

into its realization – that spurred Yaakov on later in life.

We all have obligations to our parents (and to our mentors). How often do we take the time to begin to contemplate our *chov kadosh*, holy obligation, to honor our parents in the manner they deserve? The *mitzvah of kibbud av v'eim* is a command from Hashem, which is not contingent upon one's feelings of gratitude. It is just so much more "meaningful" when one feels a reciprocal responsibility. One who does not experience a feeling of gratitude might very well be expressing a personal deficiency of his own. Certainly, we find numerous families in which grown children act indifferently toward their parents as a result of a son or daughter's deficient character and self-serving attitude toward life in general, and parents in particular.

Maintaining a strong sense of gratitude toward parents, to the point that one would never let them down as he goes through life, is a task which defines one's achievement. We should never forget upon whose shoulders we stand. *Horav Yisrael Meir Lau, Shlita*, former Chief Rabbi of Israel, never forgot his mother's last minute gesture. He went through his teenage and early adult life without uttering the word *Mameh*, until, out of deep respect and admiration for his mother-in-law, he began to call her *Mameh*. The last time that he had pronounced this word was when he was seven years old. At the last fraction of a second, his mother pushed him into the arms of his eighteen year old brother, as she realized with a mother's intuition that this was the only way to save him.

It was at the train platform in his hometown of Piotrkow, and the accursed Nazis were dividing up the "passengers," men going to one side and women and children to another. Young Yisrael Meir was small in build; thus, his mother was able to cover him up with an oversized pillow on which she had sewn several straps. In reality, it was a makeshift duffle bag. His mother told him always to hold onto the pillow, because it was his satchel containing his worldly belongings.

Standing by the train, his mother realized the consequences of male/female separation. The women and children were being sent to death camps, while the men would be spared, so that they could work until it was their time to be sent away. With the pillow on his shoulders, the young boy was covered and unnoticeable. He was holding on to his mother's hand, while his older brother stood to the side. His mother was directed toward a railcar, and Yisrael Meir thought that he was joining her. At the very last moment, his mother made an instantaneous decision. She shoved him (with the pillow on his shoulders covering him) in the direction of the men. The young boy had no idea what was happening. He heard his mother scream to his brother, "Take Lulek (Yisrael)! Goodbye, Lulek!" and he never saw his mother again.

Mother and son had no time for conversation, no hugs and kisses, no tearful embrace – just a wave, as the Nazis shoved her into the train. His brother did not

understand. What would he do with a child, a seven year old boy? Yisrael Meir went into the rail car with the men (He was covered with the pillow, thus unnoticeable.) It was the most difficult moment of the war for him. He never before and never after cried as did on that day that he was separated from his mother. It took years to understand his mother's sacrifice. By pushing him away, she saved his life. He never forgot this act of courage. His mother's memory never left him. Indeed, he views this act of heroism as the shoulders upon which he has stood his whole life.

Va'ani Tefillah

Teka בשופר... ושא נס לקבץ... וקבצנו יחד
Teka b'shofar...v'sa neis l'kabeitz... v'kabtzeinu yachad

Sound the *shofar*...and raise a banner to gather...and gather us together.

This prayer includes three expressions that imply ingathering: sound the *shofar* for our freedom; raise a banner to gather in our exiles; gather us together from the four corners of the earth. Ten tribes were exiled prior to the tribes of Yehudah and Binyamin. We refer to them as the Ten Lost Tribes. These Ten Tribes were split in their exile, with some exiled somewhere in "the dark mountains," and the rest going even further to a place that was "beyond the Sambatyon River." The *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna* explains that the first two expressions of redemption refer to the Ten Tribes: the ones who disappeared in the dark mountains; and the ones who disappeared beyond the Sambatyon River. We also ask that, once this exile is over, these ten tribes will unite with the other two tribes until all of *Klal Yisrael* reunite as one people. We are all in exile, all lost, until we all come together as one unit. We do not live solely for ourselves. We believe that all individuals are part of a large collective unit that is incomplete until all of us are together. We pray for this thrice daily, realizing that we are unable to achieve our ideal until all Jews are once again united.

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear

mother and grandmother,

Leona Genshaft

נאה בת רפאל הכהן ע"ה

נפטרה מ"ז שבט תש"ע

by her family

Neil and Marie Genshaft

Isaac and Naomi

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Parashas Yisro

תשע"ה

פרשת יתרו

וישמע יתרו

Yisro heard. (18:1)

The name of a *Parsha* is not arbitrary. It has been chosen by design, for a reason, for a purpose, to teach a lesson. This brings us to the name of our *parsha*: Yisro. Unquestionably, Yisro was an extraordinary human being: father-in-law of both Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Elazar ben Aharon *HaKohen Gadol* and the grandfather of Pinchas, who is Eliyahu *HaNavi*. But do their relationships warrant that a *parsha* be named after him? It is not as if we have a *parsha* named for the Patriarchs, Yosef *HaTzaddik* or Aharon *HaKohen*. Veritably, our *parsha* is about *Mattan Torah*, the Giving of the Torah. Yisro is a prelude to the Torah, because a lesson about Torah learning can be derived from Yisro.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, explains that Yisro taught us two essential prerequisites to Torah study. First, *Vayishma* Yisro, "Yisro heard." Did not everyone hear of the amazing miracles and wonders that Hashem wrought for His People? They heard – with their ears – not with their hearts. When Hashem told Shlomo *Hamelech* that He would grant him a wish, Shlomo asked for a *lev shomea*, "a heart that hears" (*Melachim I* 3:9). One who hears solely with his ears, hears superficially, as in "going in one ear and out the other." If what we hear does not enter into our hearts, if we do not integrate what we hear into our being, then what we heard did not achieve its intended effect. Listening is insufficient. We must review, scrutinize and absorb what we have heard. Otherwise, it will soon dissipate.

Second, when Yisro heard, he immediately altered his lifestyle by picking himself up, packing everything, and leaving his home in search of the Jewish People. Only someone who truly seeks the truth, has the mettle to leave everything behind, his entire past, in pursuit of his goal. Yisro sought the truth. He searched through every religion, every dogma, and realized that the only truth was Judaism. It was this drive for the truth, this passion for spiritual integrity, coupled with a critical assessment of his discovery, that catapulted him to join *Klal Yisrael*. Had he been someone who listened without heart, accepted the superficial without truly assessing the veracity of its dogma, Yisro would have remained an idol worshipper in Midyan.

Thus, the Torah places Yisro's story as a prelude to *Mattan Torah*, for us to deduce that these two traits are critical to Torah acceptance. In order to receive the Torah, one must hear with his heart. And an astute, thinking person who is truly in pursuit of the truth will undoubtedly arrive at the truth. Those who do not seem to "find it" are not really looking – or listening.

וישמע יתרו...כי הוציא ד' את ישראל ממצרים

And Yisro heard...that Hashem had taken Yisrael out of Egypt. (18:1)

Originally, Moshe *Rabbeinu* had taken his entire family with him to Egypt. Aharon *HaKohen* urged him to send them back to Midyan. His contention was very practical: The Jews in Egypt were already suffering; why should Moshe add to their number? Now, after hearing about all of the miracles, Yisro realized that the time had come for the family to be reunited. *Chazal (Midrash Rabbah, Shemos 4:4)* relate Moshe's response to his brother's admonishment. He said, "Tomorrow (in the near future), they (*Klal Yisrael*) will leave Egypt and stand at the foot of *Har Sinai*, where they will hear Hashem declare, *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*, 'I am Hashem, your G-d,' and my sons will not hear – *k'mohem*, like them."

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, observes that Moshe was underscoring the words "like them." This means that, while it is true that his sons would experience the Revelation at *Har Sinai*, would be privy to hearing the first two *dibros*, commandments, directly from Hashem, they would not "hear," experience the Revelation on the same spiritual plane as *Klal Yisrael*. This is due to their not having experienced slavery as did *Klal Yisrael*. There is no comparison between listening to Hashem's declaration after having just emerged from 210 years of suffering and misery and to being present as a spectator. Moshe wanted his sons to experience *Har Sinai* at its apex, something which only a slave could do. Thus, he wanted to bring them down to Egypt.

L'fum tzara agra, "The reward is commensurate with the pain," is a well-known aphorism of the *Tanna*, Ben Hai Hai (*Pirkei Avos 5:26*). The reward for observing Hashem's commandment is increased in proportion to the effect and discomfort one experiences in its performance. Idiomatically, it might suggest that success comes with a price. Here it means that the level of the *Har Sinai* experience increases with the level of slavery one suffers, because the more difficult the physical trek to the mountain, the greater the spiritual ascendancy one experiences when he arrives. All the pain will have been worth it when one sees the incredible reward.

While no one wants to feel pain, suffer loss, or experience disappointment, all too often, when attempting to avoid the inevitable, we become victims of emotional numbness. If one creates an environment in which he feels no pain, he will never understand the joy, the exuberance, of living, growing, succeeding. I saw an inspiring quote, "The bad part about being so numb is there will come a time when you will want to feel something, but you will not know how to."

When there is no experience of pain, there is no experience of joy.

How we react to pain also defines us. If we become immersed in the suffering and pain that we experience, we end up wallowing in self-pity and depression. People suffer, but, at a certain point, one must move on. We must attempt to use the pain as a springboard for opportunity, for building, for spiritual and emotional growth. Yosef *HaTzaddik* was viceroy over Egypt. As a result of his royal position, he did not participate in carrying the coffin of his father, Yaakov *Avinu*. As a result, when the Torah details the census (*Bamidbar* 1:32) and the division of *degalim*, banners, it writes: "For the sons of Yosef... for the sons of Ephraim." It does not say: For the sons of Yosef, for Ephraim." Yosef is moved aside as he is replaced with the sons of Ephraim. The *Baal HaTurim* explains that, since he did not carry his father's coffin, the banner representing his *shevet*, tribe, is attributed in name to his son, Ephraim. Thus, the Torah writes, "To the sons of Ephraim." True, as a king he simply could not participate, but... since he did not carry the coffin, he cannot gain the name of the banner. *L'fum tzara agra*.

Often times, it is very likely that the pain, the challenges and the problems that arise are really the solution for which we are waiting. With time and patience, we will see how everything turns out satisfactorily. The following story expresses this idea. There was an astrologer who claimed that he could foresee the future by reading the stars. The king had great respect for this astrologer and accepted all of his forecasts. As happens often, when one person finds favor in the eyes of the king, another advisor, usually someone who is quite insecure, becomes obsessed with envy and slanders the king's favorite. An advisor told the king that his favored astrologer was a sham artist who was fabricating his forecasts. The king became angry. No one wants to be manipulated. The king had the astrologer picked up and, in no time, passed judgment to have him executed.

The astrologer was led outside and told to stand against the wall. The king said to the executioner, "When I give the signal, you will shoot." The king then approached the astrologer and said, "You say that you know everything. Tell me, how are things with you right now?" The astrologer replied, "Things are far from good."

"When do you think you will die?" the king asked.

"I do not know, but I do know that, whenever it will be, I will die exactly three days before the king," the astrologer replied.

When the king heard this, he began to shudder with fright. Instead of signaling the executioner to kill the astrologer, he put him in charge of the man's safety. It was vital that the astrologer be protected from all harm. The king felt that his life was bound up with that of the astrologer. The astrologer now realized that what he thought was a life-ending problem had actually become his salvation. He now had a full-time body guard to protect him from harm. We derive from here that the problems which seem to envelop us, which we fear will consume us, are actually Hashem's way of solving what could have developed into a serious problem.

יהי מחזרת וישב משה לשפוט את העם

It was on the next day that Moshe sat to judge the people. (18:13)

Family is the most important unit in Judaism. It is the center of Jewish life. Indeed, the early collapse of traditional Judaism in this country, a collapse which led to the growth of the secular streams with their own brands of Jewish perspective, was followed closely afterwards by the collapse of the Jewish home. The traditional Jewish family had been secularized as a result of the powerful draw of assimilation. This led to the breakdown of the synagogue, and the rest is history. It is, therefore, amazing that Moshe *Rabbeinu* did not spend more time with his newly-arrived family from whom he had been separated for some time. I quote the following commentary from the *Abarbanel* (free translation):

"The Torah found it necessary to make known that Moshe sat down in judgment immediately, on the following day (after Yisro's arrival). For a number of days, he did not occupy himself with his father-in-law, his wife and sons. On the day of their arrival, he spent time with them, but, immediately, on the very next day, he returned to his position as leader. He spent the entire day, from early morning until late at night, in judgment. His primary focus was on his position as leader – not as husband, father, and son-in-law."

Imagine this happening in contemporary society. One's wife and children arrive after a lengthy separation; the leader will most certainly take some time off to spend with his family. They need time to catch up, to talk about what has taken place in their individual lives. Moshe *Rabbeinu* was different. His focus was on *Klal Yisrael*. True, he had a family, but the members of *Klal Yisrael* were also his family and, as leader, he had a moral obligation to address their needs, to listen to their grievances, to soothe their nerves, to engender hope within them. That is the job of a leader. Personal time for personal issues was kept to a minimum. The nation came first.

זכור את יום השבת לקדשו ... לא תענה ברעך עד שקר

Remember the *Shabbos* day to sanctify it ... You shall not bear false witness against your fellow. (20:8-13)

The *Midrash Rabbah* (47:6) teaches that the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, were written side by side, five on each tablet. Thus, the injunction to observe *Shabbos Kodesh* stands opposite/next to the prohibition against false testimony. A Jew who observes *Shabbos* attests that the world was created by Hashem's utterance. When one bears false testimony, he corrupts his speech, which leaves him unable to testify that Hashem created the world. (He created it, then He rested on the Seventh Day. *Shabbos* attests to this verity.) Truth is the force that keeps the world alive, while falsehood is destructive. One who prevaricates cannot possibly provide testimony about *Shabbos*. This means (I think) that, while one can observe *Shabbos* – for himself, it does not necessarily mean that his observance serves as testimony. Thus, such a person's observance lacks the ability to inspire others to observe. The *Zera Shimshon* underscores every Jew's connection to *Shabbos* as a witness to the creation of the world. This places an added responsibility of *Shabbos* observance. First, it is a *mitzvah*. Second, it is our testimony attesting to Hashem as Creator of the world. A Jew who observes *Shabbos* makes a powerful statement: "I attest to the fact that Hashem created the world."

Rabbi Nachman Seltzer relates a story within a story concerning *Shabbos*, which emphasizes the Jew's partnership with Hashem in the creation of the world. A *Chassidic* Jew once came to the *Rebbe* for a *brachah*, blessing. He was going through a difficult period, and he and his wife were facing a tremendous test from Heaven concerning their infant son. As soon as the *Chassid* entered his *rebbe's* chamber, he burst out in bitter and painful sobbing. The *Rebbe* waited as the man cried himself out. Once he regained control of himself, he began to speak. His young son lay curled up in bed deathly ill... The doctor had just about given up hope. From a medical point of view, the child had no chance of recovery. The man left his wife at the hospital to await what the doctor claimed was the inevitable, while he went to his *Rebbe*.

The *Rebbe* listened to his *chassid's* tale of woe. He did not just listen, he hung on every word. When the *chassid* finished speaking, the *Rebbe* kept silent for a few moments, then said, "Do you think that I can just issue a blessing and Hashem grants me my every wish? It does not work that way at all!" But, the *Rebbe* continued, upon seeing the crestfallen face of his *chassid*, "There is one time every week when this is not so. Hashem created the world in six days and rested on *Shabbos*. On the holy day of *Shabbos*, we become partners with Hashem in Creation. On *Shabbos*, there is a special *koach*, power, granted for a Jew to ask Hashem's favor. After all, in our role as partner, we may make certain requests – such that we would never dream of asking during the week. So, go on home, and you can be certain that, this *Shabbos*, I will *daven*, pray, for your child, imposing on the special partnership we Jews all have with Hashem on this special day."

I write this story because it impacted me greatly. Who does not have a "shopping list" for Hashem? Who does not have that one *bakashah*, request, that keeps gnawing at him, that controls his life, and is on his mind every waking moment? For some, it is health, personal or family; others require *parnassah*, a livelihood; yet others have issues with children/siblings and people in general. Now we know that *Shabbos* is an *eis ratzon*, special time when our prayers are heard. Like everything else, however, there is a catch: one must be *Shabbos* observant. This means that one's level of *Shabbos* observance has to be paradigmatic of a testimony about Hashem as Creator of the world. Who is prepared to say that his observance can tolerate such scrutiny? While we all observe the prohibitions, do we honor and sanctify *Shabbos* appropriately? Do we dress the part; go to *shul* on time; make *Shabbos* meals that include Torah thoughts and *zemiros*? Yes, all of this is part of positive *Shabbos* observance. The manner in which we observe *Shabbos* defines our attitude towards *Shabbos*: is it a drag, a day off, or a day of spiritual advancement?

Rabbi Seltzer relates another *Shabbos* story, which I feel is most meaningful and, regrettably, relates in some manner to many of us. A *chassid* once came to his *Rebbe* with a heavy heart. "*Rebbe*," he cried, "my business is suffering. Day after day, I am losing money. I cannot turn a profit. If it goes on like this much longer, I will be bankrupt."

The *Rebbe* looked at the *chassid* and asked, "Tell me, do you ever discuss your business on *Shabbos kodesh*?" This is a question that no one wants to be asked, since we are not on the spiritual level of entering into *Shabbos Kodesh* as if it were an island in time, with our minds totally

devoted to spiritual elevation. The *chassid* trembled as he replied, "*Rebbe*, I am almost never home during the week. The only time that I have to speak with my wife is on *Shabbos*. Yes, invariably, there have been times that my conversation gravitated toward my business. It is not as if this was the original intent of the conversation, but, during the course of an extended, relaxed meal, business does invariably enter the subject matter of our conversation." The *Rebbe* listened, then looked his *chassid* in the eye and said, "If you will be *mekabeil*, accept upon yourself, that from here on in you will never talk about your business on *Shabbos*, then I can guarantee that your business will prosper as it did before."

I write this story because it affects us all. Our *Shabbos* observance is more than just a *kiyum mitzvah*, fulfillment of Hashem's command. When we observe *Shabbos* we are offering testimony that Hashem created the world. When we observe *Shabbos*, our spiritual comportment has to reflect the type of demeanor that one who is a partner with Hashem in the creation of the world would exhibit. Thus, when we act in such a manner, we have the "right" and "opportunity" to ask Hashem, our "Partner," for His blessing. It is as simple as that!

כבוד את אביך ואם אמך נמנו יאריכון ימך

Honor your father and mother, so that your days will be lengthened. (20:12)

The *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, were inscribed on two tablets. Hence, the name: *Luchos*. The Ten Commandments are divided equally with: five devoted to *mitzvos bein adam laMakom*, between man and G-d; and five devoted to *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro*, between man and his fellow man. Interestingly, the *mitzvah* of *kibud av v'eim*, honoring one's father and mother, is listed on the tablet dedicated to *bein adam laMakom*. *Chazal* (*Kiddushin* 30b) teach that, when one properly honors his parents, it is considered as if he has honored Hashem. This is probably due to the fact that they "partner" with Hashem in the conception and birth of a child.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, would cite the *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 68:6) concerning Yaakov *Avinu's* leaving home, due to his fear of Eisav and because the time had come to search for a wife. On the way, Elifaz, son of Eisav, attacked him and left him penniless. This was followed by Yaakov's continuing on to the home of the deceitful Lavan, the man who would be his father-in-law. Despite these hindrances, which would have impeded the goal of a lesser man, Yaakov moved on and established the underpinnings of *Klal Yisrael*.

How did he do it? From where did he garner the strength to overcome these trying situations? The *Midrash* explains that it was the knowledge that, "If I give up now, all of the efforts that my mother expended to assist me in obtaining the *brachos*, blessings, from my father will have been for naught." Rivkah *Imeinu* made many sacrifices for her son, Yaakov. She risked her marriage and, quite possibly, her life, to guide Yaakov in the ruse to receive his rightful blessings. It was all so that Yaakov would derive the spiritual benefits of those blessings. How could Yaakov turn his back on his mother; how could he fail her? It was this sense of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, based upon a profound acknowledgement of the favor – and everything that went