

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Yisro
 January 28, 2005

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<i>1. The Far Reaching Effect of One's Association with Special People</i>	2
<i>2. The True Dimension of the Torah Sage</i>	2
<i>3. The Establishment of Eternity</i>	4
<i>4. The Purification of the Jewish People</i>	4
<i>5. A Rebbe Must Value the Honor of His Students No Less than His Own</i>	6

Previous Topics:

Maintaining the Balance
 The Value of Commitment
 The Importance of Reflecting on Life's Experiences
 The Root of All Difficulty
 What is the Basis for One's Classification?

About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

If you would like to receive this Weekly Torah Commentary Series by email

Please call 212-371-9555 or email:

info@yadavraham.org

TUNE IN TO OUR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF CLASSES

www.yadavraham.org

Yad Avraham Institute
New York
January 28, 2005

B"H

Parshas Yisro

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. The Far Reaching Effect of One's Association with Special People

The Torah states, **“Yisro, the father-in-law of Moshe, came to Moshe with his sons and wife, to the Wilderness/Desert, where he encamped, by the Mountain of G'd...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “Although it is understood that the Jewish people were in the desert, the Torah nevertheless tells us that Yisro went out into the “Desert” in order to communicate to us the praiseworthiness of Yisro. As sheik of Midian, he was seated in the glory of the world, but because of his desire to hear the words of Torah, he chose to go out into the wilderness to the Mountain of G'd.”

If the Torah had not revealed that the reason Yisro decided to go out into the desert to hear words of Torah, one would have thought that he had done so for other motives. Perhaps it was to accompany his daughter, who was Moshe's wife, and her sons on their way to Moshe. He may have also wanted to associate himself with Moshe who became world renowned after the exodus and the splitting of the Sea. However, the Torah reveals to us that Yisro had no motive other than to hear the word of G'd/Torah. He was willing to abandon all status to address his spirituality.

After Pinchas had killed Zimri (Prince of the Tribe of Shimon) for his public desecration of G'd's Name (Chilul Hashem), the Torah attests to the fact that his motive was pure, for the sake of G'd and not a self-serving act of zealotry. Pinchas experienced G'd's pain and acted to avenge His Honor. As the verse states, **“He (Pinchas) avenged My Vengeance.”** It is not uncommon for a zealot to act to advance his own agenda, which is to be zealous. However, Pinchas' act was purely for the sake of G'd. Similarly the Torah attests to the purity of Yisro's motive for going out into the desert and leaving behind his glory.

How is it possible that Yisro who initially was a pagan and acculturated with the Midianite way of life could have such an advanced appreciation for G'd?

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the Torah identifies Yisro as “the father-in-law of Moshe” in order to reveal to what degree he valued his son-in-law. He prided himself as being the father-in-law of Moshe, although he was the sheik of Midian. Moshe was a member of a monotheistic people who were despised by the nations of the world. Despite the fact that Moshe was an embodiment of spirituality and detached from the material, Yisro appreciated his value. Because he perceived Moshe as someone of special value, he was subliminally influenced to assume a spiritual perspective of life. Yisro's decision to abandon his social status did not come about suddenly and without cause, but rather it was a progression of the path that he had come upon.

The Torah tells us that Yisro was motivated and impacted upon when he had heard about the Splitting of the Sea and the war between the Jews and the Amalekites. He was moved to a point that he was willing to give up all that he had established in his life in order to hear the Word of G'd. His capacity to process and appreciate these events (for what they were) was only because he had seen Moshe in that special light.

Even if one initially does not have a proper Jewish educational background, if he is associated with people of special spiritual status, such as Torah sages, he will ultimately develop an appreciation for his own heritage/Torah. Because of the degree that he will esteem these special individuals, he will begin to appreciate values and ideals that were not noticed previously.

2. The True Dimension of the Torah Sage

The Torah states, **“...Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood by Moshe from morning until evening. The father-in-law of Moshe saw**

everything that he was doing to the people, and he said, “What is this thing that you do to the people?” Rashi cites Chazal, “Moshe was sitting like a king and the Jewish people were standing.” Yisro was bothered by the fact that Moshe was belittling the honor of the Jewish people. Yisro understood and appreciated the meaning of being worthy to be chosen as G’d’s people. Thus, he considered Moshe’s interaction with his people as a belittlement.

Yisro criticized Moshe for sitting while the Jewish people stood in his presence. Although Yisro understood and revered Moshe as a prophet of G’d, he did not fully comprehend his capacity as the teacher of the Jewish people. It was only after Moshe explained to him, “Because people come to me to seek G’d...” that Yisro understood that Moshe was the conduit through which G’d transmitted His Torah to the Jewish people.

There is a Positive Commandment to revere G’d, “*Es Hashem Elokecha tirah* – you must revere G’d.” The word “*Es*” in itself has no meaning but only functions as an adjunct to what is being discussed. The Torah is telling us that not only does one need to revere G’d, but also there is another individual who must be revered no less than Him. Rabbi Akiva explains that the “*Es*” is coming to include the Torah sage. Thus, it is a Positive Commandment to revere a Talmud Chacham (Torah Sage), as one reveres G’d.

Maharal of Prague z’tl explains that the Torah Sage must be revered no less than G’d Himself because since the receptivity of the student is determined by the degree of reverence that he has for the teacher, the teacher must be revered no less than G’d in order to be effective.

The Torah refers to an ordained judge as “Elohim – G’d.” The verse states regarding the court of ordained judges, “*Elokim netzav baadas Keil - Hashem stands within the congregation of G’d.*” Meaning, that when a proper rabbinic court convenes composed of qualified judges, G’d is present. G’d gives the judges the ability to process the evidence and render a verdict as He sees fit. The judges see through the “Divine Eye” rather than the limited human eye. G’d associates and identifies Himself with the court only if it is composed of qualified judges. The Torah tells us that G’d had said to Moshe, “**I am appointing you Elokim l’ Pharaoh- G’d over Pharaoh.**” Moshe was G’d’s agent to afflict judgment upon Pharaoh. He was endowed with miraculous powers that made it obvious that he was associated with G’d. Being G’d’s agent, Moshe was the conduit to affect existence in the most miraculous manner.

With this understanding we are able to comprehend the Positive Commandment of revering the Torah Sage as one reveres G’d. Since the Torah sage is the conduit through which G’d’s Torah is communicated, the Torah sage, as the communicator of G’d’s Torah, is no less than the ordained judge who convenes as part of a rabbinic court. Just as the judge sees reality through the Divine Eye, identically the Torah sage communicates G’d’s Torah within a similar context.

The Torah tells us that Yisro had a second criticism of Moshe. He said, “**The thing you do is not good. You will surely wither...You shall select from among the entire people, men of accomplishment, G’d-fearing...you shall appoint them leaders of thousands...**” Yisro suggested to Moshe that he should establish a hierarchical judicial system because it was too great a burden for him to adjudicate all matters of the Jewish people. Chazal tell us that Moshe understood that ultimately he could not be the sole judge for the Jewish people because of the burden being too great. However he delayed appointing other judges to assist him for a reason.

The Torah tells us that before Moshe passed away he rebuked the Jewish people for many failings of the past. He recounted that at the time that Yisro had suggested that Moshe establish a hierarchical system of judges, the Jewish people responded, “It is good that Moshe appoint other judges.” Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “The Jewish people were interested in accommodating themselves. Moshe had said, ‘From who is it better to study – from the teacher or his student? Is it not better to study from me, who suffered and sacrificed for the sake of Torah? However I know your true motives. You want me appoint many judges so that you may be able to influence them in your favor. You know that you cannot influence me.’”

It is true that ultimately Moshe would need to appoint other judges; however, at the time Yisro gave his criticism, Moshe understood that it was in the best interest of the Jewish people that he be the conduit for the Torah. Because Moshe sacrificed for the sake of Torah he was the most qualified person to be the transmitter of Torah as its conduit. Yisro did not fully appreciate the dimension of Moshe and his affect on the Jewish people.

Rambam states in *Hilchos Talmid Torah (The Laws of the Study of Torah)* that a Rebbe (teacher) should have the semblance of an angel. Meaning, just as an angel selflessly performs the Will of G’d (without deviation), so too should the rebbe be a person who teaches only for the sake of G’d. In addition, one should seek Torah from a

rebbe who suffered for the sake of Torah because he will be a greater conduit to transmit G'd's Torah.

3. *The Establishment of Eternity*

The Torah states, **“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Behold! I come to you in the thickness of the cloud so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever.’”** As a result of witnessing G'd speaking directly to Moshe, the Jewish people will never question the authenticity of Moshe's prophecy.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Yisodei HaTorah (The Fundamentals of Torah) that Moshe was established as G'd's/spokesman not because of the revealed miracles which he performed in Egypt, but rather, because every Jew witnessed G'd speaking to him “face to face” at Sinai. Each of the miracles that Moshe performed was to affect a specific result for the positive or the negative. For example, the ten plagues, splitting of the Sea, and the earth opening to swallow the community of Korach were all for the purpose of Divine Retribution. The Manna and the wellspring of Miriam were all to provide sustenance for the Jewish people in the desert.

Sforno explains that all prophets prophesized in a dream state. G'd did not communicate to them in a wake state because the physicality of the human being does not have the capacity to withstand the level of revelation in prophecy. If an individual experienced prophecy in a wake state, he would be overwhelmed to the point that he would die. Prophecy is communicated to the prophet through his neshama (soul). Only Moshe, whose physicality was spiritualized to a special level, had the capacity to receive G'd's communication even in a wake state. In order to confirm this seeming impossibility as a reality to the Jewish people, G'd allowed every Jew to experience His prophecy in a wake state (face to face) in order to establish the level of Moshe's prophecy. Thus, “they will believe in you (Moshe) forever...” – as G'd's prophet, never to be contested.

Rambam writes that for a non-Jew to merit a share in the world to come, it is not sufficient for him to only abide by the Seven Noachide Laws. He must also believe that they were transmitted to Moshe at Sinai. If a non-Jew observes the Noachide Laws because he believes that they were communicated to Noach, as G'd's prophet, he does not merit a share in the world to come. Why is this so?

The Torah tells us that in order for a prophet to be established as being a true prophet he must firstly perform a miracle as well as accurately predict a future positive event. If one fulfills these criteria set forth by the Torah, he is established as a true prophet. Rambam explains that although there is a possibility that this individual was able to bring about a miracle and predict the future through witchcraft (and not because he is a true prophet of G'd) he is nevertheless established to be a true prophet because he met the criteria set forth by the Torah. This is similar to credible evidence that is established through the testimony of two witnesses. Although there is possibility that the witnesses may be lying, the Torah nevertheless tells us that they are to be believed. Thus, presumption is sufficient to establish the prophet and the witnesses as credible—although their credibility can still be questioned because it was never established as fact.

The basis for establishing the credibility of a prophet is only through the criteria set forth by the Torah – regardless of the reality of which we may be unaware. We can only surmise that the prophet is in fact true. However, Moshe was not established as a prophet based on these criteria. He was confirmed to be a prophet because G'd openly spoke to him in the presence of the entire Jewish people. Moshe's credibility as being a prophet of G'd is based on reality and fact – and not supposition. Consequently, the authenticity of Torah as being the Word of G'd is solely based on the fact the word of Moshe is the Word of G'd. Identically, the Seven Noachide Laws must be observed with a belief that they are definitely the dictate of G'd – uncontested and true – because they were communicated to Moshe at Sinai as part of the Torah.

4. *The Purification of the Jewish People*

The Torah states regarding the first of the Ten Commandments, **“I am Hashem, your G'd, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “G'd said, ‘It was worthwhile for Me to take you (the Jewish people) out of the land of Egypt so that you should be My servants.’” Regardless of what G'd needed to do, i.e. reveal miracles, it was worthwhile for the sake of taking the Jewish people as His subjects.

There is nothing that is difficult for G'd to do. The miracles in Egypt and the Splitting of the Sea are no less miraculous than the orderly function of nature. Ramban explains that nature itself is a concealed miracle. The only difference between the sun rising and setting

each day and the Splitting of the Sea is that the sun rises and sets every day whereas the Splitting of the Sea was a unique occurrence. In either case, they both happen because G'd Will's it to be so.

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Yisro, **“Yisro, the minister of Midian...heard everything that G'd did to Moshe and to Israel...that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt.”** Rashi cites the Mechilta which explains, “the greatest miracle that G'd performed was taking of the Jewish people out of Egypt.” At the time of the exodus, Egypt was physically decimated. Egypt had been destroyed by the ten plagues. Why is the taking out of the Jewish people out of Egypt considered the greatest of all the miracles that had transpired? If the walls of the prison are destroyed and the warden and all the prison guards are killed, would it be considered a great miracle when the prisoners flee the prison?

As a result of being in Egypt for 210 years, the Jewish people were so infected with spiritual impurity and acculturated with Egypt that they were completely shut down on a spiritual level. They had no capacity to internalize or process anything that was spiritual in nature. Within the context of reality, it was virtually impossible for them to ever be purged/cleansed of their impurity to become receptive to spirituality. They had fallen to the lowest level of impurity, which is the 49th level. Despite all of this, after experiencing the ten plagues and leaving Egypt, the Jewish people were able to recognize and internalize the revelation of G'd at the splitting of the Sea. This was demonstrated by the declaration of the Jew, “This is My G'd.” The level of revelation of G'd at the splitting of the Sea that the maidservant experienced was at a greater level than that of Yechezkel the Prophet.

Chazal tell us that Yisro had worshiped every deity in existence. Thus, he understood the effect of being completely immersed in impurity. It was because of this appreciation that he was so impressed when he had heard that G'd had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt – meaning that He had purged them of that impurity. This was the greatest miracle of the exodus.

Now we are able to understand in a different light the Chazal that is cited by Rashi regarding the First Commandment – “G'd said, ‘It was worthwhile for Me to take you (the Jewish people) out of the land of Egypt so that you should be My servants.’” The Torah is specifically addressing the purging process that G'd had performed for the Jewish people to cleanse them from their spiritual impurity so that they should have the capacity to be His

servants. Ultimately this would enable the Jewish people to stand at Sinai and receive G'd's Torah.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that there was a discussion between Reb Shimon Bar Yochai and his students regarding why the Jewish people were deserving of annihilation during the period of Purim. The students of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai were of the opinion that the Jewish people deserved annihilation because they had partaken in the feast of the *rasha* (evil one) – Achashverosh (the Emperor of Persia). Reb Shimon Bar Yochai rejected their explanation because if that were the case, then only the Jews in Shushan (the capital city of the Persian Empire) who participated in the feast should have been liable for punishment and not the entire Jewish people. The reason he offered for the Jews deserving annihilation was that they had bowed to the image of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian Emperor, who had destroyed the First Temple). Nebuchadnezzar had ordered all of his subjects to bow to his image or be subject to death. The only Jews who did not bow were Chananyia, Meshael, and Azarya. Thus, since the Jewish people bowed to the image of Nebuchadnezzar, they deserved annihilation.

The students of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai asked him, “If in fact the Jewish people did bow to the idol and thus deserved to be destroyed then why were they not?” He answered them, “Because their bowing was only an external action with no substance. They only bowed because they were compelled to do so. Consequently, the decree against the Jewish people manifested itself in a similar manner –it only appeared as if they were to be annihilated but it was not meant to be.”

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that if one were a true heretic he is classified as a “*min-heretic*.” Even if that person were to gain a level of clarity and do teshuvah (repent) for his heretical beliefs, G'd will cause him to die. The reason for this is that heresy is something that is so deeply rooted in a person that even if he were to do teshuvah it would be only on a temporary basis. He will ultimately return to his heretical beliefs. G'd prefers that the individual should die as a righteous person. Thus, He will take him after he does teshuvah so that he should die as a tzaddik (righteous) before he reverts back to his heresy.

Reb Yonasan Eibshitz z'tl explains that when the students of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai asked him “If in fact the Jewish people deserved to be destroyed then why were they not?” They were alluding to the fact that even if the Jewish people had done teshuvah, because they had bowed to the idol they should be classified as “*minim-heretics*.”

Their difficulty was that G'd should have taken them in their state of teshuvah before they would revert back to their heretical ways. Yet He did not. To this, Reb Shimon Bar Yochai responded that their bowing was only an external act. They did not actually believe in what they had done. In essence they did not assume pagan beliefs. Therefore their teshuvah had fully reinstated them since they were never "minim."

The Jewish people in Egypt became idolaters assuming the classification of "minim." Although the Jews had come to a level of clarity through the Ten Plagues, they were destined to return to their idolatrous beliefs. Despite their status as "minim," G'd purged them of their impurity so that they would not revert back to their idolatrous ways. This was worthwhile for G'd to do in order for the Jewish people to become His servants.

The Commentators ask- why does G'd identify Himself as "Hashem who had taken Israel out of Egypt" and not "the G'd who created the world?" With our understanding, we are able to explain that it is only because the Jewish people were spiritually purged did they have relevance to G'd. Had G'd not performed the greatest miracle of all by cleansing them, there would have never been a Jewish people or a Sinai event. Thus, G'd identifies Himself as the One who took Israel out of Egypt.

5. A Rebbe Must Value the Honor of His Students No Less than His Own (from Beshalach)

The Torah tells us that Moshe had chosen Yehoshua to lead the Jewish people in the battle against the Amalekites. The Torah states, "Moshe said to Yehoshua, **'Choose for us men and go wage war with Amalek.'**" The Midrash states, "The manner in which Moshe addressed Yehoshua indicates that although he was Moshe's student, Moshe related to him as an equal. This is to teach us proper behavior. As his teacher/mentor, Moshe could have said to Yehoshua, 'Choose for me...' Rather, Moshe said, 'Choose for us...' – speaking to him as a peer. From here we learn that the honor of the student should be valued by the rebbe/teacher to the same degree that he values his own honor."

Simply, one could say that the Torah is teaching us a methodology for a teacher to impact upon his students in the most effective manner. If the teacher values the student no less than he values himself – relating to him as a peer- his teachings will impact on a more profound level.

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis states, "Rav says, 'I learned an enormous amount from my teachers. From my colleagues more than from my teachers. From my students (I learned) more than all of them.'" Rav's statement reveals that the development and growth of a Torah sage is mainly through the interaction between the teacher and his students. They are the medium through which he advances himself. If in fact the teacher assumes new levels of Torah advancement, through the student, then the rebbe/teacher must be beholden to the student. In addition, his honor as a Torah sage is directly attributed to the student. Thus, it is logical that he should honor and value the student no less than he values his own honor.

It is written in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) that one should establish/mentor many students. Rashi in his commentary cites Chazal who explain that despite the fact that one may have mentored many students at a younger age, he should continue to mentor students even at an advanced age because the students that he will mentor then may surpass the students of his youth. Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl in his commentary on Pirkei Avos explains the value of continuing to mentor students in another vein. It is based on the principle of "from my students more than all of them." The Mishna is advising the Torah sage to mentor as many students as he can (regardless of his age) for the sake of his own Torah advancement. It is only through the interaction with the students that the rebbe continuously advances.

On a simple level, one would understand the principle of "from my students more than all of them" to mean that in order for a rebbe to be most effective with his students he must prepare and present the material in a cogent manner so that the students should be impacted upon by his teachings. Simultaneously, the rebbe also develops to have a greater understanding of the subject matter because of the questions posed to him by the students. However we are able to understand this concept on a more profound level.

The Gemara in Tractate Moed Katan teaches us that when one chooses a rebbe/mentor for himself, "he should have a semblance of an angel." As it is stated in Malachi, "If he resembles an angel of G'd, you should seek Torah from his mouth." Just as an angel, who is an agent of G'd, acts solely for the sake of G'd without deviation or ulterior motive (l'shmah), so too the rebbe/teacher must be an individual who teaches the Torah with the pure intent of disseminating G'd's Word.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos states, "All who exert themselves for the community should do so for the sake of

Heaven (l'shmah), for then the merit of the community's forefathers will aid them..." When a rebbe/teacher possesses the characteristic of an angel, which is acting purely for the sake of G'd, then he will minimally have the merit of the forefathers of his students assisting him. Meaning, his level of Divine Assistance (siyata d'shmaya) will be at an advanced level –thus causing the rebbe to have another level of Torah. The student of this rebbe will be a greater beneficiary of his teachings because of the special Divine Assistance that he merited. Based on this principle, we are able to understand Rav's statement "from my students (I learned) more than all of them." It is only through one's dedication to disseminate Torah to his students does a rebbe merit the most advanced level of Divine Assistance.

Therefore if the rebbe truly appreciates the basis for his own advancement on Torah, he will value the honor of his students as he values his own.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

*Energize your day...
... with a solid morning of Torah study*

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Mishna
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Shabbos
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00 pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Avodah Zorah**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham

1:30 – 2:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

1:00—2:00 pm **Derech Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

**TUNE IN ON THE INTERNET
FOR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF SELECTED
CLASSES
WWW.YADAVRAHAM.ORG**