

THE Chabad WEEKLY ^{Vol. 4, # 17}

Chabad of North Beverly Hills, 409 Foothill Rd. Beverly Hills, 90210
 Rabbi Yosef Shusterman 310-271-9063

This week's Torah portion, Yitro, contains the narrative of one of the greatest historical occurrences of all time: the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. Yet this is not readily evident by the name of the portion, which is called by the name of Moses' father-in-law.

Every word, letter, and subtle grammatical nuance in the Torah teaches us volumes; how much more so, the names of the portions themselves. What then, is so significant about Yitro that the Torah portion containing the Ten Commandments is given his name? Yitro, described in the Torah as "a priest of Midian," was not merely a highly respected official in his native land. Yitro was the high priest of idolatry, who had explored every type of idolatrous worship and philosophy in the world. The Zohar explains that the Torah could not be given to mankind until Yitro had rejected each and every false god, and had publicly accepted G-d's sovereignty. Yitro was the symbol of the power ancient man invested in gods of wood and stone. It was only when Yitro declared "Now I know that the L-rd is greater than all the gods," that truth prevailed, and the Torah could be given.

The most dramatic contrast occurs when darkness itself is transformed into light. In Hebrew this is called "the superiority (yitron) of light over darkness," a light which shines forth from a place it had previously been unable to reach. It is also interesting to note that Yitro's name is linguistically related to this as well. Yitro's acceptance of G-d also reflects the reason why the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. Prior to that time, the Patriarchs were already following the Torah's commandments, and Jews had studied Torah while in Egypt. What was innovated at Mount Sinai was the power to infuse the physical world with holiness, to combine the spiritual and the material simultaneously. The G-dliness concealed within the physical world could now be uncovered and revealed, according to G-d's plan.

When Yitro not only rejected his false idols, but joined the Jewish people in their faith, it paved the way for future generations to transform darkness into light and to build a dwelling place for G-d in this world. A Jew's task is to sanctify his physical surroundings and imbue them with holiness. Yitro therefore merited that an entire portion of the Torah bears his name, for he personified the mission of every Jew and the reason for the giving of the Torah. (From: *Living with Moshiach* 5759. www.moshiach.net)

Thus you shall say to the House of Jacob and tell the Children of Israel."

Yitro 19:3 Our sages state that "House of Jacob" refers to the women of Israel, and "Children of Israel" to the men. When G-d gave the Torah to Israel, He told Moses to approach the women first. The purpose of the exodus from Egypt was for the Jewish people to receive the Torah at Sinai, as it is written: "When you will have brought the people out from Egypt, you shall serve G-d upon this mountain" (Shemot 3:12). Of the exodus itself it is said that it occurred in the merit of the pious women of that generation. Thus, when it came to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the women were given precedence.

The Messianic redemption, too, will come about in the merit of the righteous women of Israel, as stated in the Midrash: "All generations are redeemed by virtue of the pious women of their generation" (Yalkut Shimoni, Ruth: 606). Thus the women will once again be first to receive the wondrous teachings to be heard from Moshiach.

And they camped in the desert (19:2) In the ownerless wilderness was the Torah given to the people of Israel. For if it were given in the Land of Israel, the residents of the Land of Israel would say, "It is ours"; and if it were given in some other place, the residents of that place would say, "It is ours." Therefore it was given in the wilderness, so that anyone who wishes to acquire it may acquire it. (Mechilta D'Rashbi)

Why was the Torah given in the desert? To teach us that if a person does not surrender himself to it like the desert, he cannot merit the words of Torah. And to teach us that just as the desert is endless, so is the Torah without end. (Pesikta D'Rav Kahana)

And it came to pass on the third day (19:16) A Galilean scholar lectured before Rabbi Chisda: "Blessed be the Merciful One who gave a three-fold Torah (consisting of Torah, Prophets and Scriptures) to a three-fold people (comprised of Kohanim, Levites and Israelites) through a third-born (Moses, the third child of Amram and Jocheved) on the third day in the third month. (Talmud, Shabbat 88a)

The Torah is associated with the number "3" because the ultimate function of Torah is "to make peace in the world" and "3" represents the concept of peace. Peace is unity in diversity. The number "1" implies exclusivity and singularity; the number "2" connotes diversity and plurality; the number "3" represents a state in which the diversity of "2" is superseded by a third, encompassing truth, within whose context differences no longer divide but rather unite diverse components into a harmonious whole. This is the function to Torah: to introduce a unity of purpose to the diverse objects, forces and peoples of creation, uniting them all in the harmonious endeavor of serving the divine objective in creation. (The Chassidic Masters)

Honor your father and your mother (20:12) There are three partners in man: G-d, his father, and his mother. When a man honors his father and his mother, G-d says: "I consider it though I had dwelt among them and they had honored Me." (Talmud, Kiddushin 30b) (The commentaries point out that the Ten Commandments were engraved on two tablets--five on the first and five on the second. The first tablet contains mitzvot that are "between man and G-d," while the commandments on the second tablet govern the relationship "between man and man." This means that as the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," belongs to the category of "between G-d and man"! - chabadonline.com)

Purpose of a Leaf

*As a young boy, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchaak would go with his father on walks through the woods. One time, as they talked, the boy absent-mindedly plucked a leaf off a tree and began to shred it between his fingers. His father saw what his son was doing, but he went on talking. He spoke about the Baal Shem Tov, who taught how every leaf that blows in the wind—moving to the right and then to the left, how and when it falls and where it falls to—every motion for the duration of its existence is under the detailed supervision of the Almighty. That concern the Creator has for each thing, his father explained, is the divine spark that sustains its existence. Everything is with Divine purpose, everything is of concern to the ultimate goal of the entire cosmos. "Now," the father gently chided, "look how you mistreated so absent-mindedly the Almighty's creation." "He formed it with purpose and gave it a Divine spark! It has its own self and its own life! Now tell me, how is the 'I am' of the leaf any less than your own 'I am'?" (From: *Be Within, Stay Above* by Rabbi Tzvi Freeman)*

"THE PEOPLE SAW AND MOVED." (1)

SIMPLY PERCEIVING G-DHOOD CAUSED THE PEOPLE TO MOVE, A MOVEMENT SHOWING VITALITY, LIFE.

IF YOU ONLY KNEW - THE TZEMACH TZEDEK SAID - THE POWER OF VERSES OF TEHILLIM AND THEIR EFFECT IN THE HIGHEST HEAVENS, YOU WOULD RECITE THEM CONSTANTLY. KNOW THAT THE CHAPTERS OF TEHILLIM SHATTER ALL BARRIERS, THEY ASCEND HIGHER AND STILL HIGHER WITH NO INTERFERENCE; THEY PROSTRATE THEMSELVES IN SUPPLICATION BEFORE THE MASTER OF ALL WORLDS, AND THEY EFFECT AND ACCOMPLISH WITH KINDNESS AND COMPASSION. FOOTNOTE: (1) SH'MOT 20:15. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM SHVAT 24).

***When you reach the final ascent of the climb, you cling to whatever twig or feeble root you can find to pull yourself up.
And that is where we are now. Any spark of light that comes your way - squeeze all you can from it.***

-From Bringing Heaven Down to Earth