

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Yitro

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Ralph and Paulette Frisch in memory of
Ralph's father Zeev ben Raphael Frischwasser z"l, and his grandfather Avraham ben Tzvi HaLevi Levitan z"l

A Lesson from Yitro

Our parshah is fairly straightforward. Before the climactic Revelation at Sinai, we learn of a simple conversation between Moshe and his father-in-law, Yitro. The Torah tells two key aspects of this conversation. First, Yitro expresses awe over the nation's salvation by the hand of G-d. Second, upon seeing that Moshe serves as the sole judge of Israel, Yitro suggests that Moshe change the way disputes are addressed. His idea is that Moshe should establish lower courts that would hear most cases. Only the most difficult would be reserved for Moshe. The subsequent chapters of the parshah describe the leadup to, and the actual revelation on, Har Sinai.

Taken at face value, we would understand that the conversation between Moshe and Yitro occurred before the Torah was given at Sinai. This seemingly uncontroversial view is taken by many, including Ramban. (See his comment to Shemot 18:1.)

Yet, many commentators, such as Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, argue that the events of Chapter 18 occurred sometime after those of Chapters 19 and 20. Among Ibn Ezra's proofs is the fact that during their conversation, Moshe describes to Yitro that he teaches the nation, "the Laws of G-d and His teachings." (18:16) This comment would only make sense if the Torah had already been given. Accordingly, argues Ibn Ezra, this conversation between Moshe and Yitro happened *after* the Torah was given.

But Ibn Ezra still has a problem – Why would the Torah break its chronology

here? He answers that the Torah wished to juxtapose Yitro's arrival with the earlier war against Amalek in chapter 17. Doing so contrasts Amalek, who reacted to Israel's success with violence and hatred, with Yitro, who reacted with excitement. By presenting the stories in this manner, we have a deeper appreciation for Yitro.

Perhaps we can expand Ibn Ezra's suggestion and see an even deeper message from Yitro's appearance at this point. In his commentary to Shemot 18:11, Rashi notes that Yitro was an idolator par excellence, having worshipped every single god and deity in existence. While this may appear to be an insult, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Broide, former Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva, explains in his *Sam Derech* that this was a compliment. Rabbi Broide writes that Yitro went from idolatry to idolatry in a constant quest for Truth. No matter how much Yitro had already invested in a new belief system, he never stopped exploring it. And, when he eventually found it lacking, he moved on. That is, until he found the Torah.

Rabbi Broide contends that no one else in Yitro's generation ever bothered to reflect on their beliefs. They passively received and practiced, never probing the deeper significance of their beliefs and actions. Yitro was unique in his active and serious approach to religious experience.

Perhaps this is the reason that the Torah has Yitro and this story to precede the events at Sinai. Before we can receive the Torah, we must learn about

Rabbi Jared Anstandig

Yitro, a role model for religious growth. Yitro was committed to genuine study and understanding. We ought to apply this same approach to our study of Torah.

Rabbi Alex Israel, in an [essay on this parshah](#), similarly presents Yitro as a pre-Sinai role model. He points out that Yitro's suggestion of a system of lower courts is not such an impressive idea. There is no need for Divine intervention to come up with such a plan. Indeed, Rabbi Israel argues, this is the entire point. If all we had was Har Sinai, we would believe that we are all passive recipients of Torah, with no ability or permission to think, analyze, or initiate. By opening with Yitro and his rather simple suggestion, we see that we, like Yitro, are called upon not only to observe but to participate.

In the shock and awe of the revelation at Sinai, it is easy to sit back and believe that we are all merely passive recipients of the Torah. By putting Yitro at the start of this parshah, we learn that nothing could be further from the truth. Torah is not a spectator sport. In fact, we are called to join in.

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Story

This chapter begins with Amatziah, the son of Yoash, becoming king of Judea at the age of 25. His kingship generally pleases G-d, but he does not remove the shrines that people were using to make offerings to G-d outside of the Temple. (14:1-4) With the kingdom in his hands, King Amatziah executes those who assassinated his father. Deferring to Devarim 24:16, though, he spares the assassins' children. (5-6)

After winning many battles, Amatziah sends representatives to King Yehoash of the northern kingdom of Israel to call for a meeting; Rashi explains that the goal is to declare war. Yehoash responds with a message that Amatziah should stay in his kingdom and enjoy the pride of recent victories instead of provoking disaster and bringing Judea down with him. (7-10)

Amatziah, however, does not listen. This causes Yehoash to advance his own army, and the two face each other at Beit Shemesh in Judah. The Judeans are forced to flee and King Amatziah is captured by Yehoash, who marches on Jerusalem. He takes the vessels of the Temple and treasures of the palace before returning to Israel. (11-14)

King Yehoash of Israel eventually dies, is buried with his ancestors, and is succeeded by his son, Yeravam. King Amatziah of Judea lives fifteen years longer than him, but has to flee to Lachish to escape a coup. He is killed there. His body is brought back to Judea on horseback and he is buried with his ancestors in Jerusalem. Amatziah is succeeded by his sixteen-year-old son Azariah, who rebuilds Eilat and restores it to Judah. (15-22)

King Yeravam takes the reigns of Israel. He, however, does not please G-d, and does nothing to depart from the negative influence of his namesake, Yeravam ben Nevat. Yeravam does restore territory to Israel, and he is helped by G-d, who will not allow Israel to be destroyed. Yeravam dies, and is succeeded by his son Zechariah. (23-29)

Insight

King Amatziah makes the decision to spare the children of the assassins who killed his father, based on Devarim 24:16: "Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents; a person shall be put to death only for his own crime." Shemot 34:7, however, states that G-d "visits the iniquity of parents upon

children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations."

The Talmud (Berachot 7a) notes this apparent contradiction between the two verses and resolves it by stating that Shemot 34:7 applies when people adopt the evil actions of their ancestors for themselves, while the verse in Devarim refers to those who do not adopt such actions. This allows us to understand that we will not automatically be treated one way simply because of our genetic makeup or the environment in which we were raised. Rather, we all have an opportunity to take responsibility for our own autonomous choices.

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It Happened in Israel: Listening to Hashem's Call

Rabbi Yehuda Mann

The Talmud tells a fascinating story about two sages: Ilfa and Rabbi Yochanan.

Ilfa and Rabbi Yochanan studied Torah together, and they became very hard-pressed for money. They said: Let us get up and go and engage in commerce... so that we will no longer be complete paupers. **They went and sat under a dilapidated wall and were eating bread, when two ministering angels arrived.**

Rabbi Yochanan heard that one angel said to the other: Let us knock this wall down upon them and kill them, as they abandon eternal life of Torah study and engage in temporal life for their own sustenance. The other angel said to him: Leave them, as there is one of them whose time of achievement stands before him, i.e., his time has yet to come. Rabbi Yochanan heard all this, but Ilfa did not hear the angels' conversation. Rabbi Yochanan said to Ilfa: Did the Master hear anything? Ilfa said to him: No. Rabbi Yochanan said to himself: Since I heard the angels and Ilfa did not hear, I can learn from this that it is I whose time of achievement stands before me.

Rabbi Yochanan said to Ilfa: I will return home... Rabbi Yochanan returned to the study hall, and Ilfa did not return, but went to engage in business instead. By the time that Ilfa came back from his business travels, Rabbi Yochanan had been appointed head of the academy, and his financial situation had improved. (Ta'anit 21a, William Davidson Translation with emendations)

Insight

This is not the only time that someone overhears angels speaking. Rabbi Pinchas Horovitz, in his *Panim Yafot*, explains that the same thing happens to Reuven when the brothers plot to kill Yosef. The Torah states, "[One brother said to another]... Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, 'A savage beast devoured him.' **We shall see what comes of his dreams!**" But when Reuven heard it, he tried to save him from them. He said, "Let us not take his life." (Bereishit 37:20-21, JPS Translation).

According to Rashi, the words "We shall see what comes of his dreams" were spoken by angels, not the brothers. Rabbi Horovitz explains that what happened to Reuven is the same thing that happened to Rabbi Yochanan. The "it" that Reuven heard was none other than an angel's comment about Yosef's dreams. Only Reuven heard that comment and he understood that since he was the only one who heard it, it must be his mission to save Yosef.

Hashem speaks to us often, although it is not always as clear as it was for Rabbi Yochanan and Reuven. Certain signs in our lives indicate that we have a mission. It could be a certain talent that we have, or a person coming especially to us asking for help. Let's be attentive to Hashem's call, and take action.

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Biography
Nechama Leibowitz
Idan Rakovsky

Note: We identify Dr. Nechama Leibowitz simply as “Nechama” because she requested that people use no titles for her.

Nechama Leibowitz, born in Latvia in 1905, was a passionate Jewish Studies educator and scholar. She grew up in a home filled with Jewish and general culture, competing in her father’s Bible quizzes against her brother, Yeshayahu, who became a famous and controversial Israeli philosopher. In 1919 she moved to Berlin, where she taught Tanach, wrote articles and studied for her doctorate. On the day she finished her doctorate, she fulfilled her dream and moved to Israel.

In 1942, Nechama began mailing out stencils of questions on the weekly Torah reading to anyone who requested them. These worksheets, which she called *gilyonot* (sheets), would be sent back to her, and she would personally review them and return them with corrections and comments. They became very popular and in demand by people from all sectors of Israeli society.

In her study, Nechama combined the classic commentaries on Tanach, which focused on Tanach, Talmud, Midrash and Hebrew language, and the secular world, whose interest lay in literary study, archaeology, and history. She broke new ground in the world of Torah study, and Nechama’s question, “What seems difficult to Rashi?” has become very common, as has her method encouraging comparison of different commentaries. Nechama adopted and expanded upon techniques of literary Tanach analysis. She felt that these were very close to the midrashic method and to the Sages and commentaries, with their close reading of the text.

As a passionate Zionist, Nechama refused to leave Israel even when she was offered large amounts of money to lecture abroad. She believed that Torah must be taught in Hebrew and that Hebrew should also be the language spoken by all Jews. Nechama also opposed some feminist ideas. While she supported equal pay and rights for women, Nechama did not desire to change the balance of gender roles within traditional Jewish society.

She passed away in 1997. According to her request, *Morah* (a teacher) is the sole epitaph on the stone marking her grave.

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Torah and Translation
Questions About Honouring One’s Parents
Nechama Leibowitz, Gilyonot, Yitro 5722
Translated by Idan Rakovsky

כדרך שנהגנו בכמה מ“גיליונות לפרשת השבוע” לפרשת יתרו, כן נהגנו גם השנה, הקדשנו את כל הגיליון לאחד מעשרת הדברות. מצוות כבוד אב ואם - אם כל היותה מובנת ושגורה בפי ילדינו - הרבה בעיות כרוכות בה ובלשון הכתוב שבדיבר זה, וכאן עסקנו רק באחדות.

האם מצווה זו היא מצווה שכלית בלבד שבין אדם לחברו (כדעת רבים) או האם היא יותר מ“פריעת חוב”? שאלה זו מתעוררת בייחוד ע“י העמדת דבר זה בסוף הלוח הראשון והרי הוא מעין מעבר בין מצוות שבין אדם למקום לבין מצוות שבין אדם לחברו. וכבר פילון האלכסנדרוני עמד על כך (בספרו עשרת הדברות) שמצוות כבוד אב ואם ממוצעת בין המצוות שבין אדם למקום לבין המצוות שבין אדם לחברו, מפני שיש בה משתייהן והאבות הם הממוצעים בין אדם למקום.

על מהות “הכבוד” ועד היכן מגיעים חובות הבנים לאבות על זה מדובר הרבה אצל חז“ל. והמורה יוכל לקרוא לפני תלמידיו כמה מדברי חז“ל (קידושין דף ל) שנאמרו בעניין זה, ואף סיפורים שסיפרו על מנהגי חכמים בקיימם מצוות אלה, וגם על דיקים מבין הנכרים שהחמירו במצווה זו.

שאלה אחרת שהעסיקה פרשנים שונים היא שאלת השכר המובטח והוא השכר היחיד בכל עשר הדברות ובא בכבוד אב ואם דווקא. יש לעסוק בפירוש מילת “למען” במקום הזה, האם כוונתה שכר מכוון מצד עושה המצווה, הרואה בו את תכלית המצווה או האם פירושה תוצאה הבאה מעצמה.

ואילו שאלה שנייה הקשורה בשכר היא האם “האתה” המובטח כאן האריכות ימים הוא “האתה” האינדיבידואלי של כל בן ובן או הכללי, הציבורי של כנסת ישראל?

As we have done in several “Weekly Portion Sheets” for Parshat Yitro, so we are doing this year, as we dedicate the entire sheet to one of the Ten Commandments. The mitzvah of honouring the father and the mother – as understandable and common among our children as it is – yet, many problems are bound up in it and in the language in its text. We have dealt with only some of these questions here.

Is this only a logical social mitzvah (as many believe), or is it more than “repaying a debt”? This question is raised especially by the fact that this mitzvah is placed at the end of the first tablet, as a sort of bridge between the mitzvot that are between human and G-d and the social mitzvot. Philo of Alexandria already noted this (in his book *The Ten Commandments*), [writing] that the mitzvah of honouring the father and mother is balanced between the mitzvot between human and G-d and the social mitzvot because it includes elements of both, and parents are balanced between G-d and man.

Regarding the nature of “Honour” and the extent of the duties of children to parents. Our sages wrote much about this. The teacher could read before his students some of our Sages’ writings on this topic (such as Talmud Kiddushin 30), as well as the stories told about the practices of Sages in fulfilling this mitzvah, and also about righteous non-Jews who were strict regarding this mitzvah.

Another question that various commentators dealt with is the question of the promised reward [“so that you may long endure on the land”]. It is the only reward mentioned throughout the Ten Commandments. It comes regarding honouring one’s father and mother, specifically. One should deal with the meaning of the word “*l’ma’an*” [“so that you may”] in this context. Does this mean reward intended by the one who performs the mitzvah who sees in it the goal of the mitzvah? Or does it mean a result which happens on its own?

A second question related to the reward is whether the “you” who is promised length of days is the individual “you” of each son and daughter, or the general “you”, the collective Jewish nation?

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Monday-Thursday

10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)

Monday/Wednesday: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook

Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

Shabbat January 21-22

After 8:00 AM shacharit R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Gruda Beis Medrash (men)

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

Motzaei Shabbat 7:15 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Parent-Child Learning on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/parent-child>

Sunday January 23

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)

10:00 AM-11:20 AM Midreshet Yom Rishon for Women!

On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/myr82>

Rabbi Jared Anstandig: How Many Mitzvot Are There?

Mrs. Sarit Anstandig: *Na'aseh v'Nishma*: The Duality of Jewish Experience

No charge, All women welcome!

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Eruvin, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/jliczoom> 613613 (univ)

5:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Tu b'Shevat in Argentina? ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (univ women)

Monday January 24

A New Parshah Podcast: Parshat Mishpatim, with R' Chaim Metzger and R' Mordechai Torczyner
Apple <http://tiny.cc/apodcast>, Google <http://tiny.cc/gpodcast>, Spotify <http://tiny.cc/spodcast>

8:45 AM Idan Rakovsky, Jewish Thought in the Postmodern Age, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Introduction to Talmud 3 of 3, ZOOM <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

7:30 PM Idan Rakovsky, Song of the Week, ZOOM <http://tiny.cc/weeklysng>

8:30 PM R' Moshe Yeres, Talmud Shabbat (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/talmud>

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Divorce in Modern Israel, Shomrai Shabbos: Main Shul (men)

Tuesday January 25

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc (Melachim I 3), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 10-11), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Wednesday January 26

6:15 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Beitzah, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/beitza>

10:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Chanah: Prophet & Fighter, #3 of 3 ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>
Fee: \$30 (or whatever you can pay), register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah Chabura, Clanton Park

Thursday January 27

8:30 AM R' Chaim Metzger, Trei Asar, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/trei> (university)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 23), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

7:30 PM Panel Discussion "Preparing for the Unforeseen" with the Prosserman JCC: <https://virtualjcc.com>

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah, at BAYT (Gruda BM), email ymannt@torontotorah.com for ZOOM options (men)

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Gemara Bava Batra, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (university women)

Friday January 28

8:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Bava Batra Perek 2 *advanced*
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>