



Parshat Yitro: Torah & Shabbat

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Herschel Reichman

The Gemara writes that the Torah was given to the Jews on Shabbat. This is hinted at by two verses that share the same expression of *Zachor*, namely, “*Zachor et yom hashabbat*, Remember the Shabbat day,” and “*Zachor et yom asher amadata lifnei Hashem b'Chorev*, Remember the day that you stood before Hashem at Chorev.” Why did Hashem choose to give the Torah specifically on this day?

In its account of *Matan Torah*, the Torah says, “*Vayered Hashem al har Sinai*. Hashem descended to Mt. Sinai.” Targum Unkelos translates “*Vayered*” as “*Vayitgala*,” meaning Hashem revealed himself. Indeed, according to Chassidut, the Almighty is everywhere, but there are barriers between our perception of Him and reality, which prevent us from seeing Him. At Har Sinai, Hashem removed this blindfold.

Chassidut further teaches that there is a relationship of *itaruta d'latata*, an arousal from below, which causes Hashem to respond with an *itaruta d'imaleh*, movement from above. This is the power of repentance. Our first move is the crack the wall, which causes the edifice blocking our perception of Hashem to crumble.

In Mishlei, King Shlomo writes, “Deep waters are the thoughts of man's heart.” Chovot Halevavot explains that just as there are subterranean pools of water waiting to be

discovered, there are profound wells of spirituality hidden within our souls. Latent within every Jewish soul is the ability to connect the Creator. This is *itaruta d'latata*, believing in our powers and opening ourselves up.

Shabbat is the optimum day to dip into these spiritual reservoirs. When we abandon our daily weekday focus and immerse ourselves completely in Torah, prayer, and *avodat Hashem*, we are one with Hashem. Shabbat supports *itaruta d'latata*. It is a day to find our true selves, a day of revelation, connection, and profound elevation. That is why Hashem particularly chose this day to give the Torah.

The Shem Mishmuel explores the paradoxical concepts of *yesh* and *ayin*, existence and non-existence. Does man have worth, or is he nothing compared to Hashem? On the one hand, man is the purpose of creation. On the other hand, he is but a speck amid the vast celestial bodies and galaxies spinning around the universe. The Shem Mishmuel answers that there are two ways to serve Hashem. One can serve Him through *yesh*, tapping into our spiritual powers and elevating them for higher purposes. On the other hand, one can serve him through *bitul hayesh*, losing oneself in the grandeur of Hashem's spirituality. This is a very high level, one reached by Avraham, Moshe, Aharon, and David.

All of us straddle this dialectic balance. There are times when we need to use our energies in order to achieve great things. We cannot be passive and we must fight to eradicate evil. But there are times when we must be *ayin*. Trying too much is pride. At some point we must give ourselves over to Hashem and let Him take us where He will lead us.

The six days of the week and Shabbat parallel this concept. During the week, man is a *yesh*, he toils to accomplish his purpose. On Shabbat we become *ayin*, null and void in proximity to the Almighty. Spirituality envelops us and we are filled with infinite holiness. On this day, sin falls away, and the barriers separating us from our Maker disintegrate. Torah also is both *yesh* and *ayin*. The Gemara writes that a *talmid chacham* is in the category of *yesh*. By interpreting the Oral Torah, he becomes an actual partner with Hashem. Yet our Sages note that in order to acquire Torah one must make oneself into a desert by nullifying one's personal interest and ego. The balance of greatness in Torah is recognizing one's abilities, yet personifying humility.

May we be *zoche* to the Torah of the six days of the week, and to the Torah of Shabbat, to knowing that we are nothing yet something, incomplete yet holy, and may this new level of awareness help us reach ever greater heights in *avodat Hashem*.

Impediments to Closeness with Hashem

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Mishlei, Chapter 6, examine the *middot* that distance a person from Hashem. A Jew was placed on this earth to cleave to Hashem by mirroring His attributes. When man dies, his body disintegrates but the soul lives on via its relationship with Hashem. The opposite of attachment which is the essence of love is detachment or hatred. On a spiritual level, hatred is a form of distancing. There are seven categories of people who Hashem hates, because by their nature the choices they made, distanced them from Hashem.

“Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood.” The first category are

arrogant people. Hashem says, “I and he cannot dwell in one domain.” All the benefits of this world are a gift from One Source. What blocks us from being grateful and joyful is self-worship. The second category is a person who lies. There is lying out of self-aggrandizement and there's defensive lying. What is the problem with a lie if you aren't hurting anyone? Hashem is the one who creates reality. When you lie, you create an alternative reality that you prefer, which in a sense, distances you from Hashem. The third category is all forms of physical violence. Chazal say that a person who slaps another person is as though he slapped the face of the *Shechina*. If you can

be physically violent towards someone it means you've lost sight of his divine image. Arrogance corresponds to thought, lying corresponds to speech and bloodshed corresponds to action.

“A heart that thinks thoughts of violence; feet that hasten to run to evil.” The fourth and fifth category are people who think sinful thoughts and run to do evil. Someone who harbors negative thoughts but does nothing wrong, can't be prosecuted by humans but has still inflicted self-damage because he's distanced himself from Hashem. And the harm is severe because his inner life is who he is. The

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Maharal says we give birth to ourselves continually because we are constantly making choices which begin with our thoughts. There are two kinds of alacrity. The first is where you don't want to be where you are and you're in a hurry to get out and the second is where you are in a hurry to get in. When a person is in a hurry to do evil, sometimes it's an escape mechanism and sometimes it's a love of evil which feeds on negative ambitions. When the yetzer hara is in control of a person to the

point where they are enthusiastic about evil and about what conceals Hashem, then they are by definition distant from Him.

"One who speaks lies with false testimony and incites quarrels among brothers." The sixth category is a false witness who not only lies, but causes people to be judged erroneously. The pasuk says that someone who speaks falsely and thereby ruins a person's reputation is hated by Hashem. The seventh category is

someone who causes quarrels between brothers. When I studied in Bnei Brak at Rav Wolf's Seminary, Rav Wolf used to tell us that our job isn't to ignore the differences amongst the various groups in the frum world; our job is to find what's positive and what we can learn from everyone and integrate that into our lives. Don't learn what isn't, learn what is. Then you will find peace within yourself, and it will carry over to how you speak.

Arrival Accentuation – Parshat Yitro

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

Bnei Yisroel have just received the Ten Commandments and experienced God's presence. While still on this spiritual high, Hashem gives them instructions how to build an altar that will maintain this connection as they bring Him their offerings. Among the specifications are that it be an altar connected to the earth, and that one not hew the stones to build it with a sword. Further, one must build a ramp rather than a staircase to ascend "so that your nakedness will not be uncovered upon it." How did these specific instructions aid in achieving the goal of maintaining an intimate relationship with Hashem?

The Toras Emes explains that just as the Jews saw that the Torah itself came from Heaven, so must they realize that everything they have, material possessions as well as spiritual gifts, comes from Heaven and is not a result of personal strength. If you realize this, says the Lashon Chasidim, you will not approach the altar, your prayers, arrogantly. You will refrain from "high stepping," for that would reveal your "nakedness," your shortcomings and spiritual failings.

The Sifsei Chaim explains that the purpose of our constant prayers is for our benefit, to help us maintain a constant awareness of Hashem's benevolence and constant gifts to us. In fact, the first request in the *Amidah* is for wisdom and insight, for even these are gifts from Hashem with which we can understand this basic tenet of Judaism and feel the appropriateness of asking for Hashem's help when we cannot find our way on our own. By

acknowledging that everything comes from Hashem, says R. Feuer, we become worthy of having the dominion over creation that Hashem entrusted to Adam, for we affirm that we are just His emissaries. We may also then use His gifts, His food, His materials for our personal benefit. In effect, every moment of our lives becomes a reenactment of the Sinai experience as we internalize the truth that nothing exists save Hashem Himself. But, warns Vayovenu Bamikrah, as we reexperience Sinai, we must remember that we did not ascend to Hashem; rather, He came down to us. He wants our humility, not the symbolic sword in our own hands to build our altar to Him.

Rashi explains that we must be sensitive even to the appearance of causing shame or embarrassment to the altar which is why a ramp was built. How much more so must we be careful not to embarrass a human being created in God's image. Rav Belsky points out that we "honor" the stones of the altar because they serve a holy purpose. So too each Jew was endowed with a holy spark of the Divine. This in itself is worthy of true honor. When we respect another human being, he senses it and mirrors it back and lets it refract outwardly in all directions as well, thereby forming a network of deep love of one human being for another. Further, continues Rav Pam, each person has a God given purpose in this world, even if we are unaware of that purpose. It begins with respect for the inanimate rock and grows from there to encompass all of creation, culminating in respect for all mankind. This respect for individuals and for society, writes

Rabbi Friefeld, is a fundamental precept in the Torah, engendering many laws in the Shulchan Aruch. If you want to keep the Sinai experience alive, you must remain a "mentch" in your dealings with the world around you, from the sefer you put back on the bookshelf, to the food you do not waste, to your neighbor who deserves a sincere good morning greeting. As human beings, we crave respect and validation. Glide smoothly on a ramp in your interactions with others rather than being one step up on them.

The Mizkeinim Esbonen, quoting the *Midrash*, offers a homiletic interpretation of the ramp. He refers back to the ladder of Jacob's dream. The incline of the ladder is similar to that of a ramp. The bottom was planted on earth and its head reached to the heavens. This ladder symbolized the *Beit Hamikdash*. Each of us occupies our individual rung of the ladder as we ascend spiritually. Because of the incline, there is no one directly above us whose great accomplishments might discourage us from climbing higher. Nor is there anyone directly below us who will cause us to become arrogant. We must recognize that we each have our own place and our own journey.

If we are to keep climbing toward an ever stronger relationship with Hashem, to strengthen the bond first formed at Sinai, says Rav Pam, we must respect ourselves for the image of Hashem stamped upon us, and recognize this likeness in our fellow man and in all of creation.