

# A FATHER-IN-LAW'S GENTLE REMINDER TO HIS SON-IN-LAW

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Yisro

### A Father-In-Law's Gentle Reminder To His Son-In-Law

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 580, Women and Havdalah. Good Shabbos!

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Rav Elyakim Schlessinger makes the following observation, in his work Beis Av:

The Torah teaches: "Yisro, the father-in-law of Moshe, took Zipporah, the wife of Moshe, after her having been sent away; and her two sons; of whom the name of one was Gershom, for he had said, 'I was a sojourner in a strange land'; and the name of the other was Eliezer for 'the G-d of my father came to my aid, and He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.'" [Shemos 18:2-3]

This narration takes place well after the birth of Moshe's two sons. For this reason, it is unusual that the Torah tells us why they received those names.

It is the style of the Torah to often tell us why various children were given specific names. Typically, they are named because of specific events that are engendered by their birth. It is appropriate to provide these descriptions when a child is born. But here, since these children were born much earlier, the Torah should simply record their names, not the reasons why they had them. By this point, the reasons are ancient history!

Rav Schlessinger suggests that Yisro was sending a pointed message to his son-in-law, Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe's real leadership task was now about to begin. The taxing career that Moshe had as the leader of the Jewish people was starting. When a person is faced with a situation where he has an entire congregation or -- in this case -- an entire nation to worry about, it is very easy for the person's own children to slip through the cracks.

The logic is simple: "I need to worry about Klal Yisrael. So if the teacher gives my son a bad report card, I don't have time to worry about it. I simply have bigger things on my mind, worrying about the

macro problems of leading the Jewish people."

Yisro wanted to bring home to Moshe Rabbeinu the idea that he should never forget the importance of the individual -- of the microcosm that makes up the bigger group. Yisro is gently saying, "Moshe, if the Almighty had not paid close attention to you, where would you be? You are only in the position you are in now because 'The G-d of my fathers was with me and he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh'." If G-d had taken the attitude, "Okay Moshe is only one person, I have bigger issues to worry about, where would you be?" One person CAN make all the difference in the world. Your children too -- if they are properly tended to -- could grow up to become great leaders in their own right.

History is not made up of the deeds of nations. It is made up of the deeds of individuals. Yisro is reminding Moshe that although he has the overwhelming responsibility of leading Klal Yisrael, he has responsibility for his two young sons as well.

### **The "Man" Moshe - First And Foremost**

When Yisro arrived at Bnai Yisrael's wilderness encampment, Moshe went out to greet him. The Torah narrates: "Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law and he bowed and he kissed him; and they inquired one man to another. (ish l'rei-ayhu)" [Shemos 18:7].

Rashi points out that there is somewhat of an ambiguity in this pasuk [verse]. We cannot be certain who the pronoun "he" is referring to when the Torah says "he bowed down and he kissed him". Was it Moshe who initiated the action of bowing and kissing his father-in-law or was it Yisro who initiated the action of bowing down to and kissing his son-in-law?

Rashi says that the Torah resolves this ambiguity by use of the term "ish". We know elsewhere that Moshe is referred to as "ish" [the man] as in the pasuk "And the man (v'ha'ish), Moshe was exceedingly humble." [Bamidbar 12:3]

But still the question must be asked, why did the Torah convey the meaning of this ambiguous pasuk in such a roundabout way? Why not simply tell us directly that it was Moshe who did the bowing and the kissing? Why the need for the nuanced use of the word "Ish"?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky suggests that the Torah is sending us a message. A son-in-law is going out to greet his father-in-law. The son-in-law bows down to the father-in-law. The son-in-law kisses the father-in-law. The son in law is the great Moshe Rabbeinu. Why does he humble himself like that to Yisro? Moshe does so because he is first and foremost an "ish". These actions were not a function of Moshe the prophet, or Moshe the leader of Israel. It is a function of Moshe the human being, Moshe the "mensch". In spite of all that that he was, first and foremost he was a "mensch."

Rav Gifter once made note of the pasuk at the beginning of Parshas Noach: "These are the generations of Noach. Noach 'ish', 'tzadik', 'tamim', was he in his generations." True, he was righteous (tzadik) and true he was whole-hearted and pure ('tamim'), but the prerequisite of any of that was the

fact that he was an 'ish', a 'mensch', a decent human being.

Here too, we know that it was Moshe who was showing this honor to his father-in-law. Why? It was not because he was the great leader or prophet or teacher. It was because he was the decent human being ('ish') Moshe.

Rabbi Kamenetsky relates that a family member of his, Rabbi Tzvi Kamenetsky, was trying to get in touch with a friend who was staying at the Caribbean Hotel in Miami Beach. Rabbi Tzvi Kamenetsky called the front desk and asked to speak to such and such a person. The operator rang the room and there was no answer. She then asked if he wanted to leave a message. He said, "Please tell so and so that Rabbi Kamenetsky called." The operator (who sounded like an elderly black Southern matron) said to him, "Rabbi Kamenetsky? Are you related to the famous Rabbi Kamenetsky?" He responded, "Yes he was my grandfather." She answered back, "He was your grandpa! He was a good friend of mine, Rabbi Kamenetsky!"

She went on to explain that when Rabbi (Yaakov) Kamenetsky came to the hotel, he gave "some kind of Bible class" every morning in the lobby of the hotel. "Every single morning before he gave the class, he would come by my desk, give me a nod, and say 'Good morning!'. When he finished the class he would walk by my desk again and say 'Have a good day!' That Rabbi Kamenetsky, he was a great rabbi, but he was a great MAN!"

This is the same Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky that we have mentioned in the past who always used to greet the nun who walked the streets of Monsey. He used to say hello to her as well. One does need to be the genius that Rav Yaakov was, one does not have to be the proficient expert in Shas that Rav Yaakov was, the great and clever intellect that Rav Yaakov was. One merely needs to try to be the mensch that Rav Yaakov was.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Yisro are provided below:

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