

## **TorahFax: Yisro**

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Tuesday, Shevat 16, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / February 7, 2023

This week's Parsha, Yitro, is the Parsha of the Giving of the Torah.

Jews acquired their physical freedom, after 210 years in Egypt, when they crossed the sea and saw the Egyptians drown in the sea. However, their true freedom – their spiritual freedom they acquired only when they received the Torah at Mount Sinai. The Torah gives us purpose and direction in life and without it one is not considered truly free.

Our sages say, "True freedom is only when one studies and abides by the laws of the Torah."

The Giving of the Torah took place over 3000 years ago. However, the Torah commands us that we must not view the Torah and mitzvot as something ancient, of which one becomes tired after a while. Torah should be viewed as if G-d gives it to us each day anew. It should be cherished and studied as if it was given to us on this very day.

The Torah was given at Mount Sinai, which is a small mountain in the Sinai desert. The day of the week in which the Torah was given was on Shabbat.

Q. Why didn't G-d wait and give the Torah in the Land of Israel? Why in a desert?

A. The Land of Israel was divided among twelve Tribes. Had G-d given the Torah in Israel it would have to be on the land of one of the tribes. In that case, all others wouldn't feel that they too have an equal share in the Torah, as the tribe on whose land it was given. G-d wanted every Jew to feel that the Torah belongs to him/her equally. Giving the Torah in the desert shows that the Torah belongs to everyone.

Q. Why did G-d give the Torah on a small mountain? It would be more befitting to give the Torah from a high and impressive mountain.

A. Our sages say that G-d chose a small mountain to teach us that the Torah is within everyone's grasp. It also teaches us that in order to properly receive the Torah one has to be humble.

The Torah was given on Shabbat to teach us that, although we have to rest on Shabbat, we must never rest from studying Torah. One must study Torah every day of the week, especially on Shabbat.

Q. Why do we read from the Torah on Monday and Thursday, in addition to reading it on Shabbat?

A. Our sages instituted this so that three days should not pass without Torah. The reason these two days were chosen is because Monday and Thursday used to be market days, when people from the villages and farms would come to the market in the city to sell their produce. Many of the villages didn't have a minyan or one who can read from the Torah. Being that on these two days they would come to the big city, these days were the most practical ones in which Jews, living in small communities, could attend synagogue while in the city and hear the Torah reading.

Thursday, Shevat 18, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / February 9, 2023

Highlights of this week's Parsha, Yitro, in which we will read about the Jewish people coming to Mount Sinai, their preparations and G-d Giving them the Ten Commandments and the Torah.

Parshat Yitro, is named after Moshe's father-in-law, Yitro. In fact, Yitro had seven names. Each name recounts a different aspect of his life. The Torah here uses the name Yitro because it is associated with the Torah.

The Parsha begins with the story of how Yitro, who resided in Midyan and upon hearing of the miracles which G-d performed for Moshe and the Jewish people, decided to join them. He also brought his daughter, Tziporah, Moshe's wife, and their two sons, who stayed with Yitro when Moshe went to Egypt to liberate the Jewish people.

Q. What were Moshe's children's names?

A. The Parsha tells us that the older one was named, Gershom. "Gershom" is a combination of two words, "Ger-shom," which means a "stranger" (Ger) I was "there" (Shom). The Torah explains that Moshe named him Gershom, because Moshe ran away from Egypt and was a stranger in a foreign land.

Moshe's second son, Eliezer, is also a combination of two words; "Eli-Ezer, which means "My G-d" (Eli) "Is my help" (Ezer). Thus, the older one Moshe named for the hardship he went through and the younger one for the positive things in his life.

Q. Which factor caused G-d to give the Torah to the Jewish people when they came to Mount Sinai?

A. When the Jewish people came to Mount Sinai, there was great unity among them, as never before. In the words of our sages, "They were as one person with one heart." When G-d saw their unity and oneness, He decided to give them the Torah then.

Q. How is Torah compared to water?

A. Our sages explain that Mount Sinai was a low mountain. Rather than giving the Torah on a tall and more distinguished mountain, G-d chose Mount Sinai, to teach the Jewish people that Torah is acquired and internalized only through humility.

This is also the reason that Torah is compared to water. Just as water will always flow to a lower level, so too Torah is found with those who are humble.

Unity and humility go together. Strife and intolerance is caused by selfishness and haughtiness. When the Jewish people came to Mount Sinai and realized that this particular mountain was chosen by G-d because it is a small mountain, they too practiced humility, which brought them to unity – “As one man with one heart.”

Humility is the key to unity and unity is the key through which we receive G-d’s blessings.

The Rabbi of Koshnitz would say, "If all Jews would join hands in unity, they would blend into one big hand which would reach all the way to the Heavenly Throne and bring down all the heavenly blessings!"

Friday, Shevat 19, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / February 10, 2023

This week's Torah portion is Yitro. The highlight of this Parsha is the Ten Commandments, given to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai.

The name of the Parsha, Yitro, is after Moshe’s father-in-law, who was the priest of Midyan. Upon hearing all the miracles G-d performed for the Jewish people; their liberation from Egypt, the miracle of the splitting of the sea, the manna which came every day from heaven and the many other miracles which took place at the time, he decided to convert and join the Jewish people. He also

brings his daughter, Moshe's wife, Tziporah, and their two children to join Moshe at Mount Sinai.

There are only six Parshiot in the Torah which carry a person's name: Noah, [Chayei] Sarah, Yitro, Korach, Balak and Pinchas.

Our sages say that Yitro's words, "Baroch Hashem" – "Blessed is G-d," when he came to join the Jewish people, was an important factor in G-d's giving the Torah to the people. Thus, there is a connection between the Giving of the Torah and Yitro, which is also the name of this Parsha.

Contrary to popular perception, the two tablets were square. They were not rounded on top.

The Ten Commandments were engraved on two tablets. Both tablets were of equal size, with five commandments on each tablet. One tablet contained the commandments between man and G-d. The other contained the commandments between man and man.

Although the five commandments between man and G-d contained 146 words and the five commandments between man and man totaled only 26 words, they were written on the same size tablet. The 26 letters, which contain the mitzvot between one person and another, took up the same amount of space as the 146 words, which command us about the mitzvot between us and G-d, as they were written in much bigger letters.

Lesson: G-d wanted to teach us that one should not minimize in the importance of the commandments between man and man. They are as important in G-d's eyes as the mitzvot towards Him.

One cannot claim piety by meticulously performing the mitzvot toward G-d while ignoring the commandments between fellow humans. G-d especially engraved these commandments in LARGER letters to show that our attitude toward others plays a very important role in our relationship with G-d.

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa in Pirkei Avot stresses this point as follows: "Anyone with whom his fellowmen are pleased, G-d is pleased with him; But anyone with whom his fellowmen are not pleased, G-d is not pleased with him!" May G-d be pleased with us all and send us His blessings.

