

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Yitro	26 Jan 2019	20 Shevat 5779	Exo. 18:1-20:23	Isa 6:1-7:6, 9:5-6(6-7)	Matt. 19:16-26

This week's Torah portion is dedicated to my mother-in-law who has returned to Hashem two years ago. May her soul continue to be elevated as I fulfill each mitzvah in her remembrance.

This week's Torah portion begins with "And Yitro...heard" who was a Median priest. Yitro means "in addition" which means he was added in the chapter. As the Torah was perfect even before its "addition", there had to be a reason why Moshe added Yitro in chapter 18. We learned from last year that Yitro was an expert in all types of religion. He was one of three advisors to the Pharaoh. He was disgraced after advising the Pharaoh to let the children of Yisrael alone as they were protected by the Creator Himself. He realized his life was in danger and fled Mitzrayim to Median. His knowledge in pagan religion led him to become a ruler and a high priest of Median.

There is a debate amongst commentators when he came to Moshe. Some commentators said that Yitro came to Moshe before the *matan* Torah. Yitro heard the Ten Plagues, the splitting of the Sea, and the war with Amalek. The Yisraelites, despite leaving with weapons did not fight against the Mitzrim. And Yitro thought the Yisraelites were weak and cowardly. After hearing the war with Amalek, he realized that they were not as he thought and came to an understanding that Yisraelites refused to fight against Mitzrim because they were grateful for giving shelters to their forefathers 210 years ago. Just as Moshe did not lift hand against the Nile River which protected him, and the sands covered to hide the body of dead soldier to protect Moshe. As we have learned that Hashem is measure for measure, so did the Yisraelites in kind.

We learned that Yitro came after the war of Amalek last year. The sages said that Yitro came after the *matan* Torah as the Yisraelites were three days away from receiving the Torah and Moshe did not have enough time to receive his father-in-law. The Zohar teaches that the Yisraelites were so steep into pagan worship and they did not believe in Moshe or Hashem despite all the miracles until Yitro said, "Now I know that YHWH is greater than all the mighty ones (gods)." (Shemot 18:11). Only then, they realized their idol worship was worthless and gave up their pagan idolatry. Thus, Yitro came after the *matan* Torah.

The sages taught that Yitro came a year after the *matan* Torah. The splitting of the sea occurred one week after leaving Mitzrayim. Six weeks later, the children of Yisrael arrived at Mount Sinai to receive *matan* Torah. During their journey, they were attacked by Amalek. Another hint is that Yitro saw Moshe sitting as a judge. Since Moshe could not judge without the Torah, the sages concluded that Yitro came a year later.

The sages explain that Yitro was "added" into the chapter because his role was critical influencing the Yisraelites to fall away from their idol worship and to accept Hashem as their Elohim. Now, we need to understand how and why Yitro was able to influence the Yisraelites. He fled to Median and became a priest there. But he was not satisfied with the idol and continued to search of deity. His expertise with idols were well known to the world. Therefore, his declaration of "Now I know that YHWH is greater than all the mighty ones" convinced the Yisraelites to follow Moshe. We now know how Yitro was able to influence, but as to why the answer is simple. He was seeking for the truth. That was the reason Yitro moved from one religion to another. As he became knowledgeable in the religion, he found fault within it. Therefore, he was flitting from here to there. The side effect of his expert knowledge gave him the credibility to convince the Yisraelites that there is only one, the Creator Himself.

When Yitro came to Moshe, he came with Moshe's wife and her sons (Shemot 18:3), then in verse 5, the Scriptures say, "his sons". Why the conflict? The Zohar answers because Tsipporah raised them without her husband. Therefore, the Torah calls them "her sons" as it would not been proper to call them as they were not in the same "celestial place"¹ as Moshe. Moshe was talking to the Shechinah when Yitro sent a messenger to Moshe. He then broke away from the Shechinah to meet his father-in-law, thus "his sons."

Rabbi Shimon said that "his sons" is inclusive to Yitro's sons as Ya'akov had his sons while he was with Lavan. When Yitro came to Moshe, he brought his whole family with him that they "might all enter together under the wings of the Shechinah" as said in Shoftim (Judges) 1:16, "And the children of the Kenite, Moshe's father-in-law went up out of the city of palm trees."

He² asks: Since it is written "to Moshe" (v. 5), why does the Torah add "in the wilderness" as it is sufficient to say, "to Moshe"? He answers: It is to proselytize them [Yitro and his family] and bring them under the wings of Shechinah for they would come "into the wilderness" to the mountain of Elohim to receive the *nefesh* of the convert. As a mountain doesn't belong to anyone but Hashem as said in B'resheet 22:14 "On the mountain YHWH provides" by Avraham. Thus everyone who comes there is credited with the title "a convert of righteousness."³ The mountain is symbolized as the house of Ya'akov (Yeshayah (Isaiah) 2:3).

Now, when the Torah was given to the children of Yisrael, all the nations were surrounding the mountain. The Talmud explains further that all nations including Yisrael heard the voice of Hashem. The ministering angel of Ishmael refused to accept the Torah as it contained, "You shall not murder." The ministering angel of Esav refused to accept the Torah as it contained, "You shall not steal." However, the ministering angel of Ya'akov said, "We shall do, and obey." (Shemot 24:7) Now, in Shemot 20:19 says, "You [Moshe] speak with us and we hear." The word "hear" in Hebrew is "*shema*" which mean 'listen and obey.'

Rambam⁴ said that after receiving two commandments, the children of Yisrael heard only the first two from Hashem, but they could hear only the sound of His voice as said in Devarim 4:12, "You heard a voice of words, but saw no form, you only heard a voice." It implies that they heard the sound of words but they could not understand the words said to them. They began to faint and their *nefesh* leaving the body as "they trembled in fear" (Shemot 20:18) for they could not tolerate the intense holiness of direct communication by Hashem. For this reason, they spoke to Moshe in the following verse, "You speak with us." (v. 19) (Devarim (Deuteronomy) 5:24-27) However, Ramban⁵ said that this discussion took place before the *matan* Torah. How do we know the children of Yisrael received two Commandments? The word "Torah" in Hebrew is written as (תורה) which has a numerical value of 611 (5+200+6+400).⁶

The highlight of this week's portion is the *matan* Torah as Hashem appeared to all the nations, and only Yisrael accepted His *Torot* (Commandments). It is the central event of the entire Torah and the purpose of creation. The saga of the exodus and its miracles transpired for the sake of the giving of the Torah. When Moshe met Hashem in the burning bush, Hashem said, "and this will be the sign that I sent you when I take out the people from Mitzrayim, you will serve Hashem on this mountain." (Shemot 3:12) What is the sign? Rashi explains that the words 'you will serve Elohim on this mountain' explain that the merit for Yisrael to

¹ Zohar, Yitro, p. 26

² ibid, p. 29

³ ibid, p. 30

⁴ Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1135-1204

⁵ Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, 1194-1270

⁶ BT, Makkos 24a

leave Mitzrayim was Hashem's very big plan, that in the future they are going to receive the Torah on this mountain. Thus, the entire going out of Egypt was for the purpose of receiving the Torah.

Before we discuss in detail about the Ten Commandments, we should discuss the tablets itself. The Talmud⁷ records the size of the Tablet "whose length was six *tefachim*, width six *tefachim*, and thickness three *tefachim*. "*Tefachim*" means "hand-breadth" (4 fingers across measured between 3.16-3.76 inches). So, the length was 18.96" to 22.56"; width 18.96" to 22.56"; and thickness 9.48" to 11.28" which was placed in the Ark. However, these Tablets were a set made by Moshe. (Shemot 34:1) The Gemara explains that the original Tablets were two meters tall. Moshe used parts of the original to make a set of his own Tablets.

Also, the pictures we see today with rounded top is wrong. This image came from the Middle Age when Rembrandt draw the Tablet with rounded top. The Talmud describes the Tablet as a rectangular to fit inside the Ark. Even before third century, the Tablets were drawn as a rectangular.

Now, there are five Commandments written on each Tablet: the first which is on the right side are all the *miztvot* between us and Hashem and contains "Hashem" on each commandments; the second tablets which is on the left side are between me and others. We have learned that there are six different categories of Commandments:

1. Absolute – These are forty-eight mandatory commandments that we MUST observe.
2. Negative (restriction) – These are commandments that are forbidden, such as, not to serve idols.
3. Never have to do it but some have to do it – These are commandments Hashem does not want you to do it, but have to do it. Examples are divorce or execution.
4. Optional based on your will – These are commandments that you can choose to do, such as eating meat.
5. Depending on situation just created – These are commandments that situation did not exist before but now exist, i.e. the biblical Levitical marriage.
6. Depend on the will of a person and Hashem welcomes it – These are commandments depending on you and Hashem approves of you doing it, such as wearing *tzitzit*. Three other examples are by Moshe who divorced his wife, broke two tablets, and adding extra day for sanctification.

The first Commandment is "I am YHWH your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Mitzrayim, out of the house of slavery." (Shemot 20:2) Noam Elimelech said that it should have been enough to say, "I am YHWH your Elohim." Why did Hashem add "who brought you out of the land of Mitzrayim, out of the house of slavery"? He continued that each sentence was according to its level of redemption. Meaning, each person saw his own exile and received its redemption according to his level. For example, the Levites did not participate in hard labor as they were exempt from physical labor due to religious duty. But, they were limited in their activities, i.e. curfew, travelling, etc. Therefore, "I am YHWH your Elohim."

The people who were making bricks understood their redemption from taking away harsh labor. They would arise early in the morning and return late at night. So, their relief was resting from their physical labor. Thus, "out of the house of slavery." As for others, "who brought you out of the land of Mitzrayim," they were in

⁷ BT, Bava Basra 14a

less strenuous labor. For example, the person might be doing well financially. But he might be suffering from other issues, i.e. a sick child, Hashem forbid.

The fifth Commandment of “Honoring your father and mother” is unique and special that it belongs to the right side of Hashem. Why? We will use two examples to have deeper understanding of this mitzvah. First, a child’s father left her when she was born. She received a call from her father many years later that he was dying and wanted her to be with him. Now, she never saw him, nor receive any type of benefit from him. What would you do? What is your obligation according to the Torah? Second example: A woman invites her mother to a Shabbat meal. Every time her mother came, she would berate her daughter beyond exhaustion that disrupts the Shabbat. What would you do? What is your obligation according to the Torah?

The *halacha* (oral law) compares honoring your parents to honoring Hashem. The fact that you honor Hashem is honoring your parents. Why is that? Are you allowed to argue with Hashem? No. So, don’t argue with your parents. Are you allowed to contradict or question with Hashem? No. So, don’t contradict or question with your parents. The *halacha* teaches that we cannot separate the two. The root of all bad *midot* (behavior) is ungratefulness. The root of all good *midot* is gratefulness. If you are grateful to your parents, then you will be grateful to Hashem. We saw gratefulness being displayed by Yisraelites by not warring with Mitzrim, Moshe not striking the water and the sand for gratefulness. So, honoring parents has to be spontaneous. That is why the fifth Commandment is on the right side.

Ahab was a king of Shomeron (Melakim Aleph 22:51) who was prosperous and turned his kingdom to idol worship. He denounced Hashem and His Torot. Eliyahu (Elijah) the prophet decreed that the rain will not come to the kingdom for three years. The Talmud explains that Hashem has three keys: one for rain (Melakim Aleph 17:1), one for resurrection of the dead (Melakim Aleph 17:22), and one for giving birth (Melakim Bet 4:8-17). When Pinehas killed Kozbi, a princess of Mydianite and Zimri son of Salu, he just did not kill them for their act but by performing ungrateful act and attempting to take one of keys away from Hashem.

So, the answer to the first example: She is to visit her father for the birth he has given her. That she should be grateful for him. Why? Because Hashem says so. As for the second example, she is to leave (not invite) or physically relocate to different city as her mother is detrimental. And the child should not suffer under any circumstances that would affect the separation from Hashem.

The conclusion is that we all need to have patience and due diligence in honoring our parents. When we honor our parents, we are honoring Hashem. That is why the fifth Commandment is on the right side of mercy (*chesed*).