driven to have it for his very own – is falling into that abyss which is the root of all evil.

Why is this? Why should one who covets what someone else has considered the paradigm of evil? If we think about it, it all really does make sense. This person is obviously dissatisfied with what he possesses, constantly envious of his fellow. In *Yiddish*, he would be referred to as an *umtzufridener mentch*, unhappy person. Nothing he has is good enough for him. He always wants what the “Joneses” have. Where is the source of this evil root? What drives a person to such discontent?

It comes from a lack of *emunah*, faith, in the Almighty. He does not trust Hashem, or he subconsciously does not believe that Hashem guides his life as part of a Master plan, and that what he has – and what he does not have – is for a clear and defined reason.

We now understand why *Lo sachmod* tells it all, why it is the one transgression that encompasses all of the others. If one does not have faith in Hashem, if he lacks *emunah*, then the rest of the Torah has no meaning or value. The cornerstone of Jewish observance is belief in Hashem. Without this essential ingredient motivating our observance, it will shortly dissipate. Believing in Hashem goes much further. One must recognize that who he is – the *neshamah*, soul, which serves as his identifying feature – is determined by Hashem. Likewise, it is Hashem Who determines what life situation is best for nurturing his individual, unique soul. This is defined as a person's destiny. In other words, a believing Jew trusts that whatever happens to him is part of his ultimate destiny, as decided by Hashem. To covet is to deny this reality, thus undermining the entire corpus of Jewish belief.

Hashem wants us to be ourselves – not anyone else. Everything about our lives is part of His plan. Thus, when we are dissatisfied with our lot, we are actually disagreeing with Hashem's decision. Hashem has custom-designed our daily challenges – both spiritual and material/physical – specifically for us. Moreover, He gives us the fortitude to withstand these challenges. To covet means to seek other challenges without the support of Hashem. That is something to consider.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, notes that the tenth commandment is one which only a Divine Lawgiver could have legislated. A mortal ruler can enact laws against activities which are physical actions, such as murder and theft. Only G-d can legislate in the area of thought and attitude. Only Hashem can tell us to sanctify our minds. Only He knows whether we have purged ourselves of jealousy. He can tell us not to covet, because He knows if we are listening to His command.

In closing, I would like to explain one aspect of this prohibition which we often tend to ignore – either purposely or inadvertently. I remember writing this in one of the earlier

Peninim, but it is certainly worth repeating. After mentioning the various possessions belonging to a fellow Jew which we are not to covet, the Torah concludes with an all-inclusive, *v'chol asher l'reiecha*, “and all that belongs to your fellow” (ibid. 20:14). If we are forbidden to covet “all that belongs to our fellow,” why does the Torah itemize the previous “possessions,” such as wife, house, servant, etc.? Ostensibly, they are included in “all that belongs to your fellow.” I once heard a very practical explanation for this redundancy. People are envious of their neighbor, friend, etc. The other fellow has something – I also want it. The other fellow has it easy earning a living, marrying off his children – I also want it. The Torah tells him: *v'chol asher l'reiecha* – take into consideration all that your fellow has to contend with. There are aspects of his life of which you are unaware. There are occurrences down the road of which you and he are unaware. When one covets, he needs to take the entire picture into perspective. Suddenly, one is no longer quick to covet. He can do without the other fellow's living, his car, his wonderful life, because there are aspects of his life that he is not prepared to accept. Many things are included in Hashem's decision to provide an individual with good fortune. It is all part of a large equation. The Torah intimates to us: think twice before you covet, because included in all your good fortune is “all that belongs to your fellow.”

וְכָל הָעָם רָאִים אֶת הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת הַלְפִידִים...וַיִּרְא הָעָם וַיִּנְוּ

The entire people saw the thunder and the flames...the people saw and trembled. (20:15)

The greatest moment in Jewish history, the most seminal Revelation which the Jewish people experienced, was *Mattan Torah*, the Giving of the Torah, on *Har Sinai*. What does this mean, and how does it affect us? If a Jew studies Torah, but either has no clue or simply does not believe in its source on Sinai, does it make a difference? It is Torah anyway – or is it not? One who studies Torah, but is not conscious that it is the very same Torah that was given to us by Hashem on *Har Sinai*, has drained all life from the Torah. Conversely, one who studies Torah, fully aware of its source and recognizing its Divine authorship, merits that the Torah then enters into his entire system, generating life within him. When we connect with *Har Sinai*, the Torah becomes alive. When *Har Sinai* is nothing more than an abstract legend or archaic tradition, then we study Bible.

Horav Simcha Wasserman, zl, gives an excellent analogy. When a plant is growing, its roots spread beneath the ground. Through this process, the roots provide sustenance to the plant from the nutrients of the soil. When the plant is growing, it has life. If one were to sever the plant from its source in the ground, the plant would die. It may have value as a piece of wood, but it is no longer alive. It is not a living plant. Likewise, there are those who “protect” the Torah in their libraries and museums. Essentially, for them the Torah is dead. They are storing it in a mausoleum. They have cut themselves off from the living Torah. One is alive as long as the respirator connects him to the oxygen. *Har Sinai* is our lifeline. To deny its role in the life of a Jew is to commit spiritual suicide, and, if we impose this line of thinking on others, we commit spiritual murder.

The root of all Judaism is Torah from Sinai: The Jewish personality receives its sustenance from this root. When firmly implanted in that root, the Jewish personality flourishes: he is vibrant, ethically correct and serves the Almighty with passion and vigor. In addition, one who studies *Torah m'Sinai* develops an intellectual maturity unlike that of any other