

PARSHAS YISRO

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

'And Yitro heard and came'. Shall we say that only Yitro heard, when we know that the whole world heard? Yet only he heard something different than the rest of the world and therefore only he came. For Rabbi Yehoshua, what he heard was the war with Amalek, for Rabbi Eliezer HaModai it was Matan Torah and for Rabbi Elazar it was the crossing of the Red Sea'.

This divergence of opinions among the Tanaim in the Mechilta as to what Yitro heard, relates to the reason why he had not come earlier. After all Moshe had told him while still in Midian, that they would leave Egypt and then receive the Torah. Furthermore, the text tells us that Yitro heard all the great things that Hashem had done to Israel. These should have been sufficient for Yitro to come. However, they are all specific and individual particulars and Yitro was *clalli*, a consensus. In this respect he was like Moshe who was the embodiment of all Israel and not just an individual or a specific part of the nation. This is why only Yitro could be suitable as a father in law for Moshe, who also was *clali*. There were none in Israel who were as *clali* as was Moshe, so it was not possible for him to join them in marriage as he did with Yitro. Yitro could not be moved by particulars; it required something that embodied a complete unity, that which is *clali*, all embracing and fundamental, to bring him.

There are seven midot of goodness in Israel, Chassidim, Giborim, Meirei HaTorah, Chozim, Neviim, Tzaddikim, and Bnei Melakhim. It is possible for a person to corrupt these same midot and thereby create the seven midot of evil, yet the converse is also true. . This is the way the Zohar explains the *ken hatzipor*, that can be holy or not. Cain was *ken tzipor* of the *klipah*, that is the perversion of the midot of the righteous and therefore he embodied all these seven evil midot. The Ari taught that Yitro was from the root of Cain and we see this in the Tanakhic texts; ' Nevertheless, Cain shall be wasted' (Bamidbar, 24:22) and in Shoftim (4:11) ' Chever Hacaini, who was of the children of Chovav, father in law of Moshe, had removed himself from Cain'.

The name is the essence and the embodiment of the specific nature and character of a thing, an animal and a person 'And Adam called them by name' (Bereishit, 2: 20). Yitro had seven names Rashi (Shmot, 18:1). Moshe too had seven names (Vayikra Rabba, chapter 1). In both cases these names represent the seven midot. Yitro, like Cain was the embodiment of the seven evil midot, not just specific or particular ones, just like the number 7 is the *clali* one, the embodiment, rather than just another numeral. This is the meaning of Chazal when they tell us that there was not a single form of idolatry that Yitro had not worshipped. People in error seek out idols hoping to draw strength either

from this particular worship or from that specific idol. This is worship of a private nature. Yitro, being clali, the embodiment of all the midot, therefore, could not pass over any of them. Now when he repented and accepted G-d, he became the embodiment of the good midot and it required the hearing of an event of that embodied G-d's greatness, to move Yitro to come.

The Tanaim were divided as to what this all-embracing event was.

Rabbi Yehoshua saw the war with Amalek as this event. Amalek is not just another nation nor just another enemy of Israel. Rather the Seven nations of Canaan are the 7 evil midot and Amalek is the embodiment of them all together. Amalek is reishit amim (Bamidbar, 24:20) Israel is reishit and Torah is reishit, be-reishit was the world created. So Amalek is able to split the Heavenly throne- Kes Yah and prevent the holy light from illuminating the world. . When we say, and the evil kingdom shall be destroyed this is Amalek. This is keter bemalkhut. This evil kingdom prevents the world from reaching out and allying itself with the Heavenly kingdom and the heavenly light from reaching into this world. The destruction of that evil income fundamentally changes all this. So according to Rabbi Yehoshua, it was the victory over Amalek who is clali, that is reishit, that brought Yitro.

For Rabbi Eliezer HaModai, it was Matan Torah that Yitro heard. We know that Torah is the clali, the embodiment of the world. 'G-d looked in the Torah and created the world'. Torah is the Divine Wisdom that descends from on high; 'When you tore apart Heaven, You descended' ; The Targum and Radak explain that at Matan Torah, the Heavens were torn apart for the revelation. The Avnei Nezer explained that just as the rakiya- heavens, separates between the waters above and those below (Bereishit, 1:6), so too it separates the material world from the spiritual one. For Matan Torah to be possible it was necessary to tear the heavens- rakiya to tear, so that the spiritual could descend. This descent is the embodiment of the connection between Heaven and Earth, its clali. So Rabbi Eliezer Hamodai saw Matan Torah as the sight that Yitro saw and came.

Kiryat Yam Suf is Binah, because it was there that Israel understood and believed in HaShem and Mosheh. At Kriyat Yam Suf the plagues are described as the 'hand' of G-d. Hand is the unity of the five separate fingers, as we read in Avot (chapter 3, mishnah17), ' How do we know that the Shechina resides where five learn Torah? He has established His bundle upon the Earth' (Amos, 9:6)'. Here is the embodiment of the power of G-d, the clali that unites all the sections and all the particulars. The MaHaral sees the kriyat Yam Suf as the annulment of all the powers of nature and of the material.

Elsewhere the Shem Mi Shmuel shows that this is not simply that G-d is more powerful but that nature and material are powerless without Him. He does this by bringing the midrash regarding the fiery furnace into which Hananya, Mishael and Azaryah were cast. The Angel of Water wished to go down and put out the fire. Said the Angel of Fire , Everybody knows that water puts out fire, so you will only show that G-d is more powerful. I will put out the fire, so that although fire normally does not put out fire, I will thereby show that nothing else has any power except what He give them. Reach of these Tanaim therefore saw a different one of these as the powerful event that caused

even the clali, Yitro to come.

Shem Mi Shmuel, 5671.

Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Meir Tamari and Torah.org.

Dr. Tamari is a renowned economist, Jewish scholar, and founder of the Center For Business Ethics (www.besr.org) in Jerusalem.