

GET THE MESSAGE?

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And Yisro heard..." [18:1]

Yisro, the Priest of Midyan, heard what had happened, and dropped everything. He grabbed his daughter Tzipporah (Moshe's wife) and Moshe's children, and went out to Moshe and the Children of Israel in the desert.

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki) asks: what did Yisro hear? And he answers, "the parting of the Reed Sea, and the war with Amalek."

These two events were, to say the least, public knowledge. The Medrash says that just so that everyone would know that the sea parted for the Jews, every body of water, in fact every glass of water, *_also_* parted. Yisro was sitting in his living room about to have his tea, and it split before his eyes. But this also happened for every other Midyanite, and every other person. So why does the Torah say that *_Yisro_* heard? *_Everyone_* heard!

From this week's parsha, we learn the essence of "hearing." To be a "shomea," one who hears, does not merely mean to have a functioning inner ear. Yisro, the "Kohen Midyan", the priest of the Midyanites, dropped everything to go join the Nation of Israel. Why? Because he alone really heard the message. G-d sent a message to every person on earth -- and Yisro heard.

We know that it is very important to "save our work" on a computer. Anyone with computer experience has shared the joy of spending an hour or more at the keyboard working on an important task, and then having the computer freeze up, power off, or otherwise head out to lunch without the opportunity to save one's work. Without saving, everything is lost. So we condemn our foolishness, buy battery back-ups and crash-protection software, and/or simply attempt to save more frequently. We get the message.

At the same time, we often claim to "hear" something that goes "in one ear and out the other." G-d sends us messages. He enters the data. But it is *_our_* responsibility to process and save that data. When something happens, when we receive a message, then only if we remember, understand, or learn from the experience have we truly "heard." In the Torah, "hearing" means "Sh'ma Yisroel" [Hear, Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One], and "Naaseh V'Nishma" [We will do, and we will hear...].

Did we get the message?

[Based on a class by Rabbi Asher Rubenstein, Jerusalem]

