



A COLLECTION OF TORAH THOUGHTS BY

Rabbi Chaim Z. Levitan

ענפי ארץ



פרשת יתרו

There are times in everyone's life when we wish - usually helplessly - that we could be someone else.

Sometimes it is a person with unusual talent or exemplary character which enables them to accomplish achievements that we pedestrians can only long for. We envy, without malice, people of remarkable perseverance and humans with the near angelic property of always smiling and being upbeat. We wish for some musical talent and abandon the hope to reach the level of knowledge and intellect of those geniuses that wander into our lives. I have a confession to make: I am guilty of all of the above, but there is something that I sometimes wish for which I assume is unique. I wish I could have been a fly on the wall when Yisro and his social-worker had their sessions. What an interesting, enigmatic and intriguing person!

We find Yisro as one of the three advisors to Pharaoh when he devised the plan to throw all the Jewish children into the sea. We should be able to assume that being an advisor to the king presumes intelligence – despite what our last election proved. He refuses to sign off on the decree, and runs away to Midian, and was Zocheh to have his descendants sitting in the Mikdash (Sotah 11a). Mefarshim enlighten us and teach that the Zechus which Yisro had, in not participating in Pharaoh's plan, enabled him to give advice to Moshe and have a Parsha named after him. He was the pope of Midian that realized the folly of its Avodah Zara, and he renounced it, which results in him being ostracized. No one would work for him, so he must utilize his own daughters as shepherds, who also suffer from him being an outcast (Rashi Shemos 2:16). Yisro then goes searching for g-d, and travels the world with no success – he encountered **EVERY** Avoda Zara – (he went to India, Africa, Jamaica and maybe even Berkley California) - Rashi 18:11. He finally comes to

the realization that **ה' הוא האלקים**, and he joins Moshe with great honor. It seems as if this lonely man searching for the truth finally achieved his goal. But then we find that he leaves again (18:27), and according to some even BEFORE the giving of the Torah, saying that he is going to be **מגיר בני משפטו**, his family (Rashi quoting Mechilta). See **דברי ירמיהו**, who explains that the Mechilta really says **ואגיניר לכל בני מדינתי ואבאים לחולמוד** – the whole country. The actual words of the Mechilta are: **ואגיניר לכל בני מדינתי וארצנו תחת כנפי השכינה. יכול שהלך ולא עשה וכוי'** – which he understands that Yisro was not able to convince the entire country BUT ONLY HIS OWN FAMILY. Yisro remains steadfast even in the face of Moshe's impassioned pleas for him to stay – see **בעהלותך 10:29-32** based on the reading of **פשטוטו של מקרא**. However, see Ramban (Shemos 18:1) near the end where he says that **ונראה שקיבל דבריו ועשה כרצונו ולא עזבם** that Yisro in fact stayed with Moshe. See Sforno here and in **בעהלותך** who seems to learn that Yisro refused to go into Eretz Yisrael because of his age and health - **שלא תסבול זקנתי אויר הארץ ומזונותיה** - so much said for a middle eastern diet.

We are even more startled at the **קינוי** - descendants of Yisro – who Shaul has to warn to leave Amaleik, who they were living with, before he goes to war with them. With Amalek? One of the catalysts for Yisro becoming a Ger, and yet they befriended them? They cannot sit still. In our world, behavioral analysts would figure out some form of an acronym with letters of the alphabet to describe that diagnosis.

To understand this, we need to peek, just a little, into what so many of the Mefarshim discuss. Let's start with Chidah in Sefer Shoftim in Shemos 17:14 (**מגורי הארץ**) among others, who alert us to Yisro having some of **נשימת קין** - which is why he descendants are called **קינוי**. The Sefarim really go to town with this idea – enough to

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בצד

fill two or three articles – but not this one. We focus only on this point: Part of Kayin's punishment was to be נוד ונוֹד (Beraishis 4:12-14) and as Rashi explains - אין לך רשות לדור במקום אחד - you cannot live in one place. A good friend of mine Rav Nachum Eisenstien ZT'L, explained the Pasuk וישב בארץ נוד (Beraishis 4:16) to mean, that even though always connotes permanence, in Kayin's life, even when he lived in one place, it felt shaky and non-enduring. He was never comfortable where he was. The Kayin/Yisro entity may really have been the first wandering Jew.

We all know the Chazal about what prompted Yisro to join Klal Yisroel – קריית ים סוף ומלחמת עמלק. I once saw a phenomenal understanding of this Chazal - though I can't find it now – and we can use it to understand another question as well. The Pasuk relates – eight Pesukim after Yisro's arrival – that Moshe told him all that Hashem did to Pharaoh and Mitzrayim, את כל התלאה אשר מצאתם בדרך all the trouble that had befallen them and that Hashem had rescued them. Rashi explains “the trouble” as being the Yam and Amalek. What was the need for that, question many Mefarshim, Yisro knew this from the start of his quest to embrace Yiddishkeit, that was the שמע ותא. What did Moshe add at this time? There is a מורה אידיעך Vort here. All Yisro heard was of all the glorious נסים that Hashem did to these people on their way to accept the Torah at Sinai. But the road to Sinai is not always paved with supernatural miracles and riches pulled from the dormant walls of the sea. But should it not be? I'm on my way to You Hashem, determined to climb the הרים, so make it easy for me. Hook me up with EZ-pass so I don't even have to stop. Moshe explained to Yisro that the two things that moved you so, stirred you to join us are two separate and distinct הנהנת ה', methods of dealing with mankind. Krias Yam Suf required nothing on the part of Yisroel - just decide to walk through – וזה יתnom לכם. No hostages, no violence, just easy street with an ocean-front

view. Sometimes. The מלחמת עמלק was the opposite, as we learned from the Mishnah. There were times of גבור עמלק and there were times of גבר ישראל, back and forth. We won, but it was not without effort. Even when we thought we had conquered them again, the enemy renewed itself and the suffering continued. Moshe was teaching Yisro how to deal with EVEN when we try to elevate ourselves towards the genuine greatness of being עבד ה'. Be prepared for the setback, because that is all part of the נסיגון, especially for someone coming from so far away. See Sforno as he explains the trouble as ברעב – חלאה – trouble as ובעצמא ומלחמת עמלק – all the problems. Rabeinu Bachya includes the bitter waters and “the bread which they brought along from Mitzrayim spoiling” (see Rav Chavel who cannot find a source for that – I guess I am not alone) and Milchamos Amalek. Not just the rewarding miracles that revitalize and encourage, but also the trying days in which we are overcome, losing ground. We must endeavor to rise above, never losing sight of the vision of Moshe reminding us to be משעבדין לבן לאביהם שבשמיים.

The lesson for all of us is any effort to improve our Ruchnius should be easily achieved, but the Yetzer Harah has not retired yet and there is always a קטרוג (see Rav Tzaodk in *קדמת הצדיק*). Our job is, to overcome the natural frustration of “gimme a break” which all comes from the Yetzer Harah. It is a hard job, but I always tell Talmidim that always, or almost always, that what's easy is usually not worth it.

May we all be Zocheh to see במרה all of the נסים that Hashem promised us.

מצפים לישועה.

נון זיהזיה
ח'ם מילא ג'י'ג'



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