

תורת אור חיים

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פרשת יתרו

יט' שבט תשס"ח

תורה שבעל פה מאהבה

Rabbi Moshe Goldberg

"ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלוקים מן המחנה ויציבו בתחתית ההר"

"Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d, and they stood under the mountain." (פרק יט, פסוק יז)

In this week's פרשה, in פרק יט, פסוק יז, it says "ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלוקים מן המחנה ויציבו בתחתית ההר" - "Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d, and they stood under the mountain." "ויציבו בתחתית", literally means "stood under." Rashi interprets it according to its simplest meaning that they stood at the foot of the mountain.

In the Gemara שבת (פה עמוד א), the פסוק is interpreted as a threat to the Jews "מלמד שכפה הקב"ה עליהם את ההר כגיגית ואמר להם אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב ואם לאו שם תהא" - "If you accept the Torah fine, but if not your burial will be there". תוספות asks a simple question, why should they be forced to accept the Torah? Didn't בני ישראל already say "נעשה ונשמע", and thereby accept the Torah on themselves? תוספות answers that Hashem felt that once they would be exposed to the wonders of Har Sinai, they might be frightened and consequently back down. This "threat" therefore came to reinforce the Jews to remain strong in their commitment towards the Torah.

The Medrash Tanchumah gives another interpretation. There are two categories of Torah: תורה שבעל פה and תורה שבכתב - The Written and Oral Torah. Granted, בני ישראל said "נעשה ונשמע", only regarding תורה שבכתב. Therefore Hashem's "threat" refers to תורה שבעל פה. With תורה שבעל פה, one must toil to understand it, to learn the Ramban, Ritvah, Rosh etc. It isn't easy to say "נעשה ונשמע" regarding a commitment like תורה שבעל פה, therefore, they had to be forced into accepting it. It was only centuries later in the days of Mordechai and Esther that the Jews reaccepted the תורה שבעל פה מאהבה - as the Gemara teaches "קיימו וקבלו היהודים - קיימו מה שקבלו כבר" - They reaccepted what they had already accepted in the days of Moshe at Har Sinai.

Now that we are approaching Rosh Chodesh Adar Aleph- "מי שנכנס אדר מרבים בשמחה" - we should all be zoche to have an Adar of שמחה and a true אהבה for תורה שבעל פה.

בני ישראל of הכרת הטוב

Eli Lesser

"וישמע יתרו כהן מדין חתן משה את כל אשר עשה אלהים למשה ולישראל עמו כי הוציא ה' את ישראל ממצרים"

Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel His people, how that the L-rd had brought Israel out of Egypt

A question is asked on this פסוק, "What did יתרו hear that prompted him to come?" Rashi answers that he heard about the splitting of the sea and the **war** against Amalek. This answer, however, raises another difficulty, "Why would Rashi say that he heard about the **war** against Amalek, and not the **victory** against Amalek?" Was the war itself enough of a reason for יתרו to join Klal Yisrael?

The Gemara (Sotah 11a) relates that Pharaoh had three advisors, Job, יתרו and Bilam. Pharaoh called his advisors and consulted with them regarding what to do about the Jews. Bilam suggested that he drown all the newborn boys. Job was silent. יתרו ran away, not wanting to be present when plans were being made against the Jewish people. In the end, Bilam was killed, Job endured much sufferings, and יתרו was rewarded to have Moshe as his son-in-law and his descendants as members of the Sanhedrin.

יתרו knew that he stood up for the Jews by running away from Pharaoh. He also felt that the Jews would only let him join בני ישראל if they were a people who expressed הכרת הטוב towards those who helped them. When יתרו first found out that the Jews did not fight against the Egyptians at ים סוף he felt that it was either because they were weak or because they felt some form of gratitude towards the Egyptians who had "hosted" them for many years. It was only when he found out that the Jews fought against Amalek that he realized that בני ישראל chose not to fight against the Egyptians because of הכרת הטוב. He therefore concluded that בני ישראל pay back people they feel gratitude towards and he consequently joined Klal Yisrael.

מעשה of the Week

We are currently learning מציעא in פרק אלו מציאות at Or Chaim and we have often quoted the ספר קצות החושן.

The ספר קצות החושן was written by Aryeh Lev Hacoheh Heller zt"l, who lived in Galicia during the 18th century. Reb Heller was so poor that he had no table to write his ספרים on. He had to write on two barrels upon which he placed a board. Furthermore, he had no firewood and he often had to sit in the bitter cold while he learned. It is told that his talmidim once found him with his beard frozen to the table! It is no surprise that with such perseverance he was worthy that his Torah should be studied for many generations.

When he was a young man he took his ספר to the ישיעות יעקב to get a Haskamah- an approbation. One day, he looked outside his window and saw a wedding taking place. He went outside to join the festivities and realized there was no bride or groom under the chupah! It was the ישיעות יעקב returning his manuscripts with a letter of approbation! The ספר ישיעות יעקב felt that bringing him his ספר was equivalent to a ספר תורה!

