



Parsha PARTNER™



PARSHAS YISRO

20 SHEVAT 5768

27 JANUARY 2008

Parsha Perspectives

OZER ALPORT

וישמע יתרו

"And Jethro heard."

Our parsha begins by relating that Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, heard about all of the miracles that Hashem performed for the Jewish people. This motivated Jethro to come join the Jewish people in the desert and to convert to Judaism. Although the verse here calls him Jethro, Rashi notes that throughout Tanach, we find seven different names used in reference to him. Each name connotes a different aspect of his personality or accomplishments.

One of the seven names is Yeser (יתר), which is also the Hebrew word that means "to add." Rashi explains that this name refers to the fact that a portion of the Torah was added based on Jethro's suggestion to Moses in our parsha that he establish a system of courts and judges.

However, in referencing the section that was added based on Jethro's proposal, Rashi curiously quotes the verse (18:21) in which Jethro delineated his plan to Moses and enumerated the requirements for proper judges. This is difficult to understand, as a cursory perusal of the parsha reveals that Jethro's exchange with Moses began several verses earlier (21:17), when he advised Moses that the current arrangement was flawed and unsatisfactory. Why does Rashi

seem to misquote the beginning of the portion of judges added by Jethro?

Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, known as the Imrei Emes (1866-1948), was once present at a Rabbinical conference in Warsaw that was called to discuss the burning issues of the day and to brainstorm possible solutions. There was one man present who somehow found a problem and proceeded to poke holes in every proposal that was mentioned. Eventually, the astute Rabbi Alter approached the critic and said that because he seemed to be so good at raising questions, he would like to pose one of his own to him.

Rabbi Alter turned and asked him our question about Rashi's apparent misquote, to which the man had no

answer. He told the critic that without much effort, virtually anybody can find problems with someone else's ideas. Rare is the individual who constructively offers an alternative plan of action.

Rabbi Alter then proceeded to offer the following response to the question we posed earlier. In quoting the later verse as the beginning of the portion added as a result of Jethro, Rashi is teaching us that had Jethro only approached Moses to criticize the current system as flawed without offering a viable alternative, he wouldn't have merited an additional section in the Torah. It was only because Jethro's critique was a constructive introduction of a superior alternative did the Torah find it worthy of recording!

We live in a society where it is considered perfectly normal to criticize the status quo and to tear apart any solutions offered by another person. Co-workers do it well, spouses do it better, and many of those who've perfected the art are now running for President. While we cannot change the approach of others, we can internalize Rashi's lesson that while anybody can focus on finding faults, a true leader and innovator will concentrate on proposing constructive solutions.

Please pray for a complete and speedy recovery for
Bracha Sheindel Rachel bas Chaya Sara Mordechai Hirsch ben Miriam

Parsha POINTERS

Talking Points | YISRO

RABBI ELAZAR MEISELS

1. HAPPY FOR YOU

"Yisro said, 'Blessed is Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and the hand of Pharaoh..." 18:10

Blessed is Hashem – It was taught in the name of Rav Papais, "It is an embarrassment to Moses and the six hundred thousand [Jews who were with him] that they did not say 'Baruch' [Blessed is Hashem] and that Yisro was the first to do so." – Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, 94a

Did not Moses, along with the entire nation, sing "Az Yashir" on the seashore in acknowledgment of Hashem's tremendous kindness toward them? Indeed, the Jewish people wholeheartedly thanked Hashem for his kindness. However, they were thanking Him for the kindness He had done on their behalf. Yisro, on the other hand, was an outsider, as he was not [yet] a Jew. His expression of thanks toward the Almighty, was not for the kindness he personally experienced, but for that done on behalf of others. Expressing gratitude of this nature was something that Moses, and the Jewish people, still had not managed to accomplish. - Rav Shlomo of Radomsk zt"l

Why is it important to thank Hashem for the kindness that He performs on behalf of others? People often have a hard time relishing the success of others. If it doesn't directly affect their own bottom line, they act as if they couldn't care less. By training ourselves to feel good about the success of others, we are actively overcoming this selfish trait. Additionally, one who seeks to bolster his trust in Hashem, is well advised to seek out the many kindnesses that Hashem performs on behalf of mankind in general, and not only on what he personally receives from the Almighty. That way, he'll surely be overwhelmed by the realization that Hashem's kindness is truly without limits.

2. NOT SO SMART AFTER ALL

"And Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he suggested." 18:24

Listened To The Voice Of His Father-In-Law – Why did Yisro merit having an entire Parshah written based on his advice proffered when he wasn't even Jewish? This is an eternal lesson for the Jewish people that wisdom and good sense were not the reasons Hashem chose us to be His nation, for there is much wisdom and good sense to be found among the nations of the world, as well. It was only thanks to His kindness towards us, and His great love for our ancestors that He chose us to be his unique nation. – Or HaChaim (R. Chaim ben Attar, 1696-1743)

History proves that one of the most difficult lessons for the Jewish people to comprehend is the notion that as Jews, our uniqueness lies not in our overpowering intellect, but in the merit of the patriarchs and our willingness to emulate their ways. Insofar as our actions reflect their devotion and passion for serving Hashem, we are the Chosen People. If we mistakenly assume that it is simply due to an inherent mystical quality not found elsewhere in the human race, the story of Yisro serves as a powerful reminder that there is plenty of wisdom and good sense to be found elsewhere, as well. Hence, our greatest contribution to society need not be in the arts and sciences. There are plenty of others equally capable of duplicating that success. Rather, it should be in the area of morality, where the example of our patriarchs endows us with a unique ability to serve as a "light unto the nations."

3. EASY DOES IT

"And Moses ascended to Hashem, and Hashem called to him from the mountain, saying, 'This is what you shall say to the House of Yaakov, and relate to the Bnei Yisrael.'" 19:4

Say To the House of Yaakov - This refers to the women. Say it to them in a gentle voice. **And Tell the B'nei Yisrael** – To the men you shall explain the penalties and details of the mitzvos using strong words – Rashi

Say To the House of Yaakov – The women were instructed in the Torah first,

because a dedicated woman is crucial to success in transmitting the Torah to the next generation, as she will be the one to encourage her children to attend Cheder (Jewish elementary school) in a pleasant and inviting manner. These early years are the foundation upon which the child's lifelong dedication to Torah will rest. – Rabbeinu Bachya (Rabbi Bachya ben Asher)

Rabbeinu Bachya adds that this is the source of the custom for women to pray for their children's spiritual success immediately following candle-lighting for Shabbos, as prayer is always more efficacious when coupled with the performance of a mitzvah. The mitzvah to light candles, which symbolize light, is an especially appropriate mitzvah to merge with a plea for success in Torah, which is also compared to light.

This page is dedicated to and written for the 6,000 Partners in Torah mentors. We welcome you to join their ranks by calling 800-STUDY-4-2. Please send your comments, questions, and suggestions to info@partnersintorah.org

CONTACT INFO FOR PARTNERS IN TORAH MENTOR ADVISORS*:

Rabbi Elazar Meisels ~
212-810-2602
(Sunday & Tuesday 8:00 - 11:00 pm)
rabbimeisels@partnersintorah.org

Rabbi Pinchos Jung ~
845-425-6533
(leave message)

*Kindly reserve use of our advisors for mentor contact.



PartnerTALK

BLUEPRINT

MRS. ALIZA BULOW

Dear Mrs. Bulow,
As a graduate student in architecture, I was intrigued when I heard that the Torah is the "blueprint of the world". But in my world, blueprints are created before the construction process begins, and I recall learning that the Torah was given after the world was created, so I'm a bit confused. What exactly does this statement mean?

Sincerely,
Miriam B

Dear Miriam,
Your question is very astute. It is true that our sages compare the Torah to the blueprint of the world; the actual phraseology is "Istakeil b'orisa, u'bara alma" "G-d looked into the Torah, and created the world". And, you are right, a blueprint, by definition, comes before the fact.

How could G-d have looked into the Torah before it was written, before the events contained therein unfolded? Understanding the answer requires a complete paradigm shift.

A common understanding is that the Torah is a record of the formation of the Jewish people as well as an instruction book on how to carry out the mission with which we were charged. While it certainly serves those purposes as well, it is in fact much more than that.

Many recognize the wisdom of its laws and how well they work with human nature and physical reality. For example, there are laws requiring us to honor and respect our parents, which is of benefit to both the individual and society, but something a child might overlook. There are also laws of kashrus (dietary laws) forbidding foods that are often unhealthy, like bottom feeding sea creatures, or meat from sick animals. But if one would think that the Torah is "sensitive" or "responsive" to the world and that's why it makes so

much sense, he would be seriously mistaken. The Torah is not responsive. Here is the paradigm shift: like a blueprint, it is causative. The Torah does not describe the world, it prescribes the world. The Torah, in the largest sense of the word (both the written and the oral dimension), was created before the world came into existence. It was then made manifest in the creation of the world and in the unfolding of history. We don't honor our parents because we have them, we have parents so we can honor them.

Rabbi Akiva Tatz, who is also a medical doctor, in his book "Worldmask", describes the relationship of Torah to the world using the analogy of genes. Genes are causative. They not only contain the future picture of what the developing body will look like, they are what make the shape take form. In his words, Torah is the DNA of creation.

Given this understanding, a blueprint is a very apt analogy. It not only describes how a future building will look, it also "directs" the contractor in the construction process. But there is another important aspect of this analogy. Just as a contractor can understand how to build a building from looking at the blueprint, so can a very skilled architect look at a completed building and discern the blueprint. He (or she!) could walk through an intricately constructed

palace, and given enough time, draw out the plans necessary to build the same structure, but... he wouldn't know what's inside the walls. He can't see if there's wiring for the Internet or what type of pipes are used in the plumbing - what's in the walls is unbeknownst to him unless he can look at the original plans.

So too, a spiritually astute person, in accordance with his or her level of sensitivity and perception, can look at the world and discern aspects of its blueprint (Torah). For this reason, some of the world's religions include elements of Truth, and there are individuals and communities that lead lifestyles of positive behavior because of their desire to connect to the Divine. They have been able to discern some of the truth in Torah through contemplating the world, and, being spiritual people, they have put what they understand into practice.

However, without the total blueprint before them they are at a disadvantage; they can only guess according to their level of knowledge. They have many holes in their understanding, not for lack of effort or concern, but because they did not receive the gift at Mount Sinai that we did. Part of the gift of being "chosen" is having the "security clearance" necessary to be able to view the whole blueprint. It was given, in its entirety, to us alone. And we are also blessed with sages in every generation to help us discern all its subtleties.

Just as an architect must be trained to read the special language and notations of blueprints before he can properly benefit from the plan, so too, we must learn the special language of the Torah in order to truly gain insight into its depths and meanings.

As you further your study of architecture, I encourage you to also expand your knowledge of the Torah- the Jewish blueprint- as well. Warmly,
Aliza Bulow

SOUL TALK

SPONSORED BY ARTSCROLL



The Torah teaches us that although everyone heard about and even saw the miracle of the Splitting of the Sea, only Yisro took a lesson from it and was motivated to join the Bnei Yisrael. This concept is discussed by Rabbeinu Yonah in Shaarei Teshuvah (2:26), where he notes that often, when people hear a very moving lecture or are shaken up by terrible news, they are prompted to change their ways. However, the impact does not last long, for the yetzer hara (evil inclination) tries hard to make the person forget the lesson. In just a few days, he will be back to normal.

The only way to insure a lasting message from an inspiring incident or the like is for a person to consciously "wake himself up" and discern what lessons can be learned from that incident, and how those lessons can impact upon and change his life.

He quotes the words of Hillel (Avos 1:14): עַם אִין אִני לִי מִי לִי, If I am not for myself, who will be for me? This means that although a person can hear speeches and lectures given by others, nothing will become a part of him unless he is actively involved in internalizing the message, utilizing his own understanding and intellect.

This is what Yisro did. He did not simply hear the facts of the great miracles as everyone else did; he took it a step further. He asked himself: "What does my knowledge of those miracles obligate me to do?

What lessons do they teach me? Who is really in charge of everything in this world? And what can I do to become close to the true G-d?"

In the Yiddish language there are two very similar words, whose meanings are worlds apart. One is הערען, *heren*, which means hearing, and the other is דערהערען, *derheren*, which means comprehending. Someone can talk in a foreign language and he will be heard by everyone in the room, but not everyone will understand and comprehend what is being said.

This is why so many times, even after being exposed to clear indications of the hand of Hashem (such as the hurricanes and tsunamis of recent years), it does not take long for us to shake off our inspiration and go back to our regular routine. If we only hear current

events, but fail to understand their messages and internalize their lessons, then the yetzer hara (evil inclination) will do a fine job of helping us to forget the initial impact.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz put it so perfectly. The Midrash (Yalkut 244) tells us that a maidservant saw at the Sea what even the great Yechezkel the prophet did not see (this refers to visions of Hashem's Throne). He asks: Why, then, did the maidservant not become a prophet like Yechezkel? And he answers: Because even after she saw the great vision, she remained a maidservant; she did nothing more than see. Thus, while she may have indeed seen great things, this did not motivate her to grow spiritually and change her ways.

LOOK WHO MADE PARTNER...

RECENT SAMPLING OF PEOPLE WHO'VE JOINED IN AS PARTNERS:

MICHELE BOSTON, BALTIMORE MD

SRULY SHAIN, LAKEWOOD NJ

SETH MICHAELSON, BRIGHTON MA

SHANIE GRUBNER, LAKEWOOD NJ

CARLYE GOLDSTEIN, NEW MILFORD NJ

Making partner has never been this easy!



Join the thousands who study
A DAILY DOSE OF TORAH!

Order your copy at 20% savings – www.artscroll.com/pit20

THE Back PAGE

TABLE TALK

FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBOS TABLE

א) In advising Moses of the qualities to seek in prospective judges (18:21), why didn't Jethro mention the quality of wisdom? (Rabbeinu Bechaye)

ב) How is it possible for Hashem to command a person (20:14) not to covet another person's possessions, when he has control over his actions but no ability to restrain the feelings which arise naturally in his heart? (Ibn Ezra)

Hey, I Never Knew That!

Amazing Insights About the Weekly Parsha OZER ALPORT

Q In founding the first modern Jewish school for girls, Sarah Schenirer chose to name it "Beis Yaakov," – the house of Jacob – a phrase which is used in our parsha (19:3) in reference to the Jewish women. However, in referring to the men, the Torah uses the phrase the "sons" of Israel. Why when discussing the women does it use the phrase "the house" of Jacob when "daughters" would seem to be the appropriate parallel?

A Rabbi Meir Shapiro observes that when a person becomes ill, there are hypothetically two ways for a doctor to treat him. The standard procedure is to prescribe medication, although another theoretical option would be to design a room in which the air is full of the necessary antibiotic. The former option has the drawbacks that it only helps one patient and requires active administration, whereas the latter could benefit many people without any effort on their parts.

Similarly, in fighting the universal illness known as the yetzer hara (evil inclination), men follow the prescription of the Talmud (Kiddushin 30b) to repel it through the study of Torah. Although the latter option isn't currently medically feasible, Jewish women nevertheless use it to ward off spiritual illness. As the backbones of the house, they imbue the entire home with an atmosphere of holiness and spirituality, which automatically benefits not only themselves but also their husbands and children and all who are fortunate to enter their homes.

This is alluded to in a well-known verse (Proverbs 1:8), "Listen my son to the rebuke of your father, and don't forsake the teachings of your mother." King Solomon found it necessary to instruct one to listen to the lessons of one's father, but a mother's wisdom permeates the very air of the house and will be absorbed without any effort. It is to emphasize this connection that the Torah refers to the women not as the daughters of Jacob but as the house of Jacob.

Q Jethro advised Moses (18:22) that the judges he would appoint should bring for his judgment any דבר גדול – major matter, but Moses instituted a system (18:26) in which the judges brought to him any דבר קשה – difficult matter. Why did Moses deviate from Jethro's instructions, and what is the difference between their two approaches?

A Rabbi Chaim Berlin explains that Jethro judged the value and importance of a court case by the amount of money at stake. As such, he advised Moses that only cases involving large sums of money were worthy of his time and consideration. Moses, however, understood that the Torah's goal is to promote justice and therefore assigns the same significance to a case involving millions of dollars as it does to one involving only a few cents. In his eyes, the primary determinant of a case deserving of his valuable time and expertise was one which was difficult for the lower judges to resolve.

Ozer Alport can be reached at ozera@partnersintorah.org

Parsha PARTNER

Parsha Partner is a publication of Partners In Torah
A division of Torah Umesorah
The National Society for Hebrew Day Schools

Parsha Partner Production Team

YAFFA BASLAW CHANI DAVIS
DAFNAH SHONER

Rabbi Eli Gewirtz
NATIONAL DIRECTOR

Kasriel Nojowitz
DIRECTOR SPECIAL PROJECTS

PARTNERS IN TORAH IS A MULTI-FACETED EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO FOSTERING UNITY AMONG JEWS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS AND ASSISTING THEM IN THEIR QUEST FOR A DEEPER APPRECIATION OF THEIR HERITAGE. PARTNERS IN TORAH BRINGS ADULTS FROM ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE TOGETHER FOR A VARIETY OF STUDY PROGRAMS AND JEWISH LIFE EXPERIENCES. OUR GROWING PARTICIPANT BASE OF 12,000+ IS SERVICED BY 25 TRAINED PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK TO MAXIMIZE THE EXPERIENCE OF EACH PARTICIPANT. FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL **800-STUDY-4-2** OR VISIT WWW.PARTNERSINTORAH.ORG
DISTRIBUTED IN UK BY PHONE AND LEARN (PAL) A DIVISION OF PARTNERS IN TORAH. WWW.PHONEANDLEARN.ORG, **08000 J-LEARN** (553 276)

HONOR OR REMEMBER A LOVED ONE BY DEDICATING AN ISSUE OF PARSHA PARTNER WHICH REACHES OVER 15,000 PEOPLE EACH WEEK. DEDICATIONS (UP TO 15 WORDS) FOR YAHRZEITS, REFUAH SHELEYMA, ETC. ARE \$180 AND ISSUE. FOR DEDICATION AND FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS INFORMATION OR TO HAVE A PARSHA PARTNER SENT TO YOUR SHUL, CALL **732-363-3330** EXT. 6377, OR VIA E-MAIL PARSHA@PARTNERSINTORAH.ORG

YOUR DEDICATION HERE