

Questions & Answers

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Questions

1. Yisro had 7 names. Why was one of his names Yeser?
2. News of which two events motivated Yisro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yisro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yisro, and not with Moshe when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yisro came to the desert — don't we already know that the Bnei Yisrael were in the desert?
6. Why did Moshe tell Yisro all that G-d had done for the Jewish People?
7. According to the Midrash quoted by Rashi, how did Yisro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
8. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendour of the Shechina?
9. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
10. Who is considered a partner in Creation?
11. "Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe...." What bothered Yisro about this arrangement?
12. Why did Yisro return to his own land?

Answers

1. 18:1 - Because he caused a Parsha to be added to the Torah. Yeser means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over the Jews already in Egypt, and you're bringing more Jews to Egypt?" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
5. 18:5 - To show Yisro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place; yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.
6. 18:8 - To draw Yisro closer to the Torah way of life.
7. 18:9 - He grieved.
8. 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
9. 18:13 - The day after Yom Kippur.
10. 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
11. 18:14 - Yisro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
12. 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism

All references are to פסוקים and Rashi's commentary.

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לעלוי נשמת ר' אליהו רחמים בן מאיר דוד ע"ה ואחיו ר' עבדאללה פרג בן מאיר דוד ע"ה

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מס' ריז

"ששת ימים תעבד, ועשית כל-מלאכתך. ויום השביעי שבת, לה' אלקיך:

לא-תעשה כל-מלאכה אתה ובנך ובתך, עבדך ואמטך ובהמתך, וגרך, אשר בשעריך." (כ-ה:ט)

“Remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it. Six days shall you work and accomplish all your work; but the seventh day is Shabbos to HaShem, your G-d; you shall not do any work – you, your son, your daughter, your slave, your maidservant, your animal and your convert within your gates.” (20:8-9)

In פרשת ואתחנן, in the second account of the Ten Commandments, the fourth Commandment, concerning שבת is given slightly differently, as שמור את יום השבת לקדשו “Guard the day of Shabbos to keep it holy (Devarim 5:12),” as opposed to the usage of the word “Remember” here. This change in vocabulary is usually explained as the two words reflecting different aspects in the keeping of Shabbos; שמור reflecting the negative commandment of not contravening any of the הלכות of the day of Shabbos, and זכור reflecting the positive commandment of sanctifying this holy day. Rashi comments on our פסוק that these two words were said simultaneously, as one commandment.

The Maggid of Dubno offers a beautiful explanation as to what this teaches us. There are many that differentiate between these two verses, and only wish to keep שבת according to one. Poor people have little money, and therefore find it hard to afford the fine crockery, food and wine that the שבת day should be honoured with. They wish they could keep the מצוה of זכור, but find it very difficult. However, as they are not involved in big business dealings and the like, they can fulfil the מצוה of שמור, as they have little to lose. In contrast, the rich, who can afford luxury extras, find the mitzvah of זכור much easier, and struggle with the מצוה of שמור,

because they lose out by not being economically active on one day of the week. Therefore, concludes the Maggid of Dubno, these שמור and זכור go hand in hand. Everyone, no matter his financial situation or business transactions must strive to ensure that they uphold both מצוות pertaining to the keeping and the sanctity of שבת. The rich must strive to keep the שמור aspect of שבת, while helping the poor keep the זכור. Rashi also comments that the words שמור and זכור are in the infinitive absolute verbal conjugation, so they translate literally as ‘guarding’ and ‘remembering;’ only by actively guarding and remembering שבת can we truly fulfil these commandments.

Rashi comments further by saying that when the Torah says “And you shall do all your work,” this means that by שבת, we should consider all our mundane activities finished. The Chidushei HaRim elaborates on this theme by saying that these words refer to one’s spiritual activities as well. If throughout the week we fight against the temptations of the יצר הרע, when Shabbos arrives, one merits rest and peace from this battle, so that even this ‘work’ of overpowering our temptations will have already been done by the time שבת comes in.

Nochum Nosson Spitzer

The Right Impression

וַיָּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לִקְרַאת חֲתָנוֹ, וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ וַיִּשָּׁק-לוֹ, וַיִּשְׂאַלוּ אִישׁ-לְרֵעֵהוּ, לְשָׁלוֹם; וַיִּבְאוּ, הָאֲהָלָה. " (יה:ז)

“Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law, and he prostrated himself and kissed him, and each inquired about the other’s well-being; then they came to the tent” (18:7)

רש"י comments that since the פסוק does not specify who bowed down and who kissed whom in this פסוק, we have no way of knowing who bowed to whom. When the פסוק follows with the words “one man to the other,” we can infer that it was Moshe who bowed to יתרו. How can we see this? רש"י explains that Moshe is referred to in another פסוק as the ‘man’, as it says, ‘And the man Moshe’ (Bamidbar 12:3). According to רש"י’s interpretation of the פסוק, Moshe first kissed and bowed to יתרו, and the two men then spoke to each other. However, a difficulty arises here. While we can understand that out of proper respect for Moshe, יתרו did not approach and kiss Moshe, but he certainly should have responded to Moshe’s bowing by bowing to Moshe in return! Indeed it seems most astonishing that he would contravene social etiquette to such an outstanding individual.

We can answer that יתרו’s actions were guided by his life experiences. יתרו had been a worshipper of foreign gods, and as such he had a very clear understanding of the causes and ways of thinking that are able to lead to such worship. In the early days of the world, the concept of worshipping false deities was initiated when people began to worship

the sun and the moon. They knew that HaShem had created the world as well as all the heavenly bodies. Their mistake lay in the thought that it would be proper to worship these creations of HaShem as intermediaries, as opposed to worshipping HaShem directly. This led eventually to the worship of all sorts of false deities, and in some cases, the total denial of HaShem’s creation of the world.

יתרו was well aware of this, and it was this knowledge that had led him to his decision not to bow down to Moshe. יתרו recognized the greatness of Moshe, the faithful servant of HaShem. Moshe had been the messenger of HaShem in performing the miracles of יציאת מצרים and it was through him that HaShem gave the manna בני ישראל the manna. יתרו feared that should he bow to Moshe, it would be looked upon as if he was bowing not out of respect for Moshe, but as an act of worship. Because of this, יתרו actually felt that it would be forbidden for him to bow to Moshe, because of the possible false impressions and implications of this act.

Daniel Nevies

Riddle of the Week

Which verse in the Torah has all the letters of the Aleph-Beis?

(Answer in the next edition of Living Torah)

Answer to Last Week’s Riddle

Explain how the following situation could occur: You take a certain item and before deriving benefit from it you say the required blessing. One minute later you take the exact same item and derive the exact same type of benefit from it. However, this time the required blessing beforehand is a different blessing. (The item contains no grain. The item undergoes no change whatsoever.)

Spices during and after Havdalah

There are different categories of fragrant spices. Each category requires a different blessing. For example, for spices that grow on trees the blessing is "Blessed are You Hashem ...Who creates fragrant trees." For spices derived from herbs which do not grow on trees, the blessing is "Blessed are You Hashem ...Who creates fragrant herbs." However, at the 'havdalah' ceremony after Shabbat a different blessing is said. At 'havdalah' the blessing is always "Blessed are you Hashem ...Who creates various types of fragrances." In essence, this blessing is for a mixture of spices, or for spices of unknown nature. But at havdala, this is the standard blessing regardless of the type of spice. This avoids confusion, since often it's difficult to identify a given spice, its origins and proper blessing. (This is according to the Ashkenazic custom. Sephardic Jews say the precise blessing.)

So, let's say you use a myrtle branch for the havdalah ceremony (intending to smell it only once). You say: "Blessed are You ...Who creates various spices." Then, immediately after havdalah you decide to smell the exact same myrtle branch. This time, the blessing is "Blessed are You ...Who creates fragrant trees."

Ideally, you should use for havdalah a spice whose proper blessing is "various spices" The Mishna Berurah suggests cloves.

Sources: Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 217 Ibid., Mishna Berurah 5, Sha'ar Hatziot 6 Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim 297:4 Mishna Berurah 297:1

The Price of Honesty

“...לא-תענה ברעך עד שקר.” (בי:ג)

“...you shall not bear false witness against your fellow”(20:13)

One character trait related to Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky was an absolute abhorrence of any falsehood. During his time at the Slabodka Yeshiva, a student with very poor eyesight proudly informed him that he had pretended to be another more physically robust student, so that he would not be conscripted into the infamous anti-Semitic Russian army. Even though he was aware that this act probably saved at least the soul of the other student, Reb Yaakov’s reaction was one of shock and horror that this boy was proud of the

fact he had been forced to prevaricate, even to save the life of a fellow Jew.

Another occasion, a young woman, engaged to be married, came to Reb Yaakov with a troubled conscience. As a young child, she had been hit by a car while crossing the street, and her parents had brought a lawsuit against the driver. The family lawyer instructed her to testify she had been crossing the street while the green man was showing. This testimony was completely false, but on its basis, she had won a large settlement, which had been put into a trust fund, and was soon to be released to her. This young woman had no desire to start her married life, building a faithful house in the Jewish community, on a large amount of fraudulently claimed money, and came to speak with Reb Yaakov.

Her first question to the sage was whether she should reveal to the original court that she had been given legal advice to commit perjury, lying under oath. Reb Yaakov advised her against doing so, as it would invariably lead to her becoming entangled in a bureaucratic legal system for many years. As she was below the age of legal responsibility at the time, the only likely outcomes would be her incriminating her parents,

not to mention disbaring the lawyer, causing a huge Chilul HaShem. He also advised against returning the money to the driver because he had been insured. Insurance companies are not there to be defrauded, he warned, but as this incident occurred so long ago, they would have written off the loss

many years back, and therefore there was no need to return the money to them.

At the same time, Reb Yaakov held that she could not keep the money. However, the young woman was surprised at Reb Yaakov’s decision that the money could not go to Tsedakah, in case she viewed the fact that her merit of giving a large amount of Tsedakah came from a sinful act of lying, and therefore the sin of the lie was annulled. Instead, the money went to a large non-Jewish charitable organisation, so she would not benefit from the lie she told as a youngster.

Gematria (בעל השורים)

The gematria of the introductory פסוק to the דבר אלוקים את כל הברים, עשרת הדברות וידבר אלוקים את כל הברים, האלה לאמור “And G-d spoke all these words, saying”(Shemos 20:1), is 1332. This is the same gematria as the phrase כל מה שדיה בכתב ושבעל פה, all of what that will be the written and oral laws. This is hinting to the fact that the עשרת הדברות, while only containing ten statements, encompass all of Jewish law and practice.

Thoughts for the Week

The Talmud (Yevamos 24b) teaches that converts are accepted only during historical periods when the Jewish people is downtrodden. For example, during the reigns of King David and King Solomon, when the Jews enjoyed political autonomy and financial prosperity, no converts were accepted, since they were likely to be motivated by a desire for personal security and monetary gain. Likewise, proselytes will not be accepted in the Messianic era. How then was Jethro allowed to convert while the Jews enjoyed an idyllic existence in the Wilderness?

The answer lies in the Talmud’s explanation of why Pharaoh’s daughter was allowed to convert during the reign of King Solomon. Since she was a princess who enjoyed the good life anyway, there was no fear that she converted in order to improve her political or financial standing. (Yevamos 76a).

The same principle applied to Jethro. He was a well-placed cleric in Midian, with position and money. He had nothing to gain and everything to lose by joining the Jewish people; thus his conversion was sincere and not to improve his material position in life. To make this point, the Torah notes his prestigious past.

(R' Shlomo Ganzfried)