
א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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יתרו

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Role and Responsibility

By Avi Abbett

Imagine you were married to the leader of an entire nation and he had to lead his people through a desert, through danger, to the land they were promised. This is the situation צפרה was in. She wanted to have a family, but her husband also had to lead a nation. It was a difficult situation for them to maneuver through. In our story, צפרה goes missing the entire time the Jews are in Egypt. The last time we heard about her, was when she, משה, and their two sons, were traveling from מדין to Egypt. "וַיְהִי בַדֶּרֶךְ בְּמִלּוֹן וַיִּפְגְּשׁוּהוּ ה' וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הַמִּיתוֹ" "and they were by an inn and they met 'ה and something tried to kill him". (שמות ד' א"). פסוק on this רש"י says that they were attacked by an angel who sought to kill משה. Here, צפרה stepped up. She stops משה from getting killed by circumcising their son as משה had previously chosen not to.

We learn from the גמרא in לב.א. that משה had done this because he knew that after three days his son would be sick and did not want this to be the case when they arrived in Egypt. משה had contemplated doing the ברית בילה in מדין and waiting there for some time, but 'ה told him to go quickly to Egypt and he didn't want to delay. Thus, משה decided not to circumcise his son. Because of this decision, משה and his family are attacked on their way to Egypt. The גמרא explains that this happened because משה didn't circumcise his son. The גמרא goes on to say that in the attack, משה was swallowed by the personification of wrath and anger, down to his legs. צפרה, saw this, took a sharp rock and circumcised their child. Immediately after this was done, משה was let go. Following this, צפרה isn't mentioned until after the Exodus, in פרשת יתרו. Where did she go?

In פרשת יתרו, the father in law of משה, took "וַיֵּלֶךְ יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֶת-צִפְרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ מֹשֶׁה" פסוק says, "and יתרו, the father in law of משה, took משה the wife of צפרה". (שמות יח' ב')

רש"י on this פסוק answers where צפרה went during the Exodus story. When משה and his family were going to Egypt, אהרן came out to meet them. He asked משה who the people with him were. משה responded saying that this was the family that he had made in מדין. אהרן asks why they were with משה. משה responded saying that they were coming with him to Egypt. אהרן responded saying: "There are already so many people to save here, why are you trying to add more?" With that משה sent them off back to מדין, and that's where צפרה had been the entire time.

The אור החיים offers a different opinion. If not for the ספר שמות on מדרש רבה, we would have thought that משה had divorced צפרה when he was given the role to lead the Jewish people, as he would not have time for his family. He had to send her home, not because he didn't want to add to their number in Egypt, but because he needed to focus on saving the entire nation. Additionally, it makes sense for both of the children to stay with their mother as they were both young kids at the time.

צפרה, while not being mentioned once after משה returned to Egypt, is still an important character in her children's lives. She is the one nurturing her kids and teaching them all that they know. צפרה teaches us that each person's life is different and no one person's path is greater than any other.

Receiving the תורה in Its Entirety

By Leah Kaplan

Everyone in the second grade learns the מדרש about 'ה offering the תורה to various nations of the world and it being rejected by them.

The גמרא in עבודה זרה ב: tells the מדרש of 'ה first going to the people of ישמעאל and offering them the תורה. When they asked what was included in the תורה, 'ה told them "לא תגנב" "do not steal". The people of ישמעאל rejected the gift of the תורה because of this commandment since the biblical prediction of ישמעאל's character traits are described as "ידו בכל, ויד כל בו" in בראשית ט' ז'. This means "his hand against everyone". This shows that it is ישמעאל's character trait and personality to steal from others, therefore, the people of ישמעאל rejected the תורה.

The מדרש continues that 'ה then offered the תורה to the people of עשו. They rejected the gift of the תורה because of the מצווה "לא תרצח" "do not kill". We learn from בראשית כז' מ', when יצחק gives עשו his portion of the ברכה after יעקב was already blessed, "ועל-חרבך תחיה", that עשו and his descendants will live by their swords. They, therefore, felt that they could not accept the תורה because they couldn't keep the מצווה of "do not kill".

In פרשת יתרו, 'ה reveals the עשרת הדברות to בני ישראל. The Jews willingly accepted the תורה, but it wasn't offered to them first.

Two questions naturally arise. First, the תורה is such a treasure. Why would any nation reject such a gift if there's only one rule in it that doesn't go along with their beliefs? There are six hundred and twelve other מצוות that can enrich their lives! The second question that comes up is: If you offer someone a gift and they reject it, and then offer it to another party and they accept it, is it really necessary to let the accepting party know that it was offered to someone else first?

To answer the first question, this is because the תורה is actually one unit of 613 מצוות and not 613 individual and independent מצוות. The other nations recognized this and realized that they would need to dedicate themselves to all 613 מצוות and could not only commit to keeping 612 out of the 613 מצוות. בני ישראל, on the other hand, were willing to accept all of the מצוות upon themselves. We see this in בני ישראל's response in this week's פרשה, in שמות כד' ג', as it says, "כל אשר-ידבר ה' נעשה", "all that 'ה has spoken we will do!" We learn from this that בני ישראל recognized the beauty of the way of life that the תורה offered and were excited and eager to accept all the מצוות upon themselves!

There is also a meaningful answer to the second question. The purpose of revealing that other nations rejected the תורה was not to make בני ישראל feel secondary, rather the goal was to teach us the consequences of not committing to rules that are given to us by 'ה, as well as the rewards for undertaking these rules.

May we all see the beauty of the תורה in its entirety and live happily in the ways of the תורה always seeking a deeper connection with 'ה through His מצוות!

Why is This פרשה called יתרו?

By Nadav Leibowitz

While reading the פרשה, it seems strange that the פרשה is named after יתרו, משה's father-in-law. He did suggest to משה to have more judges, and that was significant, but does that make him deserving of having a פרשה, that has the עשרת הדברות in it, named after him?

Most פרשיות get their names from the first word of the פרשה. A few examples of this include וישב, ויגש, and ויחי. Based on these examples, the פרשה should have been called וישמע. This would have been appropriate, since there is a lot of listening in the פרשה. Not just by יתרו, but also by בני ישראל, who listen carefully and closely to the giving of the עשרת הדברות, at הר סיני.

One reason for יתרו having the פרשה named after him, has to do with the importance of יתרו's actions. משה was having a really hard time with all of the judgments he had to make, when people came to him for a court case. Therefore, people had to wait a long time to get judged and that was very frustrating.

Imagine if you had to wait 6 months for a decision on an important question. For example, who should pay if there was damage done to your car by your neighbor. It would be frustrating to have to wait that long. You wouldn't have a car to use and it would hurt your relationship with your neighbor. It makes sense why בני ישראל became frustrated and upset at משה, and even ה', for such a drawn-out legal process.

יתרו suggested having more judges. They would share the work with משה, so that the legal system would move faster and משה would have more time. This would, in the end, save בני ישראל's relationship with the newly given תורה and its giver, ה'.

רש"י has two more reasons why the פרשה was named after יתרו. The first has to do with the title that follows יתרו's name, after his name is said. That title is "חֵתֵן מֹשֶׁה", משה's father-in-law. This is repeated many times, not because we forget the relationship between משה and יתרו, rather because יתרו wanted to take pride in being related to משה. As a result, every time we hear יתרו, we think of משה as well. When we see that the name of the פרשה is יתרו it reminds us of משה. This explains why the פרשה was named after יתרו and not וישמע. In doing so, the פרשה that has the most important event in the תורה, the עשרת הדברות, is connected to משה.

The second reason given by רש"י has to do with the meaning of יתרו's name. The root of his name יתר, which means more, like the word יותר. This was a name that was given to him, in addition to his other 6 names, because his personality was the type that always wanted more.

For example, when he heard that ה' led בני ישראל out of מצרים he wanted to learn more about ה'. This desire to learn more and grow more inspired him eventually to convert to Judaism.

This teaches us that you should always strive to learn more and become closer to ה', even if it is only a ביסל.

Family Dynamics

By Shaindle Kaplan

בני משה spent 40 days and nights, on הר סיני, learning the תורה from ה' in order to give it over to בני ישראל. When he came down the mountain, he proceeded to spend all day judging the cases of בני ישראל. He spent a significant amount of time away from his wife and children after leaving them in מדין. Therefore, we don't know much about his relationship with צפורה and his sons. However, we can see a hint to their family life through a description of יתרו's behavior in our פרשה.

In the beginning of the פרשה, it says, וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אֲנִי חֲתָנְךָ יִתְרוֹ בֶּן-אֵלֶיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ עִמָּה, "And he said to משה, I am your father in law יתרו, coming to you with your wife and two sons." (שמות יח"ו) It seems that יתרו's main purpose for approaching משה was to speak to him and have a conversation. Why then would he need to bring צפורה, משה's wife, and אליעזר and גרשום, משה's two sons along?

Perhaps יתרו had a deeper insight into the way that משה viewed his family life. רש"י explains to us that the purpose of משה's family accompanying יתרו was a way for יתרו to entice משה to come out of the tent to speak with him. According to רש"י, יתרו said to משה that if he wouldn't come out of the tent for the sake of יתרו, to speak with him, then he should come out for the sake of צפורה, and if not for צפורה, then for the sake of his two sons.

אבן עזרא takes a similar approach and explains that יתרו came with צפורה because she was of the utmost importance and was valued very deeply by משה. It is clear that יתרו recognized that, although משה spent significant time away from his family, משה's chief concern and most important interpersonal relationship, was with his family.

A takeaway message from this situation is to value every moment in life with family. Similar to משה, no matter how limited your availability due to community commitments, or employment obligations, never miss an opportunity to spend time with family.

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