

Parasha Meditation Yitro

Shemot 18:1-20:23

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

The Tree of Love

Introduction:

Guidance for Personal Preparation and Growth in Torah

This week's *parasha* does not only include the revelation at Sinai, with the giving of the Ten Commandments. The entire chapter 19 in the *Book of Shemot* is devoted to the preparation for receiving the Torah. The Torah description of the preparations that lead up to the Revelation at Sinai, can be a most appropriate source of guidance for our own preparations and growth in Torah. Let us look into which psychological and sociological insights we may glean from this chapter regarding exactly what kind of preparation we truly need to accept and grow in Torah?

Our chapter opens as follows:

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדְבַר סִינַי:

וַיֵּסְעוּ מִרֶפְדִּים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיַּחֲנוּ שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹגֵד הַהָר: (שמות יט:א-ב)

“In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came to the wilderness of Sinai. They left Refidim, and came to the wilderness of Sinai, and encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped facing the mountain.”¹

Why does it state first that the children of Israel arrived in the Sinai desert and only afterwards that they departed from Refidim? Why does it repeat that they arrived in the Sinai desert?

Leaping into Greatness before Uprooting Corruption

Even when Israel was still entrenched in the impurity of Egypt they did not hesitate to make the leap to come to Mount Sinai in order to receive the Torah. No matter how lowly or sinful we may feel, we should never feel too small and hesitate to think big and jump into greatness. Through light we can push away much darkness! Nevertheless, after our spiritual recharge we must return to clean up our original mess, this is why the Torah mentions afterwards “they left Refidim” – representing the *yetzer hara* – meaning they went back and cleaned themselves completely from the *yetzer hara* and impurity of Egypt, to rectify the material and uproot the power of evil. However, this is only after they had immediately leaped into the greatness of receiving the Torah.²

¹ *Shemot* 19:1-2.

² *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Yitro* p.139.



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Absolute Unity - the Key to Receiving Torah

In Rashi's commentary on the abovementioned verse, he asks why the departure from Refidim is mentioned in the plural (*vayisu/they left*), whereas by the encampment at Har Sinai, the singular is used (*vayichan/he encamped*, rather than *vayachanu*, the plural form). The answer is one of the most famous Rashi's on the Torah – "כאיש אחד בלב אחד" – as one person with one heart" – the singular is used to express that the entire nation of Israel encamped there, as one person, with a single unified heart, completely united in singleness of purpose. The people of Israel was not worthy to receive the Torah until there was peace between them, just as all the paths of the Torah are peace.³ Therefore, it mentioned that receiving the Torah took place in the third month which is under the astrological sign of Gemini which alludes to the unity and love which is between two twins. Likewise the two tablets were like twin tablets, five matching five. In order to be worthy of them Israel had to depart from רַפְדִּים/*Refidim* which has the same letters as פְּרִידִים/*peridim*, which means divisiveness/discord.⁴ The clue to their unity is in the point of departure, what and where they left.

Divisiveness within the Self

There are two types of divisiveness – between people towards one another, and between a person and himself. Divisiveness between two people is clearly understood. However, the internal divisiveness within a single person is more subtle. It is classically referred to by Chazal as "*Echad B'Peh, Echad B'Lev*," the mouth/voice says one thing, while the heart really is saying something else. If we are not at one with ourselves, and our speech is at odds with our true feelings, then we may end up in discord with others. Another way to express this idea in a positive light is that we should strive to be תּוֹכוֹ כְּבוֹרוֹ/"*tocho k'voro*,"⁵ our inner and outer selves should be unified, in concord with each other.⁶ In my experience, the internal discord is even more subtle. Many people are not in touch with their own feelings, perhaps due to the fast paced Western lifestyle or perhaps because our society strives to avoid pain by all means. We get used to repress our painful feelings to the degree that our sense of feeling gets impaired, so we lose touch with our own feelings.

The Souls of Israel Reflect the Letters of the Torah

Receiving the Torah must be "as one person with one heart," as the giving of the Torah was like a wedding between Hashem and Israel.⁷ Hashem, the Jewish people and Israel is one.⁸ Just as there are 600,000 letters in the Torah, there are 600,000 Jewish souls. Just as in the *Sefer Torah* if one letter is missing, the whole book is disqualified, the same way if one of the Jewish souls is missing; we are unable to receive the Torah. If the letters are too far from one another in the *Sefer Torah* if the entire book is disqualified, likewise we need to be completely united "as one person with one heart" in order to unite with Hashem.⁹

³ *Mishlei* 3:17.

⁴ *Kli Yakar*, ad. loc.

⁵ See for example *Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 28a.

⁶ Based on the *Divrei Yisrael*, Rabbi Israel Taub Ratcoinz, Poland, (1849-1920), on *Parashat Yitro*.

⁷ *Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit* 26b.

⁸ *Zohar*, part 3, p.73a.

⁹ *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Yitro* p. 138.

The Unity of Israel Pulled the Letters of the Torah Together

“When Moshe Rabbeinu went up to get the Torah, the letters didn’t want to join together and come down to this lowly world.”¹⁰ The number of the letters in the Torah, parallel the number of Jewish souls present at *Kabbalat HaTorah* on Har Sinai. On their own, the letters didn’t “want” to join together – they needed to see the 600,000 Jewish souls below pull together first, and then also the letters could join together in response. We see here from all sides that true Torah-based unity is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. The prerequisite for such unity is each of us to be one with ourselves. This is what removes the roadblocks between us and our fellow Jew.¹¹

Meditation:

Make yourself comfortable on a cushion or chair and take several deep breaths.

1. Keep breathing and relax even more. Feel conscious of your body, and imagine its shape. Mentally draw the outline of your body as you are sitting here right now.
2. Now do a body scan with your imaginary feeling detector, as you continue breathing deeply. Begin by breathing into your head detecting how your head is feeling. Does it feel energized or weary? Light or heavy? Do you detect any pain in any part of your head? Just observe without judging.
3. As you move down your throat area into your heart region with your feeling detector, look for feelings of love. Do you detect motherly love, sisterly love or passionate love? Is there any pain or hurt feelings? Just become aware of how you are feeling in your heart before mentally moving down your bellybutton to the area below your ribcage.
4. Scan your lower back, and the liver area on your right front side right below the ribcage. Do you feel heat or coldness? Do you become aware of any residue of anger or agitation you may hold there?
5. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply into your entire being as you get in touch with your hidden feelings the way they manifest in the different areas of your body. Accept yourself totally and completely the way you are, with your imperfections, hurt feelings and pain.
6. Embrace your pain, allow yourself to feel and connect with who you truly are. Are there any discrepancies between your true self and the façade you put on for others, the appearance you project outwardly? Just observe and become aware without judging.
7. Make a mental decision to allow your inside to reflect on your outside – to become “*tocho k’voro*” – to unify your inner and your outer self. Recite an intentional prayer to Hashem for a blessing to be successful in this endeavor.

¹⁰ *Midrash Yalkut Reuveini*, Chapter 7, quoted by the *Divrei Yisrael*.

¹¹ Based on the *Divrei Yisrael* on Parashat Yitro.

8. As you continue breathing visualize yourself as a tree, with your feet rooted deeply in the ground and your arms branching out above your head, ready to reach out and receive.
9. Imagine yourself as a branch in a much greater tree. This tree represents your family and community. Who is the root of your tree? On which branch does your branch emanate? Think about the people by whom you are influenced, and imagine how your branch receives nourishments from theirs. Who are the children or people that are influenced by you? Imagine them as fruits on your branch. Which fruits does your branch bring forth into the world?
10. Visualize your branch emanating from a larger branch, which emanates from an even larger branch, which in return emanates from a much greater branch. Each branch gives love and nourishment to the branches emanating from it. Continue this visualization for an endless amount of branches, as many as you can visualize in this gigantic Tree of Love.

Notes:

Why does Yitro's advice to Moshe precede *Kabbalat HaTorah* (The reception of the Torah)? Yitro's section is about building the Jewish people to become unified. That is why he told Moshe "If you carry this burden yourself alone you will surely become worn out... appoint over them rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens."¹² This can be compared to a tree, which has a root, the source of the sustenance for the entire tree, from it big branches branch out. From each of the large branches smaller branches emerge, and from them endless branches. In the same vein the community of Israel needs to be built. They must have rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens, which are all unified through their connection with Moshe Rabbeinu. They need to share Moshe's responsibility as it states "so shall they make it easier for you and share the burden with you."¹³ Sharing the burden of ruling the people together was vital so that Moshe shouldn't be separate and alone, but everyone together would connect to the source of their sustenance. This is similar to the branches of a tree, where all the branches receive nourishment together from its root. This way Moshe Rabbeinu would not be a separate branch, but connected and unified with the entire people.

This interconnected "infrastructure" was vital in preparation for receiving the Torah.¹⁴

¹² *Shemot* 18:18-21.

¹³ *Ibid.* 22.

¹⁴ *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Yitro* p. 138.

About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work. For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

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*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.

If you are interested in:

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin contact info@berotbatayin.org or in Spiritual Healing with Rebbetzin Chana Bracha, please contact her at director@berotbatayin.org

or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>

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