

# THE MECHANISM OF SPIRITUALITY

*by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky*

## 1. The Mechanism to Process Spirituality

The Torah tells us that at the splitting of the Sea, Hashem's presence was so manifest that even the Jewish maidservant who witnessed this miracle said, "Behold, this is my G-d I will glorify him!" The Chazal tell us that the maidservant experienced a level of revelation at the Sea that was greater than any revelation ever experienced by the prophet Yechezkel. Although the maidservant at the Sea saw G-d in a more revealed and obvious manner than the prophet Yechezkel, she remained a maidservant after the experience while Yechezkel became the prophet of his generation. The maidservant's life was not changed in any way as a result of her experience. How come the revelation of G-d did not cause the maidservant to become more than a maidservant? Yet, Yechezkel's level of revelation was far less than that of the maidservant and he dedicated his entire life to G-d. How do we understand this?

We read in this week's parsha that after hearing what Hashem had done for the Jews, Yisro was so affected that he decided to leave Midian and join the Jews in the desert in order to cleave to Hashem. Yisro was not the only person to hear about what Hashem had done to Egypt. The entire world knew that G-d had destroyed Egypt and redeemed His people, yet Yisro was the only one to be affected while the rest of the world remained unchanged.

The Gemara in Zevachim says that when Hashem was giving the Torah at Sinai the earth began to quake and the nations of the world ran in fear to their prophet Bilaam. They said to Bilaam that Hashem was destroying the world, but Bilaam explained that the reason why the earth was shaking was because Hashem was giving the Torah to His people. Upon hearing this news the nations of the world calmed down and returned to their pagan and idolatrous lives. The nations of the world were not affected in any way despite the fact that they clearly understood that Hashem was giving the Torah at that moment. With that level of clarity they should have gone to Sinai, yet they remained unchanged.

We see that people can hear about and understand the occurrence of momentous events and yet remain unchanged. The maidservant at the Sea remained the maidservant after witnessing the revelation of G-d despite having a level of clarity that was greater than Yechezkel the prophet. The nations of the world heard about the miraculous events surrounding the Jewish exodus from Egypt, yet only Yisro was affected. The entire world knew that Hashem was giving the Torah to the Jews

but they nevertheless continued in their pagan ways. Why was Yisro affected and not anyone else? Why was Yechezkel a prophet who dedicated his life to G-d, while the maidservant at the Sea did not change?

The answer is that understanding is not the only prerequisite for being affected by G-d. One must devote himself to constant growth and preparation in order to have clarity to be affected. The Chazal tell us that Yisro had devoted his life to exploring and serving every conceivable deity in the world and consequently concluded that Hashem was the One and Only G-d. He developed the capacity to appreciate Hashem through his lifetime of exploring other deities and realizing that they were all false. It was because of this conditioning and training that Yisro had the capacity to change his entire life and join the Jews after hearing how the All Powerful G-d turned nature upside down in order to redeem His people.

Yechezkel, the prophet, devoted his entire life to the service of Hashem. Every moment of his life was invested in performing G-d's Will. It is because of this dedicated conditioning and development that Yechezkel appreciated and internalized every experience. For Yechezkel, seeing Hashem was not an external occurrence - it was part of his total being; whereas the maidservant at the Sea was a mere maidservant prior to her revelation of G-d. How could a maidservant truly appreciate that revelation and be affected by it? What preparation or development did she have prior to that moment that would give her the capacity to be affected? This is why the maidservant returned to being a maidservant after seeing G-d in the most absolute and obvious manner.

Often people have spiritual experiences in life such as praying at the Kotel in Jerusalem, meeting a special individual, or hearing about some miraculous event. However the moment that the spiritual experience is over the person returns to his prior perspective completely unaffected by the experience.

Without the ongoing development process and conditioning through the study of Torah and the performance of Mitzvos it is not possible to develop a capacity to be affected by Hashem's presence in this world. Knowledge and understanding are only some of the prerequisites needed for being affected. We witness miracles every day; however, how have they impacted on our lives? Evidently we need to continuously engage in developing our spiritual capacity.

## **2. Understanding is more than Knowledge**

We read in this week's parsha, "Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law (Yisro) and ...Moshe told his father-in-law all that Hashem had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for Israel's sake - all the trouble that had befallen them on the way - and that Hashem had rescued them." What was the purpose of Moshe sharing this information with his father-in-law Yisro (who was not a Jew)? This information seemingly had no relevance to Yisro.

Rashi cites the Mechilta, which explains that the purpose of telling Yisro about all the wondrous events surrounding the Jewish exodus was to draw Yisro close to Torah. (Moshe wanted Yisro to

stand with the Jews at Sinai to receive the Torah.) We see from this Chazal, that the more a person understands and sees the Hand of G-d in this world the more that person will come close to Torah. If we were to comprehend Hashem's ongoing relationship with existence then we would be drawn closer to Torah.

A person may believe in G-d as well as believe that he is doing His Will by being a "good person." However, if it is not in conformity with the Torah then that person's conduct is incorrect. The only way to be truly a "good person" with respect to G-d, is that one must follow the Torah. The way for one to understand this is to observe and see the Hand of G-d in existence.

Moshe did not share the detailed events about the Jewish exodus with Yisro for the sake of keeping him abreast of current events; Moshe wanted Yisro to appreciate that everything that happens in this world is due to G-d's involvement. What happened to the Jewish people was not a mere "event."

If a person has the proper perspective and ongoing cognizance he would be able to see Hashem's involvement in existence. The question is - How does one gain this perspective? Is it through the study of Torah? It is possible to study Torah on an intellectual basis and not gain a Torah perspective. The only way to achieve this level of clarity is to concentrate on increasing one's "fear of Hashem." As it says in the verse, "The prerequisite to wisdom is the fear of Hashem." Therefore, one must study Torah with the intent of increasing his awareness of G-d and not just for gaining information and intellectual advancement. As we see, Moshe informed Yisro of the Jewish exodus not for intellectual or factual purposes, but rather to increase Yisro's appreciation of Hashem and thus bring him closer to Torah.

### **3. Breaking through the Interference**

The Torah states, "Yisro, the Minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d had done for Moshe and Israel, His People - that Hashem took Israel out of Egypt." After Yisro heard all that Hashem had done for the Jewish people, he abandoned his position as Minister of Midian and his community to join the Jewish people in the desert. What did Yisro hear that caused him to abandon his life in Midian? What is "all that G-d had done..."?

Rashi explains that "all that G-d had done..." means that Yisro had heard that Hashem had taken the Jews out of Egypt. The revealed miracles and the plagues are not mentioned as being part of what Yisro had heard. He was impressed by the mere fact that Hashem had taken the Jews out of Egypt. Why was Yisro impressed? By the time of the tenth and final plague (the killing of the first born), Egypt was already decimated and in ruins. At that point the Jews did not need G-d to take them out - they simply could have left Egypt.

The fact is four-fifths of the Jews did not leave Egypt because they did not want to leave and therefore perished during the plague of darkness. Despite seeing the plagues and the miracles, they did not have the clarity to want to leave the country of their bondage. After seeing the Hand of G-d in such an obvious manner how could they not have the clarity? Evidently life is more than clarity of

mind - it is a sense and an internalization of reality. What prevents this sense and internalization?

The Mishna Brurah ( a commentary on the Code of Laws) states that the value of the Pesukei D'Zimra is to break through the layers of (spiritual) impurity that exists in the world so that Hashem receives our prayers without interference. There are forces in existence that can prevent and interfere with our prayers as well as our actions. These forces are not something that we can visualize; nevertheless, they are part of reality.

The Egyptians were engaged in idolatry, witchcraft, incest, and adultery; and their level of spiritual impurity was such that they are referred to as an "abomination." Egypt was a stronghold of impurity that the Jews were exposed to for 210 years. How was it possible for the Jews to shed this impurity when they left Egypt to receive the Torah at Sinai? Evidently a great miracle was needed to purge the Jews from this impurity. This is what impressed Yisro - that Hashem was able to take the Jews out of their spiritual impurity and give them the capacity for Sinai. Yisro had experimented with every form of idol worship in existence and was able to appreciate the dimension of this miracle because he truly understood the meaning of spiritual impurity. The fact that Hashem was able to free the Jews from their spiritual bondage was what impressed Yisro to join the Jewish people in the desert.

We ask Hashem in our daily prayers that He should free the bound and raise the fallen. This refers not only to physical freedom but also to spiritual redemption from the spiritual impurities of existence.

#### **4. The Caliber of Individual Needed to Teach Torah**

In this week's Parsha Yisro observed how Moshe was single-handedly judging the Jewish People. Yisro advised Moshe, his son-in-law, that he should not be the sole judge of the Jewish people because eventually he would wither from the enormous strain and become incapable of handling the position. Yisro therefore suggested to Moshe that he select judges and form a judicial system. Moshe went before Hashem and asked if he should establish a court system. Hashem agreed. Why didn't Moshe understand that he could not continue to judge by himself as Yisro had said? Why did Moshe believe that he should be the judge of the Jewish people without others to assist him? Didn't he know that he would eventually become aged and incapable of fulfilling that role?

Before Moshe passed away he admonished the Jewish People and recounted that they were satisfied when he decided to appoint judges and create a judicial system (Parshas Devorim.) Moshe said in his admonishment that Jews were happy with the new judicial system because they believed that the new system would be in their best interest. Rashi cites the Chazal and explains that the Jews should have understood and expressed their preference for having Moshe as their teacher since he had learned the Torah directly from Hashem and had sacrificed for the Torah. They should have insisted that Moshe be the only one to adjudicate for them. The Jews understood that Moshe's judgment was strict and that he could not be swayed; however, the new judicial system would provide them with numerous judges that would be lenient and easy to influence. This is why Moshe

admonished the Jews.

Moshe represented the word of Hashem and understood that just as he affected the Jews at Sinai when they received the Torah through him, he could continue to influence them on a daily basis if he served as their judge. Since Moshe was the conduit for the Torah, he believed that he was the most qualified to render judgments regardless of how old and withered he would become. Nevertheless, the Jewish people did not seem to concur with this belief since they readily accepted a new judicial system without complaint.

Although Moshe accepted Yisro's suggestion to start a judicial system, he understood that only his transmission of Torah to the Jewish People would have the greatest impact.

A person must be at a special level to teach Torah and make an impact. For example, Rav Shach z'tl was teaching a Torah class during a time when scud missiles were being launched against Israel. He was asked by a student what they should do if the missile siren were to sound during the class. Rav Shach told them that the Torah that he was going to be teaching them was so powerful that the class would not be interrupted. This is in fact what had taken place. It was only after the class ended that the missile siren sounded!

Once, an ordinary person had heard the Vilna Gaon say the Shema. He was so affected by that event that he dedicated his entire life to the study of Torah. We see that the person who teaches Torah not only imparts knowledge but also transmits spirituality to his students. Moshe wished to remain the sole teacher and judge of the Jewish people because he understood his capabilities. Unfortunately the Jews did not.

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