

## **Models of Appreciation in the Torah: Yitro & Paroah**

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The midrash frequently tries to emphasize middot in characters in the Torah both as positive and negative examples. One of the reasons for this is that having examples help to concretize middot rather than leaving them in the abstract. We also frequently find a contrast within one section of the Torah where one character acts as a foil for another and we are able to see two approaches to one character trait and the consequences of each choice.

In the first half of Shemot I believe we have a contrast between Paroah and Yitro. There is a study here in how we should approach the good which is done to us and we are given two very different approaches. The narrative of Shemot begins with a Paroah who does not know Yosef (Shemot 1:8). Clearly a Paroah could not know so little about the History of his own nation. What is meant is that he put no stock in the argument that he should deal with the Jews keeping in mind what Yosef had done for Egypt. He had no issue with enslaving the children of someone who had saved Egypt and everyone in it.

Later when Moshe and Aharon approach Paroah, he denies Hashem as well (Shemot 5:2). The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 1:8) draws a parallel between these two events, denying the good that people do is a precursor to denying the good showered on us by our Creator. Paroah is a classic example of a Kafuy Tov, one who denies (or “cover over”) the good which is done for him.

Yitro on the other hand, is a wonderful example of just the opposite, Hakarat Hatov. This phrase is understood to mean appreciation but it really means, recognizing the good. When he hears about how Moshe saves his daughters he immediately asks them why they didn't invite him for dinner to show their appreciation. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 103b) uses this invitation to show the greatness of inviting guests. It brings people closer to the Jewish people and Yitro is the example. Yitro also got a son-in-law who received the Torah directly from Hashem and was the greatest leader of the Jewish people out of one dinner invite and showing a little bit of gratitude.

The Gemara (Sotah 11a) also records that he was one of the advisors of Paroah when the idea of throwing the baby boys into the Nile was proposed<sup>1</sup>. Yitro was unwilling to be part of such a horrible plan and he ran away and was therefore rewarded. Yitro here rejects the very approach which Paroah took. Paroah did not see a reason to show any kindness to the Jews but this was an anathema to Yitro.

Rav Yaakov Kamnitsky (Emet l'Yaakov Shemos 2:20) adds that the quality of appreciation shown by Yitro is an example of an amazing phenomenon. Rav Kamnitsky writes that there are times when if a person is able to really make a specific quality part of their

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<sup>1</sup> We might suggest that what is behind this Agadeta is exactly the contrast between Yitro and Paroah's actions in the Chumash which we are highlighting.

personality then they will launch themselves to great heights. This is exactly what happened to Yitro when he became a person who appreciates. We can add that just as for Paroah he went from denying the good of man to denying the good of God, Yitro has a similar trajectory. He recognizes the good of Moshe and then is the only one who hears the story of *yetziat mitzrayim* and recognizes the good enough to want to be a part of it (Shemot 18:1). Paroah slides down into oblivion and Yitro rises to great heights.

We also see the idea of appreciating the good in Moshe. When Yitro's daughters tell him about the person who saved them they refer to Moshe as '*Ish Mitzri.*' One opinion in the Mirash (Shemot Rabbah 1:32) say that the reference was to the Egyptian that Moshe killed which brought about Moshe's need to run away and then being at the well to help them. According to this opinion Moshe seems to be appreciating the fact that there was a decided good in his situation. This was a remarkable circumstances to recognize the good. Moshe had just lost the life he had built because of this Egyptian and to still be able to recognize the good in this situation is amazing. Rav Matisyahu Solomon adds that Moshe is not satisfied just to recognize the good himself he also feels obligated to teach Yitro's daughters this lesson<sup>2</sup> which they dutifully repeat to their father.

We have models of *hakarat hatov* in Moshe and Yitro and a model of a *kafuy tov* in Paroah. As Rav Yaakov says if we are able to inculcate the quality of *hakarat hatov* to the degree that Yitro did then we can hope it will rocket us to great heights.

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<sup>2</sup> Rav Kaminetsky in the same piece actually rejects this interpretation of the Midrash on the grounds that it is unlikely that Moshe sat the women down and taught them this lesson in *hakarat hatov*. But this, according to Rav Solomon, is exactly what happened and that is the lesson here.