

Parshas Yisro

For the week ending 20 Shevat 5756
9 & 10 February 1996

Summary

Hearing of the miracles Hashem has performed for the *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law, Yisro, arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yisro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts and joins the Jewish People. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yisro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate the smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. The *Bnei Yisrael* arrive at *Mt. Sinai* where the Torah is offered to them. After they accept, Hashem charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain, and to prepare themselves for three days in order to receive the Torah. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, Hashem's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrined mountain, and He begins speaking to the Jewish People, giving to them the Ten Commandments:

- 1 Believe in Hashem
- 2 Don't have other gods
- 3 Don't use Hashem's name in vain
- 4 Observe the Shabbos
- 5 Honor your parents
- 6 Don't murder
- 7 Don't commit adultery
- 8 Don't kidnap
- 9 Don't testify falsely
- 10 Don't covet

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay Hashem's word to them. Hashem instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

Commentaries

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE REAL KIND

"Remember the day of Shabbos to sanctify it." (20:8)

Have you ever been to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC? They have on display one of the Apollo capsules that went to the moon and back. You can't believe how small it is. It's like an oversized garbage can. And squeezed into this tiny space are miles of cable and sophisticated computers and three men who lie for days on couches sculpted to their bodies, with banks and banks of instruments inches in front of their faces. Nothing could be more claustrophobic. And yet if you asked an astronaut what his feelings are as he approaches the surface of the moon, whether eating food from a tube, and the most primitive sanitation are spoiling his excitement, he would reply that *he is totally unaware of his physical limitation*, so great is the exhilaration of flying through space, about to walk on another world...

People say - "You know, I love cholent. And I think it's great the family getting together on a Friday night without having to compete with the box. But well, not being able to drive, that really cramps my style! And not being able to have a shower...! No Apollo astronaut complained that his style was being cramped when he was flying to the moon.

Every week, the Jewish People have a chance to experience a journey which is even more exhilarating and out-of-this-world than an astronaut. When we keep Shabbos in the way the Torah teaches us, we connect with a spiritual world which is above the stars and beyond time. When a person encounters the exquisite spiritual beauty and the emotional vastness of the Shabbos experience, all physical limitation becomes insignificant in his 'close encounter' of the real kind.

(Heard from Rabbi A. C. Feuer)

HE AIN'T HEAVY...

"Six days shall you work and accomplish all your work; but the seventh day is Shabbos to Hashem, your G-d..." (20:9,10)

A poor villager was trekking the many miles to his destination in the next village. He staggered along under the weight of his enormous pack when suddenly a horse and wagon pulled up alongside him. "Climb aboard!" the driver of the wagon shouted down to him. The villager huffed and puffed his way up onto the back of the wagon, and the driver shook his reins and the horses obediently started to trot. A few miles down the road, the villager said to the driver "I can't thank you enough. This is really very kind of you!" "Not at all" said the driver and turned to smile at the villager at the back of the wagon. It was then that he noticed that the villager was sitting crumpled forward with his heavy pack still on his back. Exclaimed the driver - "Why haven't you taken your pack off, you fool!" The villager replied in all innocence "Well - you've been so kind carrying me, *I didn't want to burden you with the extra weight of my pack as well!*"

If Hashem can 'carry' us all week - making sure that we have food to eat, clothes to wear, cars to drive, and even air to breathe, He can certainly bear the 'added load' of supporting us on Shabbos, even if we don't go into the office!

(The Dubner Maggid)

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel
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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

LISTEN! DON'T LOOK!

“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.’” (19:9)

Impression and Concentration. Two forms of cognition. Impression - the mind forming a composite image, all the senses working together to illustrate and enrich the impression. Sight syncopating with sound, smell with touch. A palette rich in overtone and suggestion and allusion.

Concentration - a stone dropped into a still pond; concentric rings spreading outward, each one a perfect replica of the moment of its inception. A word spoken. A sound wave. Concentric circles emanating uniformly, carrying the moment of speech into the future.

There are times when communication demands precision rather than impression. At these times, the senses can interfere with each other. When the power of speech is being used to communicate the meaning of something, then hearing becomes the essential sense and the other senses distract from the clarity and sharpness of the message of the spoken word. Impression interferes with Concentration.

‘Behold I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you.’ Hashem told Moshe that He would speak to him in a cloud *so that the people will hear*, so that they will not be overwhelmed by the experiential, but will be able to hear clearly. Hearing, unimpaired by the interference of sight. Concentration unhindered by Impression.

(Based on Admo"r Rabbi Chanoch from Alexander)

Haftorah: Yeshayahu 6:1-13, 7:1-6, 9:5,6

LIVING IN THE PALACE

Echoing the theme of the parsha - the revelation of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) at Sinai, the Haftorah describes the revelation of the *Shechina* to the prophet *Yeshayahu*. In his prophetic vision, *Yeshayahu* sees Hashem's court surrounded by angels. The prophet *Yechezkel* also had a similar vision of the Divine court, but his vision is more detailed, describing the *Shechina* as a vision of a king seated on a chariot. Does that mean that *Yechezkel* saw more of the *Shechina* than *Yeshayahu*? Our sages teach us that the reverse is really the case. *Yechezkel* was like a villager, trying to convince his fellows that he has seen a king. As the king is only rarely seen so far from his capital, the villagers tend to be skeptical. Thus, to corroborate his story, the villager goes into great detail, describing the minutiae of the king's

appearance, down to the color of the buttons on his robe, to prove that indeed he must have seen a king. However, a citizen of the capital, where the king is seen quite often, doesn't need to overcome the disbelief of his friends, and so he leaves out the precise details of the king's appearance.

Yechezkel's vision happened outside *Eretz Yisrael*, when the *Shechina* was already 'in exile' - It had left the *Beis Hamikdash*. And so, *Yechezkel* describes his vision with all the painstaking detail of one who has seen an extremely rare event. But *Yeshayahu* experienced his vision of Hashem in *Eretz Yisrael*, in His heavenly throne-room above the earthly *Beis Hamikdash*. He therefore omitted many of the details, like one who lives close to the King.

(Chagiga 13a; Tosfos; The Midrash Says)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Kol Mekadesh Sh'vii - ~~Ha~~ asen Kf
"Whoever keeps Shabbos..."

דורשי ה' זרע אברהם אוהבו המאחרים לצאת מן השבת וממהרים לבוא

"Those who seek Hashem, the seed of Avraham, who loved Him, who delay departing from Shabbos and rush to enter it."

Doesn't one first enter the Shabbos and only later take leave of it?

The Shabbos offers two dimensions of pleasure to its observer: 1) the physical pleasure of resting from labor and indulging in food and drink. 2) the spiritual pleasure of observing the laws of Shabbos in order to express his love of Hashem. When one rushes to begin the Shabbos it is not evident whether he is doing so in order to avail himself of the delicious meals awaiting him or because of the holy fire burning within him to do the mitzvos which will bring pleasure to his Creator.

The test comes when it is time to take leave of the Shabbos. If the pleasure of food was his motivation for welcoming the Shabbos early he will have no interest in prolonging the day since all of the food prepared for the day has already been consumed. But if it was the desire to serve Hashem through observing the laws of Shabbos which motivated him he will be reluctant to quickly relinquish this opportunity.

The seed of Avraham, who follow in his ways of doing everything out of a love for Hashem, demonstrate with their delaying of the departure of Shabbos that their motive for rushing to enter it was the spiritual pleasure of showing their love for Hashem by observing His laws.

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