Overview

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 Children of Israel arrive at Mt. Sinai where the Torah is offered to them. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, Hashem's voice emanates from the smoke-shrouded 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. Moshe ignores his personal affairs completely and went straight to work. From the mountain to the people.

Let's Do Breakfast

"Moshe descended the mountain to the people" (19:14)

"What time do we land?"

"In about two hours, Mr. President."

"Okay — I’m going to need about an hour to have a shower, freshen up and change my clothes before I can meet the Prime Minister. Can you radio ahead and fix up a meeting at about twelve? Actually, make it twelve-thirty. I haven’t slept a wink on this flight, so I’ll need to close my eyes for twenty minutes or so. Oh, and I could do with a light breakfast when I wake up — just a roll and some coffee, a little cereal. Make that real coffee. Hey, is there any real need to have this meeting as soon as we arrive? Couldn’t we postpone till the afternoon?"

Moshe, the quintessential Jewish leader, went “from the mountain to the people.” He didn’t take a break. He didn’t take a pit-stop. Moshe ignored his personal affairs completely and went straight to work. From the mountain to the people.

Seeing The Sound Of Music

“And all the people saw the voices” (20:15)

One winter’s day in a small village in Poland, there arrived a frail figure carrying a small black leather box. It was still early in the morning, the pale winter sunlight barely coloring the ashen faces of the houses.

The man made his way to the town square. He rubbed his hands together and blew warm air between them. A cloud of mist emerged from the other side of his clasped palms and snaked its way upward, catching the rays of the rising sun as it faded away.

He opened the box and assembled three black cylindrical sections of a clarinet.

He started to play, at first slowly and hauntingly. The sound was so beautiful and compelling that very soon, yawning faces started to appear at the windows.

Children were pressing their faces to the panes. He started to pick up the tempo. The sound was so delightful, so sweet, that very soon, people emerged into the street and spontaneously started to dance.

The music crescendod in wave after wave. The unbelievable sweetness of the sound gilded the faces of the dancers with delight.

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Building For The Future

“And Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain” (19:2)

At the time of the Tower of Bavel when the world rebelled against Hashem and tried to build a city and tower that would reach to the Heavens, Hashem made it impossible for them to understand each other’s language. The project thus failed.

Why did Hashem choose to foil their designs by confusing their languages? Why couldn’t He have decreed that the project just plain fail? It certainly wouldn’t have been the last building project to have failed because of a poor architect or defective labor!

The giving of the Torah at Sinai was predicated on the absolute unity of the Jewish People.

Just as Hashem is One, and His Torah is indivisible from Him, so too the receiving of the Torah has to be in perfect unity.

Only at Sinai were the Jewish People united like one man with one heart.

The generation who built the tower of Bavel, for all their failings, had one positive quality. Their unity. Hashem could have merely foiled their plans, but that necessarily would have meant that He would have broken the power of Unity in the Creation.

But Hashem didn’t want to break the power of Unity, because he knew many generations later there would be a Jewish People who would need to receive the Torah, and the only way that they would be able to receive that Torah would be through perfect unity.

Based on Rashi

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

The revelation of the Shechina at Sinai which is the subject of this week’s Parsha is mirrored in the Haftorah by a revelation of the Shechina to the prophet Yishayahu.

No, No, After You...

The nature of most people is to want to be first. To demonstrate their superiority over others. This is the driving force behind the desire to have money and power. I’m better than you! You go second!

And even when we allow others to go first, when we put them in front of ourselves, it’s usually to demonstrate what elevated character traits we have — in other words — elevated over you!

Based on Degel Machane Ephraim

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Based on The Midrash Says

Parshas Yisro

For the week ending 24 Shevat 5757, 31 January & 1 February 1997

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