

Parshas Yisro

For the week ending 24 Shevat 5757
31 January & 1 February 1997

Overview

Hearing of the miracles Hashem has performed for the *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law, Yisro, arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yisro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts and joins the Jewish People. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yisro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate the smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. The Children of Israel arrive at *Mt. Sinai* where the Torah is offered to them. After they accept, Hashem charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain, and to prepare themselves for three days in order to receive the Torah. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, Hashem's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain, and He begins speaking to the Jewish People, giving to them the Ten Commandments:

- 1 Believe in Hashem
- 2 Don't have other gods
- 3 Don't use Hashem's name in vain
- 4 Observe the Shabbos
- 5 Honor your parents
- 6 Don't murder
- 7 Don't commit adultery
- 8 Don't kidnap
- 9 Don't testify falsely
- 10 Don't covet

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay Hashem's word to them. Hashem instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

Insights

LET'S DO BREAKFAST

"Moshe descended the mountain to the people" (19:14)

"What time do we land?"

"In about two hours, Mr. President."

"Okay — I'm going to need about an hour to have a shower, freshen up and change my clothes before I can meet the Prime Minister. Can you radio ahead and fix up a meeting at about twelve? Actually, make it twelve-thirty. I haven't slept a wink on this flight, so I'll need to close my eyes for twenty minutes or so. Oh, and I could do with a light breakfast when I wake up — just a roll and some coffee, a little cereal. Make that real coffee. Hey, is there any real need to have this meeting as soon as we arrive? Couldn't we postpone till the afternoon?"

Moshe, the quintessential Jewish leader, went "from the mountain to the people." He didn't take a break. He didn't take a pit-stop. Moshe ignored his personal affairs completely and went straight to work. From the mountain to the people.

Based on Rashi

SEEING THE SOUND OF MUSIC

"And all the people saw the voices" (20:15)

One winter's day in a small village in Poland, there arrived a frail figure carrying a small black leather box.

It was still early in the morning, the pale winter sunlight barely coloring the ashen faces of the houses.

The man made his way to the town square. He rubbed his hands together and blew warm air between them. A cloud of mist emerged from the other side of his clasped palms and snaked its way upward, catching the rays of the rising sun as it faded away.

He opened the box and assembled three black cylindrical sections of a clarinet.

He started to play, at first slowly and hauntingly. The sound was so beautiful and compelling that very soon, yawning faces started to appear at the windows.

Children were pressing their faces to the panes. He started to pick up the tempo. The sound was so delightful, so sweet, that very soon, people emerged into the street and spontaneously started to dance.

The music crescendoed in wave after wave. The unbelievable sweetness of the sound gilded the faces of the dancers with delight.

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Into this scene stumbled a deaf man. He was quite convinced that everyone had taken leave of their senses. Here, for no reason whatsoever, was half the town dancing in the square at six o'clock in the morning!

If he'd been a little bit more discerning, he would have realized that it was the voice of the clarinet and its beautiful music that was the reason for all this dancing.

When the Torah was given at Sinai, the people 'saw' the voices. They experienced *kinesthesia* - the reversal of sensory perception. Seeing Sound. Hearing Sight.

When the Torah was given at Sinai, Hashem radiated the light of His Presence on the whole Jewish People as one. They experienced this as angels dancing.

When they saw the angels dancing, they understood that it was because of the overwhelming sweetness and beauty of the Holy Torah. And, as it were, they craned their necks and strained their ears to hear its sublime melody.

Compared to angels they were somewhat spiritually 'deaf' because they had never experienced such sounds. Nevertheless, they wanted to try and at least get a 'glimpse' of the sound.

G-d opened their eyes, and they all saw this overwhelming joy, so that even if they could not experience the music itself clearly, they could experience its great happiness.

Thus, they pressed themselves to hear the voice of the Torah itself. Maybe they would be able to reach that level and understand the exquisite light which is Torah...

Based on Degel Machane Ephraim

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

“And Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain” (19:2)

At the time of the Tower of *Bavel* when the world rebelled against Hashem and tried to build a city and tower that would reach to the Heavens, Hashem made it impossible for them to understand each other's language. The project thus failed.

Why did Hashem choose to foil their designs by confusing their languages? Why couldn't He have decreed that the project just plain fail? It certainly wouldn't have been the last building project to have failed because of a poor architect or defective labor!

The giving of the Torah at Sinai was predicated on the absolute unity of the Jewish People.

Just as Hashem is One, and His Torah is indivisible from Him, so too the receiving of the Torah has to be in perfect unity.

Only at Sinai were the Jewish People united like one man with one heart.

The generation who built the tower of *Bavel*, for all their failings, had one positive quality. Their unity. Hashem *could* have merely foiled their plans, but that necessarily would have meant that He would have **broken the power of Unity in the Creation.**

But Hashem didn't want to break the power of Unity, because he knew many generations later there would be a Jewish People who would need to receive the Torah, and the only way that they would be able to receive that Torah would be through perfect unity.

Based on Rashi

Haftorah: Yeshayahu 6:1-13, 7:1-6, 9:5,6

The revelation of the *Shechina* at Sinai which is the subject of this week's Parsha is mirrored in the Haftorah by a revelation of the *Shechina* to the prophet Yishayahu.

NO, NO, AFTER YOU...

The nature of most people is to want to be first. To demonstrate their superiority over others. This is the driving force behind the desire to have money and power. I'm better than you! **You** go second!

And even when we allow others to go first, when we put them in front of ourselves, it's usually to demonstrate what elevated character traits we have — in other words — *elevated over you!*

In the *kedusha* (holiness) that we say at least twice a day, we borrow a prayer from the angels to magnify the glory of the Almighty.

We say "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the L-rd of Hosts. The whole world is filled with His Glory."

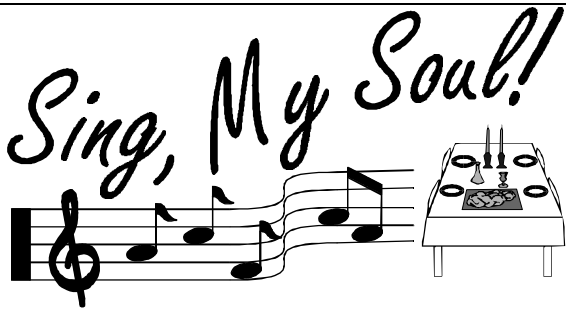
Man is not an angel. When the angels say *kedusha*, they begin by calling to each other, as if to say "You go first, because you are greater than me." To which comes the reply "No, you are greater than me!" Finally, they all praise Hashem together.

The angels repeat the word 'holy' three times. Anything which is done three times is considered to have permanence and perpetuity. Thus the angels never cease saying 'holy,' for Hashem is infinitely Holy.

Based on The Midrash Says

**INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.**

**MIZMOR LEDAVID - susk runzn
"SONG OF DAVID..."**



Hashem is my shepherd, I shall not lack anything

rxj t tkhgr 'v

Hashem Ro'i, Lo Echsor

The shepherd is the provider for his flock.

When one studies Torah while a human shepherd supports him he is forced to share his reward for this study with his provider.

But when "Hashem is my shepherd" and provides this support directly "I shall not lack anything" in the amount of reward I will receive.

This thought, expressed in this psalm at the beginning of the meal, is echoed in the grace said at the end of the meal, when we ask Hashem to spare us from relying on the gifts of flesh and blood and to provide our needs directly through His "full, open, sacred and generous hand."

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