



GUEST CONTRIBUTOR DR. ERIC LITTMAN

A Change is Gonna Come

Yisro—the priest of Midian, Moshe's father-in-law—heard all that G-d had done for Moshe and for Israel His people, that the L-rd had taken Israel out of Egypt. (18:1)

WHAT WAS SO SPECIAL ABOUT YISRO THAT he not only merited to have this week's Torah portion called by his name, he was given even more—his Torah portion would include the giving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments?

Moreover, why does the Torah call him “the priest of Midian?” This seems to be antithetical to what we would expect from a great person.

Our Rabbis praise Yisro for the fact that he heard about the splitting of the Red Sea and the war with Amalek and was impacted and moved to act by those events, unlike the rest of the world, who also heard about them but did nothing (see Rashi on 18:1). Let's delve a little deeper, all the way back to the beginning, to see why Yisro's actions are indicative of his greatness.

Kayin spoke to Hevel, his brother. It happened, when they were in the field, that Kayin rose upon Hevel, his brother, and he killed him. (B'reishis 4:8)

Kayin (Cain) and Hevel (Abel) were each born with twin sisters, whom they married. However, according to a

Midrash, Hevel was born with an extra sister, making him a triplet. Accordingly, Kayin was jealous of Hevel's extra sister, and this is what they had been arguing (“speaking”) about before Kayin killed Hevel.

The Holy Arizal taught that Moshe was a reincarnation of Hevel, Yisro was a reincarnation of Kayin, and Tziporah, Moshe's wife, was a reincarnation of the extra sister.

When Yisro first arrived in the desert, he sent a message to Moshe:

Ani chosench Yisro—I, Yisro, your father-in-law—am coming to you, and [so are] your wife and her two sons with her. (18:6)

What kind of greeting is this? Of course Moshe knew who Yisro was! He had lived with Yisro for decades, married his daughter, and tended his flocks. Why state the obvious?

In these three Hebrew words, however, Yisro was hinting at something far deeper. The first letters of the words *ani chosench* Yisro (*aleph*, *ches*, and *yud*) spell *achi*, which means “your brother”—alluding to the fact that he, Yisro, was a reincarnation of Kayin, and Moshe was a reincarnation of Hevel!

Yisro then specifically stated, “[So are] *your wife* and *her* two sons with her.” He did not describe them as his (Yisro's) daughter or Moshe's sons. The Arizal explains that Yisro was doing a

tikkun, making a rectification, for the sin he had committed back when he (as Kayin) had killed Hevel over the extra sister. By returning Tziporah to Moshe and stressing the fact that she was Moshe's wife (i.e., Hevel's rightful wife), and that they were her sons (the children Hevel could have had with his other sister), Yisro repented for and rectified the sin he had committed in his previous lifetime as Kayin.

By first referring to Yisro as “the priest of Midian” and then, afterwards, as the father-in-law of Moshe, the Torah is hinting to us that Yisro repented for his actions in his current lifetime (as Yisro), as well. He not only heard the call; he answered it, too. He wasn't complacent in his exulted status in Midian. He was a seeker of truth, and when he heard the Truth of Hashem saving the Children of Israel, he came running. He transformed himself from being a “priest of Midian” into being the father-in-law of Moshe.

Tu biSh'vat is the Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the year, for *ilanos*, trees (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 2a). Rosh Hashanah represents a time of renewal. Every year, after wilting and “dying,” so to speak, trees once again bloom and blossom.

Some trees, like the giant sequoias and redwoods, do this for thousands of years. We don't find old trees complaining, “What's the point? I've done this for so long. Nothing's going to change.”

— CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE —>

Sponsorship & feedback:

parasha@cincykollel.org

this week's issue is sponsored by

Dr. Eric & Racheli Littman

in memory of Devorah bas Abba, whose *yahrzeit* is 23 Sh'vat

Cincinnati Torah

is distributed weekly
to local shuls
and the community
e-mail list.

At the Kollel

Chavrusos are available

for private and group learning—
speak to Rabbi Chaim Heinemann!

weekdays: noon–1
Sunday–Thursday: 8–9:45

Minyanim for Standard Time

Shacharis

Sunday8:15 AM
Monday–Friday7:20 AM

Mincha

Sunday *thru January*1:15 PM
Mon.–Thurs. *thru January*2:35 PM
Sunday–Thurs., *Feb.–Mar.*5:45 PM
Shabbos2:45 PM

Ma'ariv

In the Beis Midrash:

Sunday–Wednesday9:45 PM
Thursday10 PM

A Change... CONTINUED

On the contrary, they continue growing. Even if last year was a bad year, they press on, because who (aside from Hashem) knows what will happen each year? There's always room to grow.

The numerical value of the Hebrew words *kohen Midian*, *chossein Moshe* ("priest of Midian, Moshe's father-in-law") is equal to that of *Rosh Hashanah l'ilan* (New Year for trees).

When Moshe led the Jewish People out of Egypt, he was 80 years old. That means that Yisro was probably over 100 years old. But Yisro wasn't deterred by his old age. Just like the oldest sequoias and redwoods, he, too, renewed himself and undertook what was probably a grueling journey for someone his age, specifically to seek out the Truth.

It is human nature to feel comfortable and complacent, stuck in our ways, doing the same things over and over, year after year. It's easy to feel like "I'm too old to change." It's hard to change, very hard; it's far easier to be a sweet potato—"I yam what I yam." But Yisro did more than just respond to a call when no one else did. Yisro demonstrated that we *can* change, no matter how old we get—and his change also transcended his own lifetime (i.e., the *tikkun* for Kayin). Let's not wait lifetimes to change ourselves.

The Torah is Hashem's blueprint for the way we can change and create a more perfect relationship with Him. In what other Torah portion could the giving of the Torah have been recorded, other than in the one that highlights the person who embodied the notion that we can change, no matter how old we are? This was Yisro's greatness. This is why he merited to have the giving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments in his Torah portion.

May we all take a lesson from this Tu biSh'vat and renew ourselves, and continue to grow like the giant sequoias and redwoods. May we internalize the message of Yisro's greatness, pursue the Truth of Torah, and always change for the better, to improve all of our relationships, no matter how old we are. 🌱

Every Day

👤👤 "Dirshu" Gemara Shiur

(Maseches Y'vamos)
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

👤👤 Kollel Yisgaber K'ari (amud-a-day of Mishnah B'rurah)

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

👤👤 Kitzur Shuchan Aruch

Live video conference!
Rabbi Dani Schon.....
Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

👤 Daf Yomi

Rabbi Meir Minster.....
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

👤👤 Nightly Halacha Chabura

Rabbi Dani Schon
& Binyamin Teitelbaum
Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

Sunday *Free brunch!*

👤👤 America Runs on Torah

(Jewish Law & Parasha)
Rabbi Dani Schon
and Yisroel Kaufman..... 10 AM
Grand Deluxe breakfast served

👤 Shivti

(Self-contained learning, geared
toward practical halacha) 10–noon A

Tuesday

👤👤 Partners in Torah at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

Wednesday

👤👤 Torah Treasures for Seniors at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 10:30–11:15 AM

👤👤 Downtown Lunch-n- Learn at Strauss & Troy

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 12–1 PM

Thursday

👤👤 Halacha based on the parasha

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM
Homemade refreshments served.

KEY: 👤👤 Beginners
👤 Intermediate
👤 Advanced
👤👤 for men and women