

# PARSHAS YISRO: RECEIVING - AND LIVING - THE TORAH

*by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz*

Forty-nine days after leaving Egypt, the B'nei Yisroel assembled at the foot of Har Sinai and received the Torah directly from Hashem. The Torah records the lightning and thunder that accompanied the words of Hashem as they were indelibly etched on the hearts of those fortunate to be assembled there. The Torah mentions (Shemos 19:25) how Moshe came down from the mountain and transmitted the Aseres Hadibros (26: 1-14) to the Bnei Yisroel.

The remaining nine pesukim of Parshas Yisro will be the focus of our discussion this week as we delve into their timeless message. Words of Comfort

The initial four pesukim (26:15-18) following Kabbolas HaTorah describe how the Jews were frightened by their direct encounter with Hashem. In the lead-up to Kabbolas HaTorah (the Giving of the Torah; 19:8-9, see Rashi), they had turned down Moshe's offer to relate the words of Hashem to them. Their stirring words, as recorded by Rashi (26:9) were, "We wish to see our King [and hear the words of the Torah directly from Him]". However, once they saw the glory of His presence, they were understandably awed and alarmed - and reconsidered their wish to hear from Hashem directly.

They pleaded with Moshe (26:16) to go back to the original plan and serve as a messenger in sharing the words of Hashem with them, as they feared that they may perish as a result of their encounter with the Shechina (Divine Presence). Moshe comforted them, assuring them that they would survive - and spiritually thrive - as a result of their witnessing Hashem's glory. Following those words of assurance, Moshe approached the cloud and resumed his mission of accepting the Torah from Hashem. Serving Hashem

Parshas Yisro ends with the final chain of pesukim that relate several halachos. Some seem to follow Kabbolas HaTorah perfectly, while others appear to be tangential to the logical flow.

Hashem informed Moshe (26:19-20) that having seen His Presence, the Bnei Yisroel should never succumb to the worship of idols that contain images of heavenly bodies. Then, Hashem revealed appropriate methods for His children to express their service to Him. Moshe related to the Bnei Yisroel (26:21) that they should build Altars upon which korbanos (animal sacrifices) would be brought to Him. Hashem assured His children that wherever His Holy Name is mentioned (See Rashi 26:21), His Presence will appear and bless the Jews. Fashioning the Mizbayach

The final two pesukim list two halachos regarding the fashioning of the mizbayach (altar) itself. The Torah instructs us to 1) refrain from using metal tools when building our mizbachos since metal has

been 'desecrated' by its role as an implement of war. Additionally, we are informed that 2) ramps should be made to ascend to the platform of the mizbayach (as opposed to steps) so that the kohanim would have heightened levels of modesty when they ascended. (See Rashi 20:23 for a more detailed treatment of this matter.)

Rashi, in his final commentary on Parshas Yisro, notes that the Torah is teaching us (by way of a 'kal v'chomer' reasoning) how careful we need to be in our interpersonal relationships. If we are commanded to refrain from using metal implements on the inanimate stones of the mizbayach, and we ought to take care to conduct ourselves with tzniyus (modesty) when facing steps or ramps, think about the implications for our middos and conduct with our fellow humans.

The question that remains unanswered is why the final two pesukim in the parsha were not listed in Parshas Terumah, along with the other details of the mizbayach. These halachos - and the important messages they convey - could have been noted in their appropriate setting. Why were they recorded in Parshas Yisro? Timeless Lessons

I would like to suggest that the Torah specifically noted these timeless lessons immediately following Kabbolas HaTorah. The legendary Reb Yisroel Salanter would often point out that occasionally in our eagerness to perform mitzvos, we inadvertently cause discomfort to those in our presence (the analogy that he was fond of giving was about one who accidentally wakes up his roommates before the required time when going to learn in the Beis Midrosh before davening.) While having a pre-shachris learning seder is certainly a wonderful mitzvah, it must also be approached with sensitivity and consideration.

With this in mind, there is a clear and logical progression to the final nine pesukim in this week's parsha. Hashem informs His children that the Torah is life giving in nature. We need not worry about our exposure to Hashem's presence. Quite to the contrary, this provides us with the opportunity to maintain our Yiras Shomayim - and live meaningful Torah lives.

Having seen the true glory of Hashem, we should never seek to follow the path of idol worship - but rather build mizbachos (including in our own hearts, "bilvavi Mishkan evneh,") where we can serve Hashem properly. And when serving Hashem - perhaps especially when serving Him - we must always maintain proper middos and sensitivity.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

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Rabbi Horowitz is the founder and dean of Yeshiva Darchei Noam in Monsey, NY, as well as the founder and Program Director of Agudath Israel's Project Y.E.S. (Youth Enrichment Services), which helps at-risk teens and their parents. He is a popular lecturer on teaching and parenting topics in communities around the world, and is the author of several best-selling parenting tape and CD sets.

For more information on Rabbi Horowitz's parenting tapes, visit <http://www.rabbihorowitz.com/> or call 845-352-7100 X 133.