

א ב י ס כ ל ת ו ר א !

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י"ט שבט תשפ"ו • יתרו

Two Sons Both First?

By Eliana Goldenholz '26

This week's פרשה is packed with Jewish law, philosophy, and history. There is a lot to talk about regarding the פרשה and there are many famous ideas. However, there is a less known detail, one that is tucked into the brief account of משה's two sons, that will be this תורה's focus. The תורה records their names and the reasons behind them: "אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאֶחָד" "of whom one was named גרשום, as he said 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land'" "וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֱלִיעֶזֶר כִּי-אֶל-לְקִי אָבִי בְּעֶזְרִי וַיַּצֵּלֵנִי" "and the other was named אליעזר, as 'the G-d of my father was my help and saved me from the sword of פרעה' (שמות יח:ג-ד)". At first glance, there is nothing unusual here. Often names get brief explanations. But a closer look reveals something odd: "האחד" "the one" appears twice. As in, both children are introduced as "the one." Why two "firsts"? Shouldn't אליעזר have been called "השני" "the second"? While perhaps the English translation makes the phrasing work, in Hebrew, the פסוק reads rather strangely.

This oddity caught the attention of many commentators. חזקיהו explains this word choice rather simply: גרשום could not initially be circumcised due to משה's agreement with יתרו. Once אליעזר was circumcised, it made him - spiritually and covenantally - the first son entered into Hashem's covenant. Therefore, the תורה calls him the first, a title of primacy. Though גרשום was the first in age, אליעזר

is also called 'האחד' because of his eighth-day circumcision.

אוריאל comes at this from a different point of view. The word "האחד" hints that from אליעזר's single son, his line would grow extraordinarily numerous. Having more children does not guarantee greater descendants; rather, Hashem can bring extraordinary multiplicity from a single source.

Then the אוריאל comes in and reframes the whole discussion. He explains the dual use of "האחד" not through הלכה or genealogy, but through the inner truths of משה's being. אליעזר's name recalls a dramatic moment of divine rescue, that is, of G-d saving משה from פרעה's sword. גרשום's name reflects something deeper still. According to the אוריאל, when משה was a stranger in a foreign land it speaks not only of geography, but of his existential stance. משה felt himself a stranger in this world itself. His sense of alienness, of not fully belonging to the ordinary plane of human life, was not a mood or a phase; it was fundamental to him. And משה acknowledged that inner truth by giving his first son a name that embodies it.

Two sons, two names, two primacies: the inner one of alienness and the outer one of divine rescue. Through גרשום, we get insight about who משה is in this world, and through אליעזר who משה becomes once Hashem enters the world he's in. While this may feel unsatisfying to many readers, as I am not ending with an explicit moral or הלכה, trying to recognize the

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significance to this specific language in these innocent-looking פסוקים is just as important. משה remains one of the most complicated figures in תנ"ך and the Jewish people's history. He was a man who did not belong in our world, a man who lived in a different spiritual plane than others, yet his mission in life only happens in this world. At משה's core was an existential tension.

Leadership and Help

By Nadav Leibowitz '27

It is strange how משה רבינו, the man who spoke with G-d constantly and is known as the greatest prophet ever, needed help at the beginning of the week's פרשה. This advice also came from someone who was not a part of בני ישראל but rather a priest in מדין. יתרו בהן. מדין watches משה judge בני ישראל and notices that משה needs help because every Israelite who needed help always went to משה. Even though יתרו sees that משה is doing a very holy task and giving the word of G-d to help the people יתרו says: "לא־טוב הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר" "The thing you are doing is not right" (שמות 17:10). The one of the only other times we see the תורה say "לא־טוב הַדְּבָר" "the thing is not good" is when G-d sees that it is not good for אדם הראשון to be alone "לא־טוב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ" "it is not good for man to be alone" (בראשית 2:2). This also applies to משה in this circumstance when he has judged בני ישראל all by himself with no help. יתרו outright tells משה that what he is doing is not right and that he needs help. משה

understands that what יתרו is saying is right and that while he was tasked with a very important job he must still be careful about himself and not to burn himself out with all this work. יתרו teaches משה that leadership is not about doing everything by one's self but rather doing what is best for everyone, even the leaders themselves. The תורה is telling us that we cannot receive the תורה until we learn how to help ourselves first and then focus on helping others. Only after this moment, only after משה learns what is best for בני ישראל and himself, do בני ישראל arrive at הר סיני and receive the תורה.



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