



## Parshat Yitro: Arrival Accentuation

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The *Torah* describes *Klal Yisrael's* journey to Sinai: "... On this day, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai. They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the Wilderness; and Israel encamped (*vayeechan*) there, opposite the mountain."

Why the repetition of information? Why is the order reversed, arrival followed by departure? What is the *Torah* trying to teach us? Rashi notes that the *Torah* juxtaposes Rephidim with Sinai to show us that repentance was an integral part of leaving Rephidim just as it was an integral component of our stand at Sinai. Yet the *Torah* does not document teshuvah as part of that stand.

Rashi further comments that "they encamped" is written in the singular form indicating that they encamped with a single heart and desire. This seems to parallel Rashi's comment about the Egyptians who pursued Israel with one heart as one man. How can the two be compared?

Both Ohr Doniel and Yalkut Lekach Tov discuss the approach of the Netziv. While receiving the *Torah* was the climax of our journey, the preparations began already at Rephidim. But this is where Amalek attacked because we became weak (Rephidim = *raphu*) in the study of the *Torah*, of the *mitzvot* we had already received. As Rabbi Wolbe notes, they asked, "Is Hashem within us or not?"

The preparation for the *mitzvah* infuses holiness into its observance, not our rote

performance. In this context, the Gemara cites the process Rabbi Chiya used to present "books", parchment for learning, to some orphan children. He planted the flax, wove the nets, trapped the deer, and prepared the parchment. He could vouch that every step was purely for the sake of Heaven. Similarly, when we bake *challah*, if our thoughts are on the beauty of Shabbos, it imparts a singular purity and sweetness which can never be duplicated in store bought *challah*. Therefore, to infuse *Bnei Yisrael* with the proper mindset of holiness for receiving the *Torah*, it was important to begin the preparation process early, even before the three days dedicated to preparation, writes *Mizkainim Esbonan*, for Hashem desires the heart.

Intent, preparation and focus form the backbone that elevates every *mitzvah*, says Rabbi Pincus. This is especially true for prayer and can also stop us from sinning. What was the preparation that made *Bnei Yisrael* worthy of receiving the *Torah*? Rabbi Y. Vorki focuses on the singular form of the verb *vayeechan*. *Bnei Yisrael* looked with positivity (*chen*) upon one another and found favor in each other's eyes. They joined together in unity for a common cause, a kind of caring that can only be achieved through personal humility, notes Rabbi Pliskin.

Rabbi Shmuelevitz notes a fundamental difference between *Bnei Yisrael* and *Mitzrayim*, an idea further expanded by the Tiv Hatorah. With *Bnei Yisrael*, "as one person" precedes "with one heart". In writing of the Egyptians, on the other hand, the order is reversed, and "one heart" precedes "one person". While *Bnei Yisrael* were motivated as one person with

concern for each other, their hearts then followed. The Egyptians, however, were focused on one evil, recapturing the Israelites, and they united to achieve that result. When that goal was no longer present, the unity disintegrated.

Rabbi Shmuelevitz quotes the Ohr Hachaim. There are three separate steps of the journey recorded signifying three fundamental aspects necessary for receiving the *Torah*. First, we must leave Rephidim, the lazy and lax attitude toward *Torah* study. Then we must arrive in the wilderness in a humble state. Finally, there must be unity among the people.

*Bnei Yisrael* were totally unified, singing together with one voice after they crossed the Sea of Reeds, notes *Einei Yisrael*. Yet they lost that unity in Rephidim because in some small way they lost sight of that which united them, the *Torah* and Hashem's presence within them. This made them vulnerable to Amalek's attack. When they again put Hashem as the central focus of their personal and communal lives; the process of *teshuvah* began that would achieve perfection at Sinai. At Sinai, as the Baal Hatanya points out, we again become one soul, and the separations produced by individual bodies melted away.

The Megged Yosef notes that when the priority is the goal, the journey can begin. *Bnei Yisrael* had their eyes focused on Sinai, on accepting Hashem's *Torah*. In order to achieve that, they had to go through the threefold process of the verses that follow. It was the passion and love for Hashem and his *Torah* that provided the impetus for the subsequent journey to Sinai.



## Introduction to Request

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tzipora Heller

The first three blessings of *Shemone Esrei* evoke Hashem's awesomeness, greatness and transcendence. This opens our hearts to begin to envision whom we are standing before. Then we proceed on to the blessings of requests.

There are several reasons why we make requests. It isn't about reading Hashem a grocery list and telling Him what we want. He knows what we need better than we do and is in a position to give it to us more than we could possibly get it on our own. It's about recognizing our absolute dependency on Him. We all want things and we're conditioned to think we can do something to get it. I want money so I'll get a job or a degree. I want shalom bayit, so I'll learn about relationships. These requests tell us, there's nothing we really want that we have the ability to draw into our life. The purpose is to open us up to the reality that we are completely reliant and dependent on Hashem.

We could ask, if Hashem is full of compassion and love why doesn't He give us what we need? All prayers are in fact answered, but there are three sorts of yeses. There's the yes we like which is- I got what I wanted the minute I asked for it. There's the yes we don't like which is- I'll give you what you really want but not what you think you want. And there's the yes that has to do with timing-Yes, I'll give

you what you want, but only at the moment when you'll be able to use it the most. Our prayers are answered but not necessarily on our terms.

In order to understand tragic occurrences, we have to look backwards and explore the concepts of the World to Come and reincarnation. We're all different. You're not you and I'm not me. Hundreds of years ago, the Arizal said there were no more new souls. We all were given different missions to accomplish but our stories didn't begin on our birthdays. Whatever we already accomplished in a previous life is done with. We don't need the tools for that in this life. We do however get the wherewithal to achieve whatever we still need to do. Since we don't know what it is, it's hard to recognize that the tools we have, are the ones we need.

For example, there might be someone whose *tikkun* (rectification) in life is to maintain faith in Hashem in the face of grinding poverty. That is how they will find wholeness. They've already done other things and this is the last step. So, they could do everything right, but if they don't accept this decree and continue to pray for wealth, they are missing the purpose. Whether you get an answer to your prayers or not, often the reason is- you're not really you and I'm not really me. We both have stories that already began in a previous life and we are still in flux.

Sometimes the answer that you feel you didn't

get is because you actually walked past it. There is a famous story of a man who was drowning and prayed that Hashem would miraculously pull him out. Hashem sent him all manners of rescue, a boat, a helicopter... but he refused to take it, stubbornly insisting that Hashem Himself pull him out. Another facet is that we don't always know what we want even on the simplest level. If you were to interview people on a public thoroughfare with a microphone and you would ask them, "What is your deepest wish?" You'd get different answers. There are those who would say, "World peace." And there are those who would say what they really think, "I need a better job, a bigger home..."

The requests are there to make us aware what our universal needs really are. We begin with spiritual requests. If you don't have the tools to deal with life, it doesn't matter how easy your life is. It will never be satisfactory. We live in the most prosperous era humankind ever experienced, yet depression and suicide rates keeps rising. Our first request is for understanding and knowledge. because if you're clueless, no matter what you have, life won't be satisfactory. The happiest moments are those of achievement and closeness. This doesn't come through escapism or dependency on other people for our sense of self. What a person needs most is awareness and consciousness.

## Shir Shel Yom Shlishi Part IV

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Every one of us is a judge. All day we deliberate on what to think, what to say, how to say it, what to do... Any decision we make means sitting in judgment because every decision is a choice between two sides. I want to get up in the morning. I have so much to accomplish. But I have to choose between the bad inclination that tells me, "If you get up now you won't be able to do much. If you sleep another hour your day will be more productive." It might be true or it might not be. Perhaps if you got up and just started doing, you'd forget your tiredness completely. How do you judge? You interact with people all day. Somebody knocks on your door. How will you respond? Even in the area of thought, you judge what to let in and what to keep out.

The Piascezener Rebbe gives an example of

a young boy who walks down the street and sees someone doing something immodest. It disturbs him. He walks on further and keeps thinking about it. He's indignant. How could this person do something so ugly and improper? On a superficial level, he's doing the right thing. He's condemning something wrong. That's if it's not more than a second of saying, "Oh no!" and turning away. But if he keeps thinking about it, he's basically putting himself in the same place in thought that the other person did in action.

We're naturally biased. Doing the right thing demands effort. There's free choice. The bad inclination tries to sell us falsehood. The good inclination tries to get us to see the truth. Physicality is visible and brings immediate gratification. Spirituality is invisible and

demands hard work. We're biased because the *yetzer hara* has a lot going for him. What hope do we have to make the right decision? Harav Dessler says if you want to judge fairly you have to make sure the scale is well adjusted. We have to tell ourselves that we won't be deprived. We just need patience and the outcome will be worthwhile.

But there's more than that. "*Elokim nitzav b'adat Kel.*" Hashem is with us in the process. On our own we can't make it. But if we pray to Hashem and really develop an inner desire to do the right thing, Hashem will help us. If we develop the will to do what Hashem really wants and and daven to Him to help us accomplish it, He will enlighten us and ultimately help us make the right choices.