

G-D CARES

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Yisro

G-d Cares

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Sponsored by
Irving and Arline Katz on the yahrzeits of
grandmother Henia Rochel bat Pinchas a"h (Tu B'Shevat),
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on the yahrzeit of his father
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Eli, Rachel Adina, Daniel Avraham, Yonatan and Chana Rutstein
on the birthday of wife and mother Galit

Today's Learning:
Shekalim 4:4-5
O.C. 513:8-514:2
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Pesachim 32
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Demai 33

Our parashah opens: "Yitro, the priest of Midian, the father-in- law of Moshe, heard everything that Elokim had done for Moshe and for Yisrael, His people -- that Hashem had taken Yisrael out of Egypt." R' Uri Feivel z"l (Krystynopol, Galicia; died circa 1805) observes that the change in the verse from "Elokim" to "Hashem" alludes to Yitro's coming to learn one of the fundamentals of our faith. R' Uri Feivel writes as follows:

The name Elokim alludes to G-d as the Creator of the laws of nature and as a strict judge. [These two attributes are related in that nature and justice both follow principles of cause and effect.] In contrast, the four-letter name that we pronounce "Hashem" alludes to G-d's attribute of mercy and His performance of supernatural miracles. Even Pharaoh knew that there was a Creator, but he believed that that Creator was no longer active and that the laws of nature governed all existence. Therefore, Pharaoh denied the existence of miracles. Likewise, he denied that there was a Deity who cared about Bnei Yisrael in particular.

We read in Parashat Shemot (3:16) that Hashem told Moshe: "I have surely remembered you and 'he'asui' / what is done to you in Egypt." Rabbeinu Bachye z"l comments that the letter "heh" in the word "he'asui" alludes to Hashem. In the light of the above, writes R' Uri Feivel, we can understand Rabbeinu Bachye's comment. Not only were Bnei Yisrael oppressed in Egypt; the concept of G-d as "Hashem" also was under attack. And, when Hashem remembered the oppression of His people, He also planned to "rescue" His Name, "Hashem," by exhibiting His mercy and His miracles.

When Yitro heard about the Exodus, he realized Pharaoh's mistake. Elokim and Hashem are indeed One. (Ohr Ha'chochmah)

"Moshe told his father-in-law everything that Hashem had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for Israel's sake - all 'ha'tlaah' / the travail that had befallen them on the way -- and that Hashem had rescued them." (18:8)

R' Yosef Chaim z"l (1832-1909; chief rabbi of Baghdad and prolific author) observes: The letter "heh" in the word "ha'tlaah / the travail" is superfluous. The Torah could have saved a letter by saying that Moshe told Yitro "every travail." However, the "heh," whose gematria is five, alludes to the five troubles Bnei Yisrael encountered in last week's parashah. They were:

- (1) Pharaoh chased them;
- (2) They traveled three days in the desert without finding water;
- (3) They ran out of bread;
- (4) They came to Refidim and found no water there; and
- (5) The war of Amalek.

But, Moshe related, Hashem also rescued us from these five travails.

(Od Yosef Chai)

"It was on the next day that Moshe sat to judge the people..." (18:13)

What types of property disputes did Bnei Yisrael have in the desert? R' Shalom Rokeach z"l (1803-1855; the first Belzer Rebbe) explains that they were arguing over the booty from the Red Sea. One man said, "This fine object washed up on the beach closest to you. It's yours." The second man replied, "No, you picked it up. It's yours." The first man retorted, "I picked it up on your behalf. It's yours." Pretty soon, they found themselves in court.

(Quoted in Sefer Maharash)

"They journeyed from Refidim and arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the Wilderness; and Yisrael encamped there, opposite the mountain. Moshe ascended to G-d, and Hashem called to him from ha'har / the mountain, saying, 'So shall you say to the House of Jacob and relate to the Children of Israel'." (19:2)

R' Yaakov Abouhassera z"l (Morocco; 1790-1880) writes: We read at the end of last week's parashah that Amalek attacked Bnei Yisrael at Refidim. Our Sages teach that the name "Refidim" alludes to the fact that Bnei Yisrael loosened their grip ("rafu yedaihem") from Torah observance. That is what made Amalek's attack possible.

In our parashah, they left Refidim. They tightened their grip once again. The natural result when a group of Jews becomes closer to the Torah and increases its level of holiness is that the members of the group become closer to each other. Thus, "Yisrael encamped there." It does not say "Bnei Yisrael encamped" (plural), but rather "Yisrael encamped" (singular). From this our Sages learn that they were "as one man, with one heart."

R' Abouhassera continues: Our Patriarchs are referred to in certain sources as "mountains." Each one of the Patriarchs had his unique traits, and each stood alone in some sense. However, as a result of Bnei Yisrael's unity here, Hashem called Moshe "to the mountain" (singular). A prophet experiences prophecy in the merit of the Jewish People, and that is what happened here. Moshe Rabbeinu was called to Mount Sinai in the merit of Bnei Yisrael who were united like one mountain. Indeed, the gematria of "ha'har" / "the mountain" is 540 (if the spellings of the three letters are written out, i.e., "heh" equals "heh-yud" and "reish" equals "reish-yud-shin"). Together with the kollel (a gematria term which means "add one"), this equals the gematria of "Yisrael."

(Pituchei Chotam)

"You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me." (19:4)

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (Chida; born in Chevron, 1724- died in Livorno, Italy, 1806) writes in the name of R' Chaim Vital z"l: There have been those who claimed that Hashem brought plagues on Egypt only to avenge Himself for Pharaoh saying (Shemot 5:2), "'Who is Hashem that I should heed

His voice?" However, had Pharaoh politely refused to send out Bnei Yisrael, Hashem would not have cared.

Our verse debunks such a claim, for it teaches that Hashem not only punished Egypt, He also took us from there in a loving way. "I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me."

(Quoted in Torat Ha'Chida)

"You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. You shall not make [images of] what is with Me; gods of silver and gods of gold shall you not make for yourselves." (20:19- 20)

How does the second verse quoted here follow from the first? R' Shmuel Tayib z"l (early 20th century; Djerba) explains:

Idolatry developed originally because men believed that G-d is too lofty to interact with mankind. Instead, they believed that man could relate only to G-d's intermediaries, such as angels, stars, and planets.

Those who held that belief were wrong, Hashem teaches in our verse. "You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven." Therefore, you know that you can interact directly with Me, and you have no need to make "images of what is with Me."

(Afapei Shachar)

R' Moshe Galante z"l

The Galante family is known for several generations of distinguished rabbis beginning with R' Moshe Galante (the first), who received semichah from R' Yosef Karo, author of the Shulchan Aruch. A brother of that R' Moshe was R' Avraham Galante, a leading student of the kabbalist R' Moshe Cordevero.

The second R' Moshe Galante was a leading teacher and posek / halachic authority in Yerushalayim in the 17th century. Among his students were: R' Chizkiyah De Silva, author of Pri Chadash (which is printed in the standard edition of the Shulchan Aruch), and R' Yaakov Chagiz and his son R' Moshe Chagiz. The rabbis of Yerushalayim wished to name R' Moshe Galante Chief Rabbi, but he refused to use that august title. Instead, he coined a new title-"Rishon Le'tzion"-which continues to be the title given the Sefardic Chief Rabbi until today.

R' Galante authored several works, of which the best known is Elef Ha'magen. This work includes 1,000 responsa on various topics. He also wrote Zevach Shelamim on the Talmud and Korban Chagigah on Tractate Chagigah.

In R' Galante's days, a young bachelor from Yerushalayim named Shabtai Zvi returned from a trip to

Egypt and declared himself to be mashiach. With R' Galante's permission, R' Yaakov Chagiz and other rabbis of Yerushalayim chased this false messiah and his "prophet" Natan of Gaza out of Yerushalayim.

R' Galante died on 21 Shevat 5449 / 1689 and was buried on Har Ha'zeitim. (Source: Kedoshim Asher Ba'aretz)

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