

יְתֵרוֹ

Yithro

Exodus 18:1-20:23: The reception of the Torah
Haftarah: Isaiah 6: the vocation of the prophet
Isaiah 7:1-6 and 9:5-6¹

Now *Yithro* יְתֵרוֹ the priest of Midyan, *Moshe's* father-in-law, heard about all that God had done for Moshe and for Israel his people, how Adonai had brought Israel out of Egypt. Exodus 18:1

The Feast is close at hand, but first, another figure comes on the scene, one who will play a determining role in the leadership of the Jewish people in the desert: *Yithro*, the first official convert and *Moshe's* step father!²

Now *Yithro* the priest of Midyan, *Moshe's* father-in-law, heard, *vayishma* וַיִּשְׁמָע about all that God had done... Exodus 18:1

This event with *Yithro* is directly linked to the receiving of the Torah and even bears his name. To him also was given the privilege of having his name linked with this very important Feast of G-d!

What purpose or reason would lead an important and famous priest like *Yithro* to come into the desert to meet the Jewish people, apart from family relationship?

Yithro, an advisor at Pharaoh's council, fled after the decision was made to persecute the Israelites.³ Other people had heard about the bankruptcy of Egypt and the fall of Amalek but only *Yithro*, as a truth seeker, received a holy fear.

Not only had *Yithro* "heard" about the miracles and understood that the punishment of Pharaoh and Amalek's rebellion and pride was

¹ Ashkenazim rite

² This text is an excerpt from the book on *Shavuot* we are currently working on.

³ Meam Loez, *Yithro*

not the only purpose, but he also comprehended the love G-d had for His people Israel:

Now *Yithro*, the priest of Midyan, *Moshe's* father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moshe and for Israel his people, how Adonai had brought Israel out of Egypt. Exodus 18:1

He also understood that G-d wanted to make this people His people, and it was because of this dimension of love from such a Great and All Mighty G-d that *Yithro's* heart was deeply touched; because of this, he will leave his high rank of priest and the entire honor that goes with it to meet the Israelites in the desert. His thirst of truth is greater than the love of glory. He is called "*Moshe's* step father" as being proud to belong to the House of Israel.

Now I know that Adonai is greater than all other gods, because he rescued those who were treated so arrogantly. Exodus 18:11

This humble attitude from *Yithro* will provoke the coming forth of *Moshe* and a procession of Ancients will follow this encounter: Aaron, his sons, the seventy elders and the whole people will welcome him. It is said that even the divine Presence revealed itself to honor this first official Gentile convert.⁴

Moshe will welcome him in the study tent:

Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law, prostrated himself and kissed him. Then, after inquiring of each other's welfare, they entered the tent. Exodus 18:7

He will tell him the miracles G-d performed for them, once more drawing *Yithro's* heart. He will hear what *Elohim*, אֱלֹהִים (18:1) has done for His people and then discover why Adonai, יְהוָה (18:8) did it and the dimension of His abundant grace.

Elohim is the name of G-d used for the natural laws and judgment⁵, what is called "the measure of judgment" the *midat din* and Adonai⁶, the

⁴ Meam Loez Yithro

⁵ See in the first chapter of Genesis

⁶ Appears in the second chapter of Genesis

sacred four letters, is the name used to express “the measure of grace”, the *midat chesed*.

When the nations heard that the great priest *Yithro* was converted and circumcised (as suggests the word *va yichad*, **וַיִּיְחַד** he rejoiced, which root *chad* **חַד** means “sharp knife”), many were impressed and left their idols.⁷

Yithro rejoiced *vayichad* **וַיִּיְחַד** over all the good that Adonai had done for Israel by rescuing them from the Egyptians. Exodus 18:9

Yithro received with joy the yoke of the Torah and of the circumcision because he had both heard and understood that the G-d of Israel was first and foremost a G-d of love, and as such, he also prepared himself to participate in this great Feast, this gift of love that the children of Israel were about to receive.

There was a great celebration and meal prepared, in *Yithro's* honor. In the same way, I tell you, there is joy among God's angels when one sinner repents.” Luke 15:10

The Word describes for us the event of *Yithro's* counsel to *Moshe* for the leading of the people. However, Tradition believes this event is not set in order in the Bible, but instead sets this occurrence after the receiving of the Ten Commandments, as well *Yithro's* departure for Midian which also happened after the receiving of the Torah.

Yithro, filled with wisdom, will help *Moshe* to do his part and the other valuable men assigned to leadership to take care of their part, in order to educate the people: for the knowledge of the L-rd to grow.

Those men were chosen by specific qualifications, the qualities of which Paul (*Shaul*) will also later be inspired to recommend to young Timothy, for the choosing of the elders. *Moshe* will have to use his prophetic gifts of discernment as suggests the word used, *techezeh*, the root of which also means “vision”:

⁷ Meam Loez, Yithro

But you should choose, **techezeh**, תְּחִיזָה from among all the people competent men who are God-fearing, honest and incorruptible to be their leaders, in charge of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

Exodus 18:21

Here are their qualifications:

- Good knowledge of the Torah and of leadership
- Having the fear of G-d and not being influenced by men
- Trustful
- Enemies of money and not owning any debt
- Not looking for richness and being happy with what they have⁸

Yithro gave through his wisdom, a government pattern; and his true conversion and faithfulness towards the House of Israel brought him the honor of having his name linked to the receiving of the Torah, as a prophetic foreshadow of the coming of the Gentiles in the Covenant with Israel through the Messiah.

The arrival at Mount Sinai and the preparation for the Feast:

In the third month after the people of Israel had left the land of Egypt, the same day they came to the Sinai Desert. Exodus 19:1

They have arrived at the place where the Feast will be celebrated, in front of Mount Sinai. In front of the very place Aaron and *Moshe* spoke of to Pharaoh when asking him to let the people go. We are at the beginning of the month of Sivan 2448. The most important historical event of mankind is about to happen:

The revelation of the unique G-d to the eyes of the whole earth.

There, the people camped (singular in the text), with one heart, ready to receive this unbelievable gift, the receiving of which will affect their destiny until the messianic times. A gift that will make of the Israelites a people that will never again be like any other, bound together and marked as such, by the branding of the burning letters of the Word of G-d:

A whole people unified around the Torah!

⁸ Meam Loez, Yithro

There in front of the mountain, Israel set up camp. Exodus 19:2

The time of and preparation for the great day has arrived: three days of purification, three days to examine oneself, to part from physical pleasure and material, three days to get the heart ready and to question all things.

The challenge to become a people *s'gula'*, סְגִלָּה a people set apart, a treasure loved and cherished by G-d, a kingdom of priests, is enormous.

To become a people who will never live with natural laws but whose welfare and survey will only depend upon his obedience, finally a people who will have the glorious but heavy burden to be a witness of G-d on earth.

Moshe, just descended from the mountains with the holy words, signifies it is time to get ready. It is a great day, a day when the whole earth is silenced and listens.

Those three days speak of the new birth and of the resurrection. The people won't be allowed to ascend the mountain before hearing the longest sound of the shofar, called *yovel* in Hebrew:

No hand is to touch him; for he must be stoned or shot by arrows; neither animal nor human will be allowed to live.' When the shofar, *hayovel* הַיּוֹבֵל sounds, they may go up on the mountain. Exodus 19:13

The *Yovel* is also the name for the Jubilee, the day of freedom where everybody goes back to his land and glorifies the L-rd, the final Redemption. The washed robes are the righteous deeds of the *kdoshim*, the saints:

These are the people who have come out of the Great Persecution. They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 7:14

Centuries later, while celebrating the Feast of Shavuot, the disciples received the right to "ascend the mountain", to celebrate the receiving of the Torah made alive by the *Ruach Hakodesh*, they proclaimed the Jubilee. All material was in common, and they shared everything, the purpose of the Torah was fulfilled:

All those trusting in *Yeshua* stayed together and had everything in common; in fact, they sold their property and possessions and distributed the proceeds to all who were in need. Acts 2:44-45

But for now, only *Moshe* will be able to see the L-rd Who will appear to the rest of the people through the thick fog: the misunderstanding of his carnal nature. A barrier is set in place, the people cannot get close or they die: divine holiness withstands any compromise.

All the people answered as one, Everything Adonai has said, we will do. Exodus 19:8

That Shabbat morning (whether on the 6th or 7th 2448, according to differing sources) the mountain was on fire with great thunders and thunderbolts bursting out. The sound of the *shofar* blew so strongly that the people trembled with fear in the camp and gathered around the mountain...

To be continued in the book on the Feast of Shavuot...



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