

## **Living with Depth** **Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

Parshas Yisro recounts the great day when Hashem gave the Torah to Am Yisroel, setting us apart and giving us the guide by which we live.

We studied the parshiyos leading up to this defining moment. We studied the Jews' servitude in Mitzrayim, Divine makkos, deliverance from slavery, traversing the Yam Suf, war with Amaleik, and, finally, arriving at Har Sinai to receive the Torah.

After all they had been through, they had finally arrived at the level of belief that was necessary to receive and observe the Torah. All of creation was a preparation for this moment, and here they were camped at the Har Hashem.

It was at this time that Yisro, the gentile father-in-law of Moshe, came to visit. Having heard about the exodus from Mitzrayim, Krias Yam Suf and Amaleik's war, he decided that he had to join the Jewish people. In the lead-up to the discussion of Matan Torah, the Torah discusses Yisro's visit and the parsha is named for him.

Now, we need to realize that Yisro wasn't the only person who had heard about what happened. The whole world heard about it. Krias Yam Suf was a viral event. Everybody heard about it, because wherever they were, their water split and they were consumed to find out why and how that occurred. It was the viral, trending news of the day. That's all people were talking about.

But then it became yesterday's news and people forgot about it and moved on to the next thing. In our day, news stays hot for about fifteen minutes. Back in those days, things stuck around for longer because the vehicles of communication were limited. Also, they didn't have torrents of earth-changing news like we do in the modern era, as the world barrels towards Moshiach and has lots to accomplish in order for him to be able to come.

So why was Yisro the only person to come check it out? Why weren't there Yam Suf cruise ships loaded with people from around the world coming to see for themselves where the miraculous occurrence took place? What was so special about Yisro? It is unlikely that he was the only one who was inspired.

Apparently, people the world over were impressed and awed. Many were probably inspired, but it wore off long before the miracles could impact them in any way. Before it could have any effect on them, they were on to the next thing.

This phenomenon affects us until today. People hear about something that happened and it sends shivers up their spines. They discuss it and muse about it and are all shaken up. You'd be forgiven for thinking that they would never be the same. But then they get back to doing whatever it is that they do, and just as soon as it happened, it is forgotten. You know it's true. It happens every day. There is such a deluge of news and information and people's attention

spans are so short that they go from one thing to the next, without giving anything much thought.

People can go through entire days, weeks and months without giving anything much thought. Such conduct is anathema to a Torah life. A Torah Jew thinks about everything that happens and learns from it. He hears of a tragedy and he takes it to heart. He learns mussar from it, as he is reminded of the fragility of life. He says Tehillim for the victim and sees if and how he can help. He sends food for the family and helps with the financial load.

And if the worst happens and someone is niftar, he feels the pain and reacts like a Torah Yid, performing a slew of mitzvos, from levoyas hameis, to nichum aveilim, to tzedakah, to learning and doing maasim tovim as a zechus for the niftar.

He is affected by what happened and, in its wake, seeks to improve himself and the world.

When he does a mitzvah, it is not by rote, but with forethought and kavonah. He makes sure that he is performing the mitzvah as directed by the Shulchan Aruch, concentrating on what he is doing and not cutting corners.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach would tell the story that happened at the vort of a son of Rav Boruch Frenkel-Teumim, known for his sefer, Boruch Taam.

His son was engaged to a girl from a wealthy family. At the vort, the families sat down to speak. The Boruch Taam was unhappy, and the girl's mother was upset to see him that way and thought that maybe he wasn't satisfied with the shidduch. She asked him what was wrong.

He told her that he was distressed because he had just heard that the water carrier was sick and unable to be at the vort.

She asked him why he would be so upset over the illness of the lowly water carrier that he wasn't able to enjoy his simcha.

Rav Frenkel-Teumim left the room where they had been speaking and announced that he was breaking the engagement. He explained that he doesn't want his son to marry into a family that doesn't feel the suffering of another person.

That is how Torah Jews relate to other people. They don't just hear of another's sadness and go on to the next thing. They take it seriously and think about the other person and what they are going through.

Rav Moshe Shapiro told a story that he heard from his father-in-law, who heard it from the Chofetz Chaim.

As Shabbos was coming to a close in the town of Kalush, a simple Jew was reciting Tehillim with tears streaming down his face. Another simple person was watching and wondering what was causing the man so much pain and what he could do to help. He went over to the man, excused himself for intruding, and asked him to share what was causing him so much anguish.

The man was overcome emotionally and shared his burden. He had an older single daughter who was getting on in years. She was a fine girl, but he had no money to pay for a wedding and couldn't afford to give a dowry, so he was pouring his heart out to Hashem for help.

The man who had taken an interest in the distraught Yid broke out in a smile, as he told the man that he had a son, a fine boy, who was looking for a shidduch. He suggested that his son meet the other man's daughter, and if things would work out, they would marry each other.

Indeed, they married and gave birth to five Torah giants, among them the authors of the Ketzos Hachoshen and Kuntrus Hasefeikos.

The Chofetz Chaim would point out that the story illustrates the power of tefillah – how Hashem heard and responded to the man's tefillos. It also shows the power of a Yid's chesed. Through his care for another Jew, the man was able to help him out of his tzorah. It is no wonder that their union produced outstandingly great people who benefit Klal Yisroel until this very day.

The man could have just felt bad for the poor person with the Tehillim and passed him by, davened Maariv, and gone home and made Havdolah, totally forgetting about what he had seen. But that is not the way a Torah Jew behaves. He stops, looks and is affected. He thinks about what he can do to alleviate another's suffering.

The only person who heard about Krias Yam Suf and Milchemes Amaleik and was affected long-term by the events was Yisro. He was the only one who thought about what happened and allowed the experience to transform his life. He didn't just go on to the next thing.

The pesukim recount: "Vayichad Yisro... And Yisro rejoiced over all the goodness that Hakadosh Boruch Hu did for the Jews and rescued them from Mitzrayim... And he said, 'Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods...' And he brought korbanos to Hashem..."

No one else came to the Bnei Yisroel in the midbar saying, "Atah yodati kee gadol Hashem." Everyone else remained with their pagan beliefs. They couldn't be bothered to think about what happened and certainly not to the degree that it could change their life. They were blissful in their simplicity as they passed the ketchup and quickly went on to the next thing before the news could affect them.

This is why the Torah interrupts the chapter of the Bnei Yisroel's travels in the midbar to tell the tale of Yisro's arrival. A prerequisite for Kabbolas HaTorah is to be thoughtful and serious about life. Think about what is going on and take it to heart so that it affects you as you learn from what happened to improve yourself.

Moshe Rabbeinu was chosen to lead the Jewish people out of Mitzrayim and towards Kabbolas HaTorah and Eretz Yisroel because he stopped at the burning bush to ponder what was happening as he pursued kedusha even as he was shepherding Yisro's flock of sheep.

Living a life of depth and meaning is necessary in order to accept and grow in Torah.

Divine acts are intended to teach us the power of Hashem. Torah demands that hisorerus has a lasting impact, leading to improvement and growth.

That was the lesson of Yisro, and that is why his parsha was placed before Kabbolas HaTorah. That is why the parsha of Kabbolas HaTorah is named for Yisro.

We have to be open to hearing and examining what is going on and learning from what transpires to dedicate our lives to the truth and live honest and upstanding lives. We must study the lesson of Yisro and be affected by what transpires in our communities and around the world. We must not be apathetic, unaffected and untouched by what is going on.

If there is a war in Eretz Yisroel and millions of Jews can't sleep at night in their own beds, we should think about them and daven for them and help them however we can. If there is a war and good people are getting killed, leaving behind weeping parents, spouses, and children, we need to feel their pain. We need to let them know that we feel their tzaar and seek ways to let them know that they are not alone. The economy of Eretz Yisroel has tanked and millions of people are suffering. We need to feel their pain and see if and how we can help the suffering people in some way.

There are plenty of people closer to home who are suffering and in pain. As Torah Jews, it is incumbent upon us to know that people are in pain and to seek out ways to help them. We can't ignore what is going on. We can't apathetically just leave it for "the askonim" to get involved. It is a precondition of being bnei and bnos Torah that we feel their pain and care enough to do something about it.

Not every problem is cured with money. Often times, just the fact that another person notices and cares is enough to bring some light to a dark situation.

Every one of us has the ability to improve the world. Each of us can reach out and help others. We can all bring meaning and warmth to the lives of our neighbors, friends and fellow Jews. If only we cared. If only we tried.

We can't permit ourselves to be swallowed up by social media, clicking and clicking like mind-numbed robots, immune to feeling and thought as our fingers scroll from one page to the next, without taking notice or bettering ourselves and anyone else. We need to rid ourselves of devices that dull our senses and sink our souls.

We need to read publications that improve and educate us, and not be busy with silly, nonsensical hock. We need to think more and think deeper. We need to concentrate on what we are doing. We need to learn more Torah on a higher level and perform mitzvos with greater focus and joy.

This Shabbos, as Parshas Yisro is lained, let us stand at attention and imagine ourselves at Har Sinai, being transformed into bigger and better people, cognizant of our holy neshamos and what is expected of us.