

# YISRO'S EXTRAORDINARY QUALITY

*by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky*

## 1. Yisro's Extraordinary Quality

The Torah states, "Yisro, the Priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that G'd said to Moshe and to Israel..." Rashi cites Chazal, "What did Yisro hear that caused him to abandon all of his glory and join the Jewish people in the desert? The splitting of the Sea and the battle against the Amalekites." Upon hearing about these miracles, Yisro was affected to the point that the ultimate privilege and purpose was to become part of the Jewish people. Although the entire world was aware of the miracle of the splitting of the Sea, as Chazal tell us that every body of water (including the water in a vessel) split at the time that the sea had split, only Yisro was compelled to become one of the Jewish people.

The Midrash states, "There are those who hear and are diminished by it, while there are those who hear and are the beneficiaries of what they heard. Yoash, who was a king, heard and was diminished. The nations heard about the splitting of the sea and rather than glorifying G'd they were pained and distraught by the destruction of Egypt. In contrast, Yisro heard and benefited. Despite the fact that he was a high priest of idolatry, he abandoned all that he had accomplished in his life and attached himself to Moshe and entered under the wings of the Divine Presence. He merited to contribute to the portion of judges that is in the Torah. As we find, he delineated to Moshe the criteria to choose a qualified judge." To what do we attribute Yisro's profound perception of truth?

Avraham, our Patriarch, was unique and special because of his all-consuming quest for truth. Despite the fact that he was born into a pagan world that was immersed in idolatry, he came upon the fact that there was One Supreme Being. Because of this degree of unswerving commitment and dedication to his belief, he is referred to as "Avraham Ha'Ivry (Avraham from the other side of the river)." Chazal tell us that this appellation quantifies Avraham as the person who was willing to stand up and sacrifice for what he believed in regardless of the formidable opposition of the world. Yisro shared a similar quality.

Chazal tell us that Yisro had worshiped every deity in existence and ultimately concluded that they were all false and there was only One G'd. Despite the ridicule of his community, Yisro was not deterred or discouraged. Although Yisro had become a pariah in his community, he remained strong and committed to his belief in monotheism. Through the process of searching for truth, he had honed and perfected his perception of truth. Thus, when he had heard of the events of the splitting of the sea and the war against the Amalekites, he chose to become part of the Jewish people.

regardless of the degree of sacrifice.

The Torah states, "The priest of Midian (Yisro) had seven daughters; they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's sheep. The shepherds came and drove them away. Moshe got up and saved them and watered their sheep. They came to Reuel (Yisro) their father. He said, "How could you come so quickly today?" They replied, "An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds, and he even drew water for us and watered the sheep." He said to his daughters, "Then where is he? Why did you leave the man? Summon him and let him eat bread!" Rashi cites Chazal who explain that what Yisro had said, "let him eat bread" he was alluding to the fact that Moshe should be considered as a potential husband for one of his daughters. How was Yisro able to evaluate and perceive Moshe as something exceptional and unique thus considering him to be a perspective husband for one of his daughters? Yisro, the sheik of Midian, was not a person of ordinary ability. He was an individual who was astute and had a profound ability to understand truth. He was thus able to perceive things as they truly were. In fact, Yisro initially was one of the three advisers to Pharaoh, who was the monarch of the most advanced society in the world. This tells us that he was uniquely astute and had profound abilities that allowed him to be sensitive to many events and issues that were not evident to most people.

Although Moshe had put his life in jeopardy when he assisted Yisro's daughters to fight off their attackers, he nevertheless did not seek any remuneration or acknowledgement for his service. The quality of this behavior was out of the ordinary. Under normal circumstances, an individual who offered this degree of assistance would have returned together with the women who he had assisted and protected so that the family would minimally acknowledge and appreciate what he had done for them. Yisro, recognizing the unequalled humility of the unknown rescuer of his daughters caused him to ask his daughters, "why did you not bring him back?" He is a qualified husband for one of you. Yisro was able to recognize that Moshe was special and unique because he himself was special.

Yisro heard and benefited from the miracles that were performed on behalf of the Jewish people because he was willing to forfeit everything for the sake of truth.

## 2. The Need to Overcome Spiritual Impediments

The Torah states, "In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day they arrived at the desert of Sinai (to receive the Torah)." The Midrash asks, "Why was the Torah not given to the Jewish people immediately after being redeemed from Egypt? G'd had said, 'I will take this people out to serve G'd on this mountain...' Seemingly, after the Jewish people left Egypt they should have received the Torah immediately. Reb Yehudah Bar Shalom answers this question with an analogy. It is similar to a prince who was recovering from an illness. His father said, 'Let him fully recover before he resumes his regular Torah studies.' After the Jewish people had left Egypt, they were blemished from their bondage. G'd had said, 'It will take time for them to heal from their

illness. Then they will receive the Torah."

The Torah tells us that after the splitting of the Sea and seeing the remains of the Egyptians on the seashore, "They believed in G'd and Moshe his servant." If the Torah attests to the fact that they had reached this extraordinary level of belief after the splitting of the Sea, it is inferred that that prior to that moment, although they had witnessed the ten plagues and the miracles upon leaving Egypt they were not yet at this level of belief. They needed to witness and be exposed to many more miracles. Even after witnessing the closing of the Sea and the singing the praises of G'd, the Jewish people complained and quarreled with Moshe at Marah. They were given the Manna, which was in its essence the food of angels in order to spiritualize them prior to Sinai. As Chazal tell us, "The Torah was given to those who had eaten of the Manna."

After their departure from Egypt, the Jewish people were continuously exposed to miracles and spirituality in order to purge them from the impurity that they had absorbed in Egypt. It was only after they were sufficiently purified and had overcome all of their spiritual impediments, did they have the ability to internalize their experiences and were thus able to declare at Sinai, "Naaseh V'Nishma- we will do and we will listen."

The Jewish people being spiritually handicapped from their 210-year exposure to the spiritual impurities of Egypt were not initially ready to receive the Torah immediately after their redemption. Every day that had passed after the Jewish people had left Egypt, they ascended to another level of spiritual purity. When they had left Egypt that were at the 49th level of spiritual impurity, which was the point of spiritual extinction. They needed to extricate and elevate themselves from an impure state to a totally pure state over the following 49-day period. After they had reached the pinnacle of their spirituality, they were able to be taken as G'd's people by being given the Torah at Sinai.

### 3. Dason And Aviram, the Precipitators of the Ultimate

The Torah tells us that Dason and Aviram had informed on Moshe to Pharaoh when he had killed the Egyptian. Moshe was subsequently condemned by Pharaoh to be put to death; however, he had miraculously fled Egypt. He became a fugitive in Midian for many years. Moshe had witnessed an Egyptian beating a Jew after he had raped the Jew's wife. Moshe was thus compelled to take the appropriate action, which was to kill him. Although Moshe's action was unequivocally justified and correct, Dason and Aviram, his fellow Jews informed on him to Pharaoh. Why did they do so?

Although Moshe, was a Jew he had a special royal status in Egypt because he was the adopted grandson of Pharaoh. Due to his lofty position within the Egyptian hierarchy, Moshe could have been a powerful advocate for his Jewish brethren. Regardless of his unlimited value to the Jewish people, Dason and Aviram informed on him causing him to flee Egypt. They did this because of their evil, that was driven by their ego and self-interest. Because of their wealth and financial standing within the community they had a special relationship with Pharaoh. It was because of this that they were able to gain Pharaoh's attention in order to inform on Moshe. Regardless of the catastrophic

consequences to the Jewish people, they could not tolerate that any Jew could be more intimate with Pharaoh than themselves. Thus for the sake of their egos they informed on him.

After Moshe returned to Egypt as the Redeemer from being in exile for many years in Midian, Dason and Aviram publicly rebuked Moshe by saying, "May Hashem look upon you and judge you..." As a result of their harshness, he approached G'd and expressed himself in an inappropriate manner saying, "My Lord, why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me?" As a result of Moshe's statement, he was denied entry into the Promised Land.

Dason and Aviram continuously challenged Moshe's authority in the desert and influenced the Jewish people to complain and be defiant against the Word of G'd. Despite their level of evil and intolerable behavior, Moshe tolerated Dason and Aviram. He did not ostracize them or punish them, regardless of their continuous incitement

The Midrash cites a verse from Ecclesiastes, "King Solomon writes, 'G'd favors the pursued.' ... We find Abel was pursued by Cain. As a result of being the pursued, G'd favored the offering of Abel and rejected the offering that was brought by Cain. Noach was pursued by the members of his generation. As a result of this, Noach was favored by G'd as it states, 'Noach found favor in the eyes of G'd.' Avraham was pursued by Nimrod. Avraham was favored by G'd as it states, 'You are Hashem, G'd who has chosen Avraham and has taken him out of the fiery kiln...' Yitzchak was pursued by the Philistines, Yaakov was pursued by Esav, Yosef was pursued by his brothers, Moshe was pursued by Pharaoh, and the Jewish people are pursued by the nations of the world... In all these situations G'd favors the pursued... Therefore, Moshe was His Chosen."

Why does G'd favor the pursued? When one is in a pursued state one is unceasingly and relentlessly hounded by his pursuer. He understands that he has no route of escape or any way to extricate himself from the pursuit of his pursuer. Realizing his predicament, he turns to G'd with a depth of understanding and an internalization of his predicament. He recognizes that only G'd could help him. The internalization of this fact establishes a special and unique relationship between the individual (the pursued) and G'd. His untenable circumstance brings him to understand that all existence is dictated and determined by G'd Himself. This is the basis for G'd to favor the pursued. Moshe, achieving the distinction of being the chosen of G'd, the individual who had the most intimate relationship with G'd and thus qualified him to be the conduit to bring the Torah to the Jewish people, was only able to acquire these qualities because he was being pursued by Pharaoh.

Although the intent of Dason and Aviram was evil and sinister, they were the cause of Pharaoh's pursuit of Moshe. They had set in motion all that was necessary to ultimately lead to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, thus fulfilling the purpose of existence. As Chazal tell us, "The world was created for the sake of the Torah and the Jewish people to receive it." Moshe, understanding this felt that he owed an unlimited debt of gratitude to Dason and Aviram regardless of their evil intent.

The concept of "Gamzu la'tova - it is all for the best" teaches us that whatever one experiences in

life, although one may not understand its innate value, it is in our best interest. One's predicament may appear to be dire or tragic and truly untenable, because one is unaware of G'd's intentions. Nevertheless one must perceive it as positive vein because it will ultimately bring about what is beneficial, as G'd had intended it to be.

#### 4. Seeing Something Within it's Proper Context

The Torah tells us that after Yisro had gone into the desert to become part of the Jewish people, Moshe had shared with him in detail, every aspect of what had transpired at the time of the exodus, the destruction of the Egyptian army and how the Jewish people were miraculously saved. The Torah states, "Yisro rejoiced over all the good that Hashem had done for Israel, that He had rescued them from the land of Egypt..." It would seem that Yisro's rejoicing over the good that G'd had provided for the Jewish people was the proper response to what had taken place. However, Sforno explains that the Torah is communicating something that is slightly critical of Yisro. Sforno states, "When Yisro had heard how the Egyptians were destroyed, he did not rejoice over their destruction. He did not behave as one who is zealous over the honor for what is afforded to his Creator as a result of the destruction of His enemies." Upon hearing of the destruction of the Egyptians, who defied G'd, Yisro should have rejoiced that this insolent and evil entity of Egypt had been vanquished and destroyed. However, he did not rejoice over this fact, but rather, over the good that was afforded to the Jewish people. A person who lives for the sake of G'd's Glory would have rejoiced over the destruction of evil rather than focusing on the beneficiary who are the Jewish people. Every day we recite in the Amidah (in the blessing against the heretics), "And for the slanderers let there be no hope; and may all wickedness perish in an instant; and may all Your enemies be cut down speedily..." We supplicate G'd that His enemies should be destroyed and that evil should come to an end. One would think that since requests of the Amidah are of personal nature, they should focus on the destruction of our enemies because of our own issues. Although it is true that the enemies of the Jewish people are also the enemies of G'd, our primary focus is G'd's Glory. We pray that G'd's enemies should be destroyed so that evil should not exist.

We say in the Avinu Malkeinu, "Our Father, Our King, avenge before our eyes the spilled blood of Your servants." We are supplicating G'd that we want to witness the destruction of our enemies. It is not because the nature of the Jew is to be (G'd forbid) bloodthirsty and seeking revenge, but rather we pray that those who have victimized the Jewish people throughout history should be eliminated only because by doing so, we be witness to the glorification of G'd.

The Torah tells us that G'd said, "My Throne is not be complete until the Amalekites are obliterated from under the heavens." The reason the Amalekites need to be destroyed is not because they are the enemies of the Jewish people and have persecuted them throughout history, but rather because, G'd Himself says that His Throne cannot be complete without their annihilation. Since their existence undermines G'd's Glory. They therefore, must be destroyed.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we recite in the Amidah that G'd should instill fear upon all mankind. We also speak about the various classifications of the devoutly righteous who will rejoice at this particular time, each one to his own level of piety. When this will take place G'd's revelation evil will be vanquished from the world. Yisro focused on the periphery (beneficiary) rather than the essence of the accomplishment. Thus, he fell short of his potential.

#### 5. Moshe's Qualification as the Redeemer

The Torah tells us that when the Jewish people were traveling away from Egypt, G'd said to Moshe to tell them to travel back towards the approaching Egyptian army in order to give them the impression that they were stranded in the desert. Although traveling in the direction of the enemy would seem to be considered irresponsible behavior, they did not hesitate to follow the dictate of G'd. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "This is to demonstrate the praiseworthiness of the Jewish people that they listened to Moshe. They could have said, 'How could we approach those who are pursuing us? We should flee from them.' However, the Jewish people said, 'We only have the dictate of Ben Amram (Moshe).'" One would think that referring to Moshe, who was G'd's designated redeemer as 'Ben Amram (the son of Amram)' would be considered a pejorative reference. They should have referred to him as "Moshe." Why did they not do so, especially if this is being mentioned within a praiseworthy context?

The Torah tells us that Moshe assumed his name as a result of Pharaoh's daughter drawing him out of the Nile. The name "Moshe" alludes to the fact that he was "drawn out of the water" as is stated by the verse. The Midrash tells us that Moshe was given seven names (Tov, Tuvia, Tuvi, etc.) by his parents Amram and Yocheved. Amram, the grandson of Levy was the leading Sage of his generation and a person who had not sinned during his lifetime. Yocheved, the daughter of Levy, was a woman who had risked her life as a midwife not to kill the Jewish males at the time of their birth because she feared G'd. Kesav Sofer asks, "Due to the greatness of Moshe's parents, why does the Torah refer to him by the name given to him by the daughter of Pharaoh and not by one of the names given to him by his parents?"

Kesav Sofer answers that the Torah refers to Moshe as the "most humble man who ever walked the face of the earth." This was the all-encompassing characteristic, that was the basis for Moshe's greatness. One could become humble in one of two ways: either through experiencing life's hardships and difficulties, which causes one to become humble. Thus causing one to assume a posture of humility, or through recognizing G'd's omnipotence causing ones negation. The Torah wants us to have an appreciation for Moshe's greatness by referring to him by the name that was given to him by the Egyptian princess, the daughter of Pharaoh. Moshe was the adopted grandchild of Pharaoh and was raised as a prince in the palace with all of its opulence. Despite royal upbringing and being treated with reverence and respect, he was nevertheless the most humble man who ever lived. Thus the name Moshe is a testament to an individual, whose level of humility was unheard of.

Sforno explains why Pharaoh's daughter had used the circumstance of Moshe being drawn from the water as a basis for his name. He explains, "The daughter of Pharaoh called him 'Moshe' which alludes to the fact that he was destined to help others. Because he was miraculously drawn from the water and did not drown, it was clear that it was G'd's decree that he should live to save others." According to Sforno's interpretation, we are able to say that the reason the Torah chooses the name "Moshe" rather than the names given to him by his parents in order to continuously communicate the essence of Moshe. He did not for a moment live for himself, but only for G'd and the Jewish people.

If the Jewish people had referred to Moshe as 'Moshe' and not 'the son of Amram' they had mistakenly understood that they were attributing all that had taken place until that moment to himself because Moshe had taken the initiative to bring it about. It would not have been attributed to G'd but rather Moshe. However, by referring to him as 'the son of Amram,' which is a minimization of Moshe (as a person), it reveals that the basis for their lack of fear was their own negation to G'd Himself, rather than a mortal. It was because they had possessed exceptional trust in G'd that they traveled back in the direction of the enemy and it was not because they had faith in Moshe their leader. Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and **Torah.org**.

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