

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by **Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman** of the **New West End United Synagogue** in conjunction with **Shapell's/Darché Noam***

PARSHAT YITRO

DVAR TORAH: THE FOOLISH TRAMP

A poor tramp was carrying his heavy Load, walking along the roads of eastern Europe in the 1700s. A rich merchant in a spacious wagon passed by, slowed down, and offered the tramp a ride. He graciously said thank you and climbed into the back seat. They drove for a while, and then the merchant looked behind and noticed that the tramp still had his Load slung over his shoulder. He asked him, “Why are you still carrying your pack? Why don't you just place it on the floor of the wagon?”

The tramp answered: “The horses are working so hard to carry me, that I didn't want them to have the extra burden of also having to carry my load.”

Replied the merchant: “That's foolish. Who do you think is bearing the weight of your load anyways, whether you carry it or not? It's the horses. You're wasting energy carrying a load they're already carrying.”

In this parable of the Dubno Maggid (Rabbi Yaakov Krantz, zt”l, 1740-1804), Hashem is carrying us, and He is also carrying our loads. When He is already carrying our burdens, we waste our energy by trying to carry them ourselves, like the foolish tramp.

The Dubno Maggid harnessed this parable to explain a difficult verse in Tanach. Hashem says to the People of Israel: “עָמִי מָה עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ וְיָמָה הִלָּאֲתִיךָ עֲנֵה בִי” - “My nation. What have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Respond to Me?” (Michah 6:3). This verse seems to assume that the mitzvot are not difficult and that Hashem doesn't challenge us, weary us. But, asks the Dubno Maggid, isn't Shabbat difficult to keep? When trying to make a living, isn't it hard to avoid all work activities for one entire day every week?

He answers through answering a question on another verse: David Hamelech says, “Cast your load upon Hashem and He will sustain you” (Tehillim 55:23). Doesn't the extreme reliance on God in this verse ignore the many other verses in the Torah that speak about our active involvement in earning a livelihood, working the fields of the Land of Israel and the like? Isn't there room for השתדלות?

He answers that this verse refers to Shabbat. On Shabbat we totally cast our load upon Hashem. Once a week we avoid all practical involvement in earning a livelihood. To get involved with our parnassah (livelihood) on Shabbat is to act like the tramp, wasting his energy by carrying his heavy load over his shoulder instead of putting it on the floor of the wagon.

The foolish tramp syndrome goes beyond involvement with parnassah on Shabbat; it applies anywhere we expend energy trying to change things that are really beyond our control. If Hashem is taking care of things anyways we should just get out of the way and let Him carry the load. If Hashem wants us to act, we pray for Divine assistance to do His Will. The challenge, of course, is to know when He wants us to act and what is beyond our control; but for that we have Torah and pray for the wisdom to understand it.

SOURCE GUIDE: DERECH ERETZ COMES FIRST

Yitro gave his advice to Moshe about the judicial system, according to Chazal in the Sifrei, on the Yom Kippur that followed the giving of the Torah. This entire passage is then out of chronological order. This is striking. Why does the Torah break the flow of the narrative to place this episode at this point in the Torah? To ask the question as the Sfat Emet does: Why does Yitro's advice immediately precede the giving of the Torah even though he gave it much later? What follows here is based on the Sfat Emet's essay on this topic.

A. Derech Eretz Precedes Torah

His answer is based on a statement of Chazal that is often condensed into "דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה" - "Derech Eretz precedes Torah," and usually translated as 'Being a mentch is a prerequisite for proper Torah learning.' The Sfat Emet does not negate this explanation, but offers a different explanation of Derech Eretz and applies it to Yitro's advice.

Here is the source for the concept, and it will be followed by the Sfat Emet's definitions of Derech Eretz and Torah:

<p>1. Vayikra Rabbah 9:3 Said Rabbi Yishmael son of Rav Nachman: Derech Eretz preceded Torah by twenty-six generations. For it says, "... to protect the path of the Tree of Life" (Bereishit 3:24): "path" refers to Derech Eretz, and "the Tree of Life" is Torah.</p>	<p>ויקרא רבה ט:ג א"ר ישמעאל בר רב נחמן: עשרים וששה דורות קדמה דרך ארץ את התורה. הה"ד, "לשמור את דרך עץ החיים" (בראשית ג:כד): "דרך" - זו דרך ארץ, ואח"כ "עץ החיים" - זו תורה.</p>
---	---

This is the theme the Torah is communicating here by placing the Yitro episode immediately before the giving of the Torah:

<p>2. Sfat Emet Parshat Yitro 5641 Yitro's portion preceded Israel's receiving the Torah in line with what our Sages said, "Derech Eretz preceded Torah." [Derech Eretz] is man serving Hashem through his mind, understanding the truth and Hashem's goodness to all of His creations and His great lovingkindness. Then we merit Torah, which is a higher service, according to Hashem's true Will.</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת יתרו שנת תרמ"א הקדמת פרשת יתרו לקבלת התורה. כענין אמרם ז"ל ד"א קדמה לתורה. והוא ענין עבודת האדם להש"י מתוך השכל והכרת האמת שמכירין טובת הבורא ית' על כל ברואיו וחסדיו המרובין. ואח"כ זוכין לתורה שהיא עבודה עליונה כפי רצון הש"י באמת.</p>
--	---

There are two modes of service of Hashem, says the Sfat Emet:

1. approaching Him through our understanding of the world and appreciation of His goodness - this is referred to as Derech Eretz, and is the way the world approached Hashem for the twenty-six generations that preceded the giving of the Torah;
2. approaching Hashem through Torah, where we have direct access to what Hashem's true Will is. This approach is only accessible to Israel, because of their special place as "sons of the Almighty." As we learn in Pirkei Avot (3:14): "Israel is beloved for they were given [the Torah,] the desired vessel."

The Sfat Emet offers a parable:

<p>3. Sfat Emet Parshat Yitro 5641 Here is a parable: There is a kingdom where everyone serves the King. But those who stand before Him serve Him through fulfilling His mission and His will. This is what is meant by "You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Shemot 19:6).</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת יתרו שנת תרמ"א והמשל. הכל עובדין למלך אבל העומדין לפניו הם עובדין אותו ע"פ קיום שליחותו ורצונו. וזה ענין "ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש" (שמות יט:ו).</p>
---	---

The entire world is to serve G-d as normal subjects of the King; but Israel is the inner circle who executes the King's special missions and follows His Will.

B. The Need for Derech Eretz: The Ideal and the Post-Golden Calf Reality

Rabbi Elazar son of Azaryah makes a cryptic comment in Pirkei Avot:

<p>4. Avot 3:17 Rabbi Elazar son of Azaryah says: If there is no Torah there is no Derech Eretz. If there is no Derech Eretz there is no Torah.</p>	<p>אבות ג:יז רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר, אם אין תורה, אין דרך ארץ. אם אין דרך ארץ, אין תורה.</p>
--	--

The Sfat Emet explains that this Mishnah refers to the two types of approaches to Hashem, that of Torah and that of Derech Eretz. At Mount Sinai, before the sin of the Golden Calf: we were ready for a new reality, where we could have accessed Torah directly. We were on the way to aligning every action in the world with G-d's Will. The Giving of the Torah brought about the perfection of all actions. This is alluded to in two verses:

<p>5. Shemot 19:8 The entire nation responded together: "All that Hashem spoke we will do" ...</p> <p>Bamidbar 28:6 A regular offering that was done on Mount Sinai as a fragrant smell a burnt offering to Hashem.</p>	<p>שמות פרק יט פסוק ח וַיַּעֲנוּ כָּל הָעָם יחדו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְקֻנָּק נַעֲשֶׂה ...</p> <p>במדבר פרק כח פסוק ו עֲלֵת תְּמִיד הַעֲשֶׂיהָ בְּהַר סִינִי לְרִיחַ נִיחֻחַ אֲשֶׁה לְיֻקְנָק:</p>
--	--

But tragically the sin of the Golden Calf changed everything:

<p>6. Sfat Emet Parshat Yitro 5641 Only after the sin of the Golden Calf did we drop down from this level. But we are still able to repair this through the Derech Eretz that precedes Torah. Since there is still imperfection in the world we first need to repair action and the body through character development and subjugation to Hashem, as we said above. Only afterwards are we able to merit Torah.</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת יתרו שנת תרמ"א ורק אחר החטא בעגל ירדנו ממדרגה זו. וניתקן אח"כ בדרי"א קדמה לתורה שכיון שנשאר פסולת בעולם צריכין מקודם לתקן המעשה והגוף ע"י מדות והכנעות כנ"ל ואח"כ זוכין לתורה.</p>
--	---

This explains why Yitro appears immediately after the war with Amalek

<p>6 (continued). Sfat Emet Parshat Yitro 5641 We have already written that the evil Amalek, may his name be erased, was the root of the sin of the Golden Calf. This is the progression: Yitro preceded the Giving of the Torah and followed the war with Amalek. development and subjugation to Hashem, as we said above. Only afterwards are we able to merit Torah.</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת יתרו שנת תרמ"א וכבר כ' כי עמלק הרשע ימ"ש ה"י שורש חטא העגל. וזה המשך הקדמת יתרו למתן תורה אחר מלחמת עמלק.</p>
--	--

The sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden foreshadowed the sin of Israel at the Golden Calf:

<p>7. Sfat Emet Parshat Yitro 5641 It says in Tanna Devei Eliahu on the verse, "He banished man and he dwelled ... to protect the path to the Tree of Life" - This is the source that Derech Eretz precedes Torah. We also explained this as above: that after the sin of Adam Harishon there was also a hint that there would be a need for Derech Eretz as above. And there was a similar situation with the People of Israel.</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת יתרו שנת תרמ"א ובתד"א איתא בפסוק "ויגרש את האדם וישכן כו' לשמור את דרך עה"ח," מכאן שד"א קדמה לתורה. פרשנו ג"כ כנ"ל שאחר החטא של אדה"ר ה"י רמו ג"כ שיהי' צריכין להקדמת ד"א כנ"ל ומעין זה ה"י בבניי כנ"ל:</p>
---	--

In the picture the Sfat Emet draws, when there is imperfection in the world there is a need for Derech Eretz. In order to reach Torah we must first subjugate the negativity of the world through appreciating Hashem's goodness in the world, through coming to Hashem through a natural understanding of His world. Then we are able to elevate ourselves and be ready for Torah, where we tap in directly to the Divine Will.

YITRO'S TORAH BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

Why was Yitro called Yitro? Chazal tell us, because he contributed - יתר - a parshah to the Torah. If the Torah is the ultimate expression of wisdom - which it is - then Yitro's advice to Moshe to appoint judges, to create an entire judicial system comprised of thousands of members, must be an expression of ultimate wisdom.

But, we may ask, how does Yitro's eitzah, his advice, go beyond simple common sense? 'Moshe, don't wear yourself out. Delegate.'

Suggests the Birkat Mordechai (Harav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, שליט"א) that the key is to be found in one word; Yitro says to Moshe, "You can't do it לבדך, alone."

Let us flash back to Adam Harishon, the first man. There too Hashem said of him, "It is not good for man to be לבדו, alone."

As Rashi there explains, only G-d can be without a זוג, a partner. If Adam was to be left in his part-male part- female oneness, he would be as if a god, able to create new life in a state of wholeness and perfection. But man is meant to enter the world incomplete, only male or only female, and in his mission, to strive for wholeness, שלמות. And it is davka out of that search that man can be creative, can indeed create new life. So Adam needed to have an עזר כנגדו, a help-mate facing him.

Yitro tells Moshe, to be alone is not good, even for Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe Rabbeinu cannot help transform Israel into a holy nation ready to receive the Torah alone. He, and by extension we too, can create only by recognizing our imperfections and our incompleteness, and embarking on the journey towards attaining that שלמות. This insight is Yitro's Torah, תורת אמת.

שבת שלום ומבורך

We mourn the tragic death of Shlomit Krigman הי"ד killed in a terrorist attack this week. We continue to pray for a רפואה שלימה, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the married couples' programme and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

To dedicate a Taste of Text, please email Rabbi Freedman at rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com

For back issues and other articles by Rabbi Freedman please see www.moshefreedman.com