

Our *Parashah* opens, "Yitro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard everything that *Elokim* did for Moshe and *Yisrael*, His people--that *Hashem* had taken *Yisrael* out of Egypt." From this it seems that Yitro had heard all about the Exodus before joining *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert. But, the *Parashah* continues, "Moshe told his father-in-law everything that *Hashem* had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for *Yisrael's* sake--all the travail that had befallen them on the way--and that *Hashem* had rescued them." This implies that there was much that Yitro did not know. Indeed, after listening to Moshe, Yitro says, "Now I know that *Hashem* is the greatest of all the powers, for in the very manner in which the Egyptians had conspired against them [*Hashem* took revenge on them]."

R' Shlomo Yazya Duran z"l (Algiers; late 16<sup>th</sup> century) explains: When Yitro first heard about the Exodus, he did not grasp the significance of the details. Rather, he was moved by the general idea "that *Hashem* had taken *Yisrael* out of Egypt." In Yitro's mind, that alone justified his trek into the desert to make sacrificial offerings with *Bnei Yisrael*.

After Yitro came to Moshe, R' Duran continues, Moshe saw an opportunity to teach his father-in-law some of the fundamentals of our faith. Specifically, Moshe told Yitro that the story of the Exodus contains three lessons within it: first, that *Bnei Yisrael* were saved from their enemies; second, that *Hashem* exacted vengeance on those enemies; and, third, the amazing wonder that each and every detail of the Egyptians' punishment was *Middah Ke'negged Middah* / a precise response to the wrong they had done. (*Megillat Sefer* p.426)

## Bitachon

*This year--a Shemittah year--we will iy"H devote this space to discussing the related subject of Bitachon / placing one's trust in Hashem.*

*As discussed in previous weeks, R' Avraham ben Ha'Rambam z"l (son of Maimonides; Egypt; 1186-1237) writes that a person with Bitachon knows that it is Hashem who provides his needs. Though the way of the world is that one must seek his sustenance, a person with Bitachon knows that his efforts do not determine the outcome; therefore, he seeks a proper balance between working, on the one hand, and engaging in Torah study and Mitzvot, on the other. R' Avraham explains further that a person with Bitachon does not waste his time and effort pursuing luxuries. He continues:*

Part of developing *Bitachon* is being honest with oneself about one's needs versus one's wants. The boundary between needs and wants/luxuries certainly changes depending on the size and situation of each person's household. A person often needs to provide his family members with things he might not seek for himself. Likewise, a king needs things a commoner does not need. Thus, the prophet Elisha asked the woman who had been very generous to him (*Melachim II* 4:13), "You have shown us this great solicitude. What can be done for you? Can something be said on your behalf to the king or the army commander?" and she responded, "I dwell among my people"--such things are not relevant to me.

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**“The seventh day is *Shabbat* to *Hashem*, your *Elokim*; you shall not do any work.” (20:10)**

R' Shmuel Abohav z"l (1610-1694; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Venice, Italy) writes: In common speech, “work” connotes exertion--in particular, carrying objects from one place to another. Yet, a person may carry furniture around his house to set places for guests, and he may carry large trays of food from the kitchen to the dining room, and he does not desecrate the *Shabbat*. How then do we define “work”?

R' Abohav explains: We read (*Devarim* 5:12), “Safeguard the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, has commanded you.” This teaches us that what is permitted or forbidden on *Shabbat* is known to us only through the Oral Law--“as *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, has commanded you.” This is similar to how our Sages interpret the verse (*Devarim* 12:21), “You may slaughter from your cattle and your flocks . . . as I have commanded you.” Where does *Hashem* command us how to perform *Shechitah*? Only in the Oral Law.

(*Sefer Ha'zichronot* 10:6)

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Also, R' Avraham writes, the boundary between needs and wants/luxuries changes based on each person's nature and life experiences. Not everyone is capable of living on dry bread and water or wearing coarse garments; some people genuinely need better food and nicer clothes or houses. The point to remember is that *Hashem* knows each person's needs, and He can be counted on to provide those needs.

In contrast, there is no guarantee that *Hashem* will provide everything a person wants, even when a person trusts that *Hashem* will do so. As a result, one who does not know the difference between his legitimate needs and his wants, and he seeks luxuries, convinced that *Hashem* will provide them because he has *Bitachon*, will, in the end, think that his *Bitachon* was not rewarded.

(*Ha'maspik L'ovdei Hashem*, ch. 8)

R' Avraham's father, R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt), writes: One of the types of evil that people experience in life is self-inflicted. This includes people who are full of jealousy and anguish that they do not have the luxuries that other people have. As a result, they endanger their lives by traveling on the high seas or going into the service of a king, all to obtain luxuries that they do not need. Then, when they encounter troubles along the path that they chose, they complain about *Hashem's* supposed lack of justice. They wonder: Why doesn't *Hashem* help me amass riches so I can enjoy life? Sometimes, they even conclude that *Hashem* is, G-d forbid, not powerful enough to help them, and that He cannot overcome nature. This is not the way of those who are pious and wise.

(*Moreh Nevuchim* III 12)

**“Yitro said, ‘Blessed is *Hashem*, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt. Now I know that *Hashem* is the greatest of all the powers . . .’” (18:10-11)**

R' Baruch Zvi Hakohen Moskowitz z"l (1907-1990; rabbi in Paks and Budapest, Hungary and Vienna, Austria) explains: Yitro was saying, “Even though I know that *Hashem* is the greatest of all the powers--therefore, He does not need our blessings--I will not refrain from blessing Him.”

R' Moskowitz continues: We find the same idea in the Song that *Bnei Yisrael* sang after the splitting of the Sea. We read (15:1), “I shall sing to *Hashem* for He is very exalted.” He is very exalted and does not need our song. Nevertheless, that does not excuse us from singing His praises for the good that we have received.

R' Moskowitz concludes: When we thank and praise *Hashem* for the good that He has done, we bring about that He will do more good for us. Thus, the Song at the Sea continues (*Shmot* 15:2), “The might and vengeance of G-d ‘*Va'yehi*’ / was salvation for me.” *Midrash Rabbah* observes that the word “*Va'yehi*” contains both the past and future tenses. This hints that when we thank and praise *Hashem* for His goodness, even though He does not need our thanks or praise, it leads to His doing more good for us. In a similar vein, we read (*Tehilim* 50:23), “He who offers a *Todah*/ thanksgiving offering honor Me; and one who paves his way, I will show him the salvation of *Elokim*.” Commentaries interpret: One who offers thanks paves the way for further acts of salvation by G-d.

(*Tenuvot Baruch: Tinyana* Vol. I p.10)

**“*Hashem* said to Moshe, ‘Behold! I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever’.” (19:9)**

R' Yochanan Luria z"l (1440-1511; Alsace) asks: Did we not already read in last week's *Parashah* (14:31), “They believed in *Hashem* and in Moshe, His servant”?

He explains: The reason *Bnei Yisrael* believed in Moshe after the splitting of the Sea was because of the miracles that he was *Hashem's* agent to perform. However, faith based on miracles is shaky, because someone might come along later and perform equal or greater wonders. If that would happen, our faith in Moshe would be shattered.

In contrast, when *Bnei Yisrael* heard *Hashem* speak to Moshe “face-to-face,” as a person speaks to his friend, that firmly established their eternal belief in Moshe. Thereafter, anyone who claims to be a prophet equal to Moshe must have *Hashem* speak to him in front of all the Jewish People, which will never happen.

(*Meishiv Nefesh*)