

Introduction to Parsha #17: Yitro¹

READINGS:

Torah Yitro:

Exodus 18:1 – 20:23

Haftarah:

Isaiah 6:1 - 7:6; 9:5-6

B'rit Chadasha:

I Peter 1:22 - 2:10



***I am the Holy One your God.
It is I Who brought you forth from the land of Egypt.
[Exodus 20:2]***

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 14: *Modim Anachnu* [We Give Thanks]

Vayishma Yitro kohen Midyan choten Moshe – *And Yitro, sheik of Midyan, Moshe's father-in-law, heard Exodus 18:1a.*

Even out in the desert, it seems, news travels fast. Tales of a strange pillar of fire and cloud leading a great horde of refugees from Egypt around are spreading from campfire to campfire, household to household, and palace to palace around the world. Accounts of what happened at the Sea of Reeds are being whispered by paupers and princes alike. Yish'maeli merchants are telling to their Midyani, Edomi, and Moavi customers incredible stories of bread falling from heaven and water flowing out of rocks. Amaleki survivors of the battle of Refidim are reporting to their Emori and Kena'ani allies how fiercely the refugee-throng's warriors fight under the leadership of the fearless captain *Yehoshua*. It is only a matter of time until someone is appointed to check these stories out – and assess the level of danger this great refugee horde poses to the local nomadic population. Who better for this task than the lovable old grandfather figure, Yitro of Midyan? Everybody loves that old man, right? No one in their right mind will suspect him of espionage!

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Look yonder, Beloved - our new nation's first visitor is coming to call! And not just any visitor, mind you - a *kohen Midyan* (i.e. a Midyanite sheik)! We are going to play host to a *titled royal*! Set out the fine china! Polish the silver! Get out the crystal! Children, be on your best behavior – and remember to use your indoor voices! Men, comb your scraggly hair, put on your best garments, and elevate your conversations and language! Women – prepare to cover your faces. But before do any of that ... well, do any of you by any chance know how to make a centerpiece out of a thorn bush? And does anyone have a recipe for making *hors d'oeuvres* out of manna?

Of course, there is a *complicating factor* that overshadows Yitro's upcoming visit. In addition to being a sheik of the nomad nation descended from Midyan, he also happens to be Moshe's pre-call mentor and father-in-law. And he is not coming alone – Moshe's long-lost wife and his two sons are traveling with him. Forgive Moshe if his objectivity is compromised. He is still a novice in the role of prophet of the Most High, and he is even newer at the role of head-of-state of B'nei Yisrael.

For good or for evil, though, Yitro is coming! Act III of the Divine Drama we know as the *Book of Exodus* is about to begin. Advice and counsel will be flying, and it will all sound good. Will you be able to stay focused on the Creator's Plan and instructions in the face of flashy distractions? Will you be able to sort through the hype, hyperbole, and hypocrisy? Will you be able to stand strong against the thinly veiled pagan propaganda? Will you be able to stay true to the Holy One's directions for nation building – in the face of someone you like and trust telling you in eloquent language that there is a better way than the Holy One has choreographed? Will you be able to keep your own fleshly emotions and ego in check? Gird up your loins, Beloved – you are going to need your wits about you for this challenge! As a nation we will fail this challenge miserably. But the Holy One will not forsake us. Nor will He let us wallow in our failure. To the contrary, He will step out of His cloak of invisibility, eternity, and incorporeality, visit us gloriously, and let all of us hear with our own ears the vast difference between His glorious Voice and the voice of mere men. He will then lift us up, dust us off, inspire us, empower us, and set us back on track to establish His Grand Plan of redemption and restoration in the world!

***Hmmmn. What Was the Last Download of Directions
We Got from the Holy One our God?***

In all the excitement of the visit from the Midyani delegation, has Moshe – have we - forgotten that there is a mission-critical instruction/directive from the Holy One hanging in the air? At Marah the Holy One laid out our most mission-critical assignment as His Holy Nation, saying:

Im-shamoa tish'ma l'kol Adonai Eloheicha

If/as/when/to the extent you diligently sh'ma the voice of the Holy One your God

v'ha-yashar be'eynav ta'aseh

and you make/cause to take shape what is right/straight/productive in His sight,

v'ha-azanta l'mitzvotav

and if/as/when/to the extent you give ear to His life-instructions

v'shamarta kol-chukav aleicha

and if/as/when/to the extent you treasure/cherish/carefully watch over to keep all His directives

kol-ha-machalah asher-samti b'Mitzrayim lo-asim

I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptian

ki ani Adonai rof'eicha

for I am the Holy One who is your health-giver."

[Exodus 15:25(b)-26]

The Holy One thus made it clear that there are *four specific things* – four ‘life hacks’, as it were - that are essential to our success in navigating the challenges of life. Every son or daughter of the Covenant must embrace these *four essential behavioral approaches* that the Holy One has instructed us to follow in every situation. If, as, when, and to the extent we participate in these four behavioral approaches, the Holy One promises, we will experience freedom from the SICKNESSES [Hebrew *machalah*, meaning not only *infirmities of body* but worries, sorrows, griefs, terrors, and weaknesses of all kinds].

The operative verbs the Holy One employed to explain to us what He expects from us in the relationship, all in relation to HIS WORDS OF INSTRUCTION AND DIRECTION - not the words of the ‘voice of another’ – are as follows:

1. *sh'ma* – *i.e.* vibrate in resonance with and implement in real time - every word He speaks;
2. *asah* – *i.e.* apply creative energy to build or put in place – only what is right and productive in *His eyes*, instead of what seems right and productive to us;
3. *azan* – *i.e.* *surrender our ears to His life-instructions* and block out/reject all the counsel we receive from the ‘voice of a stranger’; and
4. *sh'mar* – *i.e.* *cherish, treasure, highly prioritize, and carefully keep watch over to keep inviolate*, all His specific directives on how to handle specific situations.

If, when, and to the extent that Yitro echoes the instructions that have been given by the Holy One, good for him – and we can embrace and follow his directives. But if he preaches ‘another gospel, or something the Holy One has not told us to do, we are to politely reject his counsel and continue doing things exactly as the Holy One told us to do!

When Yitro is long gone, you see, the Creator of the Universe will still be with us. So as between the Holy One and Yitro, which one's counsel and direction should Moshe – should we - *sh'ma, azan, asah, and sh'mar*? Should Moshe – and we – follow the worldly-wise advice and counsel of a Midyani sheik? OR should we be content to stick with, and stay faithful to, our Creator's last words of direction? Careful now, Moshe! Careful now, B'nei Yisrael! THIS IS A TEST! And it is not primarily about Moshe. It is about you, and it is about me. It is about our children, and our children's children. In every generation, we must choose: man's institutionally based, pseudo-intellectual ideas, opinions, theories, and principles? Or the Holy One's Words of Instruction and Direction. Seldom, if ever, will the orbit – or the destination – of the two coincide.

How should we prepare for this test? Hint: always, always, look and listen for '*vayadaber Adonai*' – i.e. and the Holy One said

Welcome to the Season of Multiple Voices, Multiple Perspectives, and Multiple Pathways

Yitro is the parsha of *Multiple Voices, Multiple Perspectives, and Multiple Pathways*. There will be at least *three very distinct voices* speaking to us this week. Each of these voices will come from a different perspective and will convey very different messages. The choice we make as to which of these voices and messages we will put our trust in will go a long way toward determining whether we will be able to become everything we are created to be and achieve everything we have been redeemed and empowered to achieve in this world – or not. What we are being introduced to in this parsha, you see, are critical tests of:

1. ***covenant fidelity*** – i.e. who has our ear, attention, and trust;
2. ***identity*** – i.e. whose 'mark' we will wear;
3. ***mission*** – i.e. whose Will are we here to do;
4. ***impact*** – i.e. what limitations and restrictions on the exercise of our calling will we allow other human beings – as opposed to the Holy One - to place us; and
5. ***destiny*** – i.e. where, how far, and with what level and value of cross-generational impact, will the Kingdom calling upon our lives reach?

The bold question the Holy One is presenting to us all this week is whether, now that we are free from bondage, we will choose to live the rest of our lives *sh'ma*-ing the voice of the Wise, Loving and Powerful Bridegroom-King Who brought us out of bondage to personally train us to serve as His specially-treasured people, His kingdom of priests, and His holy nation - OR whether we will choose instead to *sh'ma* the more comfortable, familiar voice of a well-meaning fellow human being with an impressive title but a decidedly human perspective and approach to life.

This is the same issue faced by Yeshua's talmidim early on. As the Book of Acts records: *But Kefa [a/k/a 'Peter'] and Yochanan [a/k/a 'John'] answered and said to them: Whether it is right in the sight of God to sh'ma you more than God, you judge; but we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard.* Acts 4:19-20.

Welcome indeed to the challenge of Multiple Voices, Multiple Perspectives, and Multiple Pathways. Man's considered opinion – or brilliant instructions straight from the Brilliant Mind of our Creator/King – which will you choose to *sh'ma*, to follow/walk in, and to live by?

Everybody's Talkin' At Me!

The first of the voices that will speak to us this week will be the voice of Yitro. He will speak to our fruit-of-the-tree-of-knowledge contaminated *pseudo-intellec*ts. He will use familiar, comfortable words of human reasoning. He will employ clichés drawn from outward forms of religion. He will seduce us to *focus on numbers instead of people*. He will counsel us to set up *a religious hierarchy designed to focus everyone's attention on matters of the flesh, to 'control' situations according to principles of fallen human logic*, and to merely *'manage' conflicts instead of resolve and diffuse them*. He will cause us to falsely believe we can still function effectively as the Redeemed Community of the Holy One without seeking any fresh inspiration, much less any direct input, from the Omniscient One Himself. He will teach us to function completely independently of the Holy One. This voice might as well say: *You will not surely die ... your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.* See Genesis 3:4-5.

Yitro will say nothing to us that will either *awaken us to our destiny*, or *inspire our awestruck hearts to love the Holy One or our neighbor*, or *empower our newly redeemed souls to walk with and serve the Author of our Redemption in an atmosphere-shifting way*. All the sheik of Midyan will do will be to stroke our flesh and inflate our human sense of self-importance. He will exalt form over substance. He will promote organizational methodology over revelation and inspiration. Because he will concern himself solely with matters of the *flesh*, his message will *sound good and pleasing* to itching ears. Because the counsel he offers will come from a charismatic speaker claiming an impressive-sounding title, it will sound eminently *informed* – even *intelligent*. But we will be more tempted to yawn than tremble when we hear it. The words Yitro speaks will lack spiritual energy. They will have no redeeming power. They will have no eternal impact. Yitro's counsel will be all about *externals, appearances, abstract ideas, programs, and formulas*. It will be all about *defining, conceding to, and functioning within human limitations*. If we *sh'ma* the counsel we will depart from our high calling to be the light of and a blessing to the world. We will lay aside that calling to build, maintain, fund, and promote a religious institution – and a man-centered system

guaranteed to result in the development of arrogance and pride in leadership, the creation of ambition and jealousy among those who aspire to that leadership, and the constant pressure on the part of the common man to seek favor from men instead of revelation and inspiration for true impasse-breaking and problem solving from the Creator of Heaven and Earth Himself.

Fortunately, Yitro's voice will not be the only voice we hear this week. There will be another, far more trustworthy Voice speaking to us. The other voice that will speak to us will most definitely cause us to tremble inside. This voice will speak to our eternal spirit, not our temporal flesh. It will challenge us to the core of our being, with matters of identity, purpose, and destiny. Instead of teaching us to manage and organize our human limitations and restrictions, this voice will encourage us to break through and overcome those barriers of the flesh and *become all we were created to be*. This voice will *renew our minds, reorder our priorities, and inspire to surrender both our hearts and our day-to-day agendas to our Creator's Covenantal Purposes and Grand Redemptive Plan*. This voice will invite, inspire, and motivate us *to team up with our Creator in Covenant in order to co-labor with Him in causing His Will to be done and His kingdom to come on earth as it is in Heaven*.

One of the voices we hear this week will *sound intelligent*; the other will *BE WISDOM*. One of the voices we hear this week will *tickle our ears*; the other will *MAKE OUR SPIRITS SOAR*. One of the voices we hear this week will put us under man-invented limitations and restrictions that will cap our ceiling at that man's level of vision, understanding and intentionality; the other voice we hear will empower us to transcend human limitations completely and start to put on and model for the world the majesty, beauty, and infinite goodness of the Creator Himself. We all wind up *sh'ma*-ing one of these voices or the other. And which of them we choose will determine how much of the plan of the Creator for our lives and our assigned spheres of influence we will see come to fruition.

Introducing the First Voice

As fallen human beings go Yitro is intelligent and articulate. Men like him – whom the Holy One sends to us to test us – always are. Yitro – like all those he represents - offers a royal-sounding title, has an impressive following, and commands diplomatic honor. He will appear, in the first blush of limited contact, to be pleasant, kindly, and benevolent. His words will seem to the fallen human ear like pearls of wisdom. But the kind of wisdom the words of this man will contain will most definitely *not* be the perfect kind of wisdom that comes down from above. This man's words will contain the kind of wisdom that is *earthly, sensual, demonic*. **James 3:15**

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. James 3:13. Yitro is not going to stick around long enough to test his counsel against the ‘good conduct’ and ‘meekness’ standard of James 3. By the end of the chapter 18, Yitro will have surveyed what the Holy One had his son-in-law Moshe doing, opined ‘*lo tov*’ – *it is not good* - suggested what he perceived to be a ‘better’ way’ than what the Holy One had devised, and ridden off into the sunset.

Yitro might have meant well. I am not here to judge Yitro’s – or anyone else’s - motivations. But please take note that there was not a *Vayadaber Adonai* or *Vayomer Adonai el-Yitro* lead-in to a single word that Yitro spoke. In a season in which the Holy One’s primary focus is training us to *sh’ma HIS Voice*, and to therefore *lo sh’ma* the voice of another, the absence of the *Vayadaber Adonai* or *Vayomer Adonai* lead-in should be HUGE to us.

Nowhere in the narrative of Torah does it say that the Holy One ever, even one time, spoke to Yitro. We are not even told that the Holy One appeared to him – even in a dream. Everything Yitro counseled, therefore, will have been conjured up in his own fallen pseudo-intellect. Every opinion he uttered was the product of his own corrupted flesh. Yitro’s unrenewed mind – like that of all unregenerate man - had been poisoned since before birth by both paganism and the constant ingestion of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – i.e. that which seems to human beings to be ‘good to make one wise’. Consider Yitro’s first words of counsel to Moshe: he leads with: ***What you are doing is NOT GOOD.***” **Exodus 18:17.** *Danger! Danger!* You have just received fair warning – everything this man says is corrupted by the poison fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil! Like other fallen human beings, Yitro will obsess over – and make everything about - what he perceives as ‘not good’. When that happens, the Holy One’s will is always the first casualty.

Yitro knew the ways of the Midyani. He knew the ways of government and politics and organizational structures and religion [polytheistic, natural, pagan religion, that is]. But he did not know the ways of the Holy One. He had no clue whatever of what the Holy One was about to do at Mount Sinai – or beyond. He had no idea what the Holy One was really doing in and through his son-in-law Moshe and his brother Aharon in this very special season. He did not have any understanding at all of what the Holy One was planning to do with the budding nation of Yisrael. How could he know these things? How could any sheik of Midyan ... or Babylon ... or America?

And Now ... Introducing the Second Voice!

The second voice we will hear speaking to us this week will be altogether different – and altogether lovely. It will be the Voice of none other than our Creator. It will

be the same Beautiful Voice that spoke to Adam, to Avraham, to Yitzchak, to Ya'akov, to Yosef, and more recently to Moshe. We will finally hear this Beautiful Voice with our own ears.

At the sound of this Voice a holy hush will fall over the earth. At the sound of this Voice the desert around us will burst into bloom. At the sound of this Voice the world will totally change. At the sound of this Voice we will tremble. At the sound of this Voice our hearts will melt within our chests. At the sound of this Voice our minds will begin to be renewed. At the sound of this Voice the *neshamah* the Holy One breathed into man in the beginning, but which has lain dormant in most of the species since the Fall, will arise with a gasp, and begin to leap and dance. At the sound of this Voice we will begin to truly live instead of just exist.

The second Voice that will speak to us this week will redefine who we are, why we have been given the breath of life, and what we, as sons and daughters of the Avrahamic Covenant, are capable of. The second Voice we will hear this week will both inspire and empower us – as it trains us to love, honor, and serve not only our Creator, but also our fellow man. The second Voice that will speak to us this week will focus our attention on our glorious new identity, mission, and destiny instead of on our immediate problems, fleshy conflicts, soul-ish emotions, and fallen human limitations. The second Voice we will hear this week will make everything new. It will bring light into all our areas of darkness. And it will bring life, health, and peace into all our ways.

All of human life involves making a choice between which of these two voices we will follow, Dear Reader. Choose this day

Introducing a Third Voice – The Self-Obsessed Scream of Our Flesh

There will be a third voice that speaks in this parsha. It will be the voice of our own flesh. It will not just speak – it will *scream*! In the midst of the Holy One's revelation of Himself and His calling upon our lives, our flesh will have a panic attack. Here is how Torah describes it:

*Then all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes,
the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking;
and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off.
Then they said to Moshe, "You speak with us, and we will hear;
but let not God speak with us, lest we die."*

[Exodus 20:19-20]

If any voice ever tells you, or any thought ever enters your head, that you cannot personally hear the Voice of your Creator - or that if you do, you will suffer ill effects – please *consider the source of that foul, serpentine notion*. That belief comes only from your corrupted, putrefied, self-obsessed flesh. The Voice of the

Almighty is the most wonderful sound in the world. His Voice is what heals you, not what hurts you. It is what inspires you, not condemns you. It is what restores and empowers you, not what restricts and emasculates you. It is what brings you life not what brings you death.

This is a week of critical, destiny-impacting choices. Multiple voices will be speaking to you. Multiple perspectives will be presented to you. Multiple pathways will be laid out for you. Please, please, listen carefully and choose wisely, Beloved! *Sh'ma* the Voice of your Creator and Bridegroom-King; and *lo sh'ma* the voice of any and every other.

***It is Finally Our Turn to Hear the Voice
that Spoke to Moshe from the Thorn Bush***

As this week's parsha begins we find that the Holy One's pillar of fire and cloud has at last led the Redeemed Community to the shadow of the very mountain where the Holy One first appeared to Moshe. It was on the mountain standing before us that the son-in-law of Yitro the Midyanite turned his gaze toward the Divine fire that manifested in a humble bush and heard a glorious voice call out to him ***"Moshe! Moshe!"*** Moshe has, of course, *not been the same since*. He will, indeed, *never be the same* again. The *sights Moshe saw* and *the Voice he heard* that day have *marked him*, have *transformed him*, and have *captivated him* forever. And something very similar to what happened to Moshe at this place is about to happen on a much broader scale to every man, woman and child who walked out of bondage in Moshe's good company. Just as Moshe's attention was captured and his life forever changed by a holy fire that burned within one of this mountain's thorn bushes, so two to three million redeemed slaves fresh out of Egypt are about to have their attention captured and their lives changed forever by a holy fire that burns upon this mountain itself.

What will happen during the 11 months or so we encamp here² will not only redefine who we are, as individuals and as a collective entity – it will literally and figuratively *shake the world*. Moshe has had his thorn bush experience; it is now time for ours. The mountain of revelation looms before us. The most glorious betrothal proposal that has ever been extended will soon be delivered to Moshe, then to us. A *chuppah* more grand than any canopy man could even conceive, much less design and build, is even now being prepared and bedecked with Heavenly splendor. The shofar of Heaven will soon beckon us come.

² According to Numbers 10:11 the Cloud led us forth from Sinai on the twentieth *day* of the second month, in the second year after the Exodus. Since Exodus 19:1-2 tell us we arrived at Sinai early in the third month, that means we were at this way station for approximately 11 ½ months.

We are about to arrive at the Mountain of the Living God – the place where thorn bushes burn with holy fire but are not consumed. We will spend the rest of the Book of Exodus, all the Book of Leviticus, and the first nine chapters of the Book of Numbers encamped at the foot of this very special mountain.

Take off your shoes, Dear Reader; we are about to tread on some very, very Holy Ground. What happened to Moshe a few months ago is about to happen to us. While our Bridegroom-King has us at this mountain He plans on empowering us by the sheer energy of His Words to become *His* in ways we had never considered possible. Prepare for impact, Beloved – we are about to be reborn. We are about to be birthed into the earth as *His special treasure people, His kingdom of royal ambassadors, and His holy nation*. We are about to become partners with the Creator of the Universe in His Grand Redemptive Plan for the redemption of mankind and creation. This is indeed the Great Adventure!

How Did We Get to this Auspicious Threshold?

The Redeemed Community – the chosen Betrothed of the Holy One – has recently experienced some absolutely *amazing* things. First a prophet appeared to her, announced that the God of her forefathers had ‘*heard her groanings*’, and proclaimed that a miraculous deliverance was on the way. Then the Holy One released a series of ten surgically precise strikes from Heaven simultaneously dismantled Egypt’s economy, culture, and population, on the one hand, and introduced the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya’akov to His chosen Bride and to *win her trust, admiration, and undying affection*, on the other hand.

In *sh’ma*-response to the Holy One’s instructions on the night of the tenth surgical strike from Heaven the chosen bride-candidate chose to accept the sign of the blood of a *seh* (a substitutionary offering selected from a flock) as the symbol of the Holy One’s covenant of deliverance. In the six weeks or so since the *night of painting doorposts* she has followed after her Beloved through some amazing adventures. She has not had to wander around seeking shelter from the elements, nourishment, or water holes as most desert travelers do. The manifest Presence of the Holy One Himself, in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, has been her sure, trustworthy, and ever faithful Guide.

Following the pillar the Beloved has now passed *six stations in the wilderness*. She ate her first meal of freedom at *Sukkot*. She stood at the crossroads at *Etam*. She faced the charge of Pharaoh’s mighty army at *Pi Ha-Chirot*, and then marveled at the breathtaking miracle He performed for her there. She saw the waters of the sea part at the Breath of the Holy One, and she walked through the midst of the waters dry shod and unharmed. She then saw the standing columns of water between which she had just walked collapse violently upon Pharaoh’s army.

She saw all Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and soldiers swallowed up by the waters of the sea.

She then followed the pillar on a 3-day hike into the Wilderness of Shur to the encampment of *Marah*. There the Holy One turned bitter waters sweet for her and taught her *chok umishpat*. Further eastward at *Elim* she was treated to a delightful season of basking in tropical beauty, experiencing the abundance of the Holy One's provision, and resting up for the next stage of her journey. Then came *Refidim*. Since arriving at Refidim the Beloved has seen the skies pour out manna for her every day³ at sunrise and has drunk deeply from pure streams of living water that the Holy One has caused to pour forth for her from a desert rock.

Since leaving Egypt the betrothed-to-be of the Holy One has been courted by the Creator of the Universe *in elegant style*. In the process her *song of deliverance* has become a *song of love*:

*I delight to sit in the Holy One's shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
He has brought me to His banqueting table, and His banner over me is love.
Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love.*

[Song of Songs 2:3-5]

The Long and Winding Road ... That Leads to Your Door ...

But why, you may be tempted to ask, has the Holy One brought His Beloved *here* to this foreboding outcropping of rock in the middle of the desert rather than taking us to the land of the patriarchs where we could satiate our physical appetites with milk and honey? We have had to travel several days' – indeed several *weeks*' – journey out of the way to get to this remote mountain. It has been very hot, very dry, and extremely arduous. We are, however, about to discover why this great detour was necessary. The Holy One has meant it for our *good*, not for our harm. Unbeknownst to us, you see, the Holy One has been preparing a *banquet for us on this mountain*. *Pools of Living Water* have been provided to cleanse us from the dust of our journey. *Fragrant oils and perfumes* have been compounded for the anointing of our hair, our feet, our hands, and our hearts. *Garments of righteousness* have been fashioned for our shoulders. A *ring of consecration* has been shaped for our finger. The *chuppah of covenant* has been stretched out and made ready. The table has been set.

Ah, but I am getting ahead of myself, aren't I. Let us go back and try to put this all-in perspective.

³ Manna fell from Heaven only six days out of every seven. No manna was given or gathered on Shabbat.

When I Look Into His Holiness ...

As glorious as all the wonderful things that have happened thus far in the Book of Exodus are, we will soon discover that they were all mere fundamental preparation for what we are going to read and experience this week. Oh, what glorious and world-changing things we about to experience! This is the week when SINAI HAPPENS. All Heaven will stand on tiptoe, as it were, in silent anticipation of what is going to occur on *this mountain*. What is about to occur on this hallowed ground will affect all people groups on the planet, in all generations. It is here, you see, that our King intends to take us unto Himself as a Bridegroom takes unto Himself a bride. It is here that the exhilarating *Divine Courtship* in which we have been participating will culminate in an inspiring *Divine Betrothal*. It is at this mountain that the Creator of the Universe will set us apart unto Himself with Prophetic DNA-altering Words that carry the transformative energy of the Heavenly Courts. It is here that the ‘Great Nation’ the Holy One has birthed will receive its constitution, its commission, its toolkit, its inspiration, its empowerment, and its orders.

We are about to *meet the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya’akov face to Face*. I do not mean *one or two of us* — I mean *every single one of us*. Every man, woman, and child among us is about to *hear the Voice that spoke Creation into existence* make stunning prophetic declarations *over us*. His words will pierce both our collective and individual souls, as He calls us to our *purpose*, to our *destiny*, and to *the place in His Divine plan of redemption for the world that He has willed for us since the foundation of the world*.

The Holy One will cause the Radiant Cloud of His Presence to spread out and overshadow the entire Redeemed Community like a *chuppah* (wedding canopy). With the Words of His Own Mouth He will then lovingly betroth us unto Himself as a Bride. Something that in Hebrew is called the *Aseret Ha-dibrot* [usually translated into English - I believe improperly - as the “Ten Commandments”] will then be given to us as the preamble to the betrothal covenant document the Holy One will give to the apple of His Eye.

In the course of this wonderful betrothal ceremony the arid desert around this mountain will, it is said, *burst into bloom*. And so will our love for our Bridegroom. The combination of the sights we will see and the words we will hear Him speak will totally *redefine our identities, renew our minds, refresh our souls, rewire our nervous systems, recast our worldviews, and reprogram our behavior patterns*. As a result of what is going to happen on this mountain we like Moshe will *never be the same again*. He is going to *set us all aflame with Holy Fire*. He is going to turn *all of us into burning thorn bushes*. And then He is going to send us

forth from this place as burning and shining lamps - to take His Glorious Light into the far corners of the world.

It Was For This 'Narrow Road' Betrothal That He Redeemed Us

I hope you did not think that it was simply *to win our freedom from Pharaoh* that the Holy One our God appeared so marvelously and showed Himself so gloriously strong in this generation. Oh no. All along the Holy One's plan has been *to bring us to this mountain*. I do not mean simply that this has been the Holy One's plan since the day He first appeared to Moshe on this mountain. I do not just mean that this has been the Holy One's plan since the day He heard and had all His compassions aroused by our anguished groans and mournful cries in Egypt. The Planning for this event goes back *much, much further than the first few chapters of Exodus*. It was in fact for the occurrences of this week's parsha that the Holy One told Noach to build an Ark. It was for this that He called Avraham out of first Ur and later Charan. It was for this that He sustained Yitzchak in the midst of famine. It was for this that He rescued Ya'akov from layer upon layer of deception. It was for this that He revealed His counsel to Yosef in dreams. It was for this that He directed a basket set afloat in the Nile by a Hebrew slave-woman to the palace of Pharaoh. It was, for that matter, *because He wanted to do the exact things we will read about this week in our lives* that He chose to love and cut covenant with our forefather Avraham. This is how He plans to bring to pass for Avram everything He has promised him.

The stunning stream of revelation we are about to receive – which I like to call *the Great Discourse of our Prophetic Destiny* - is not just a *by-product* of the Noach and Avrahamic covenants, you see – this stream of revelation was the REASON FOR both of those covenants. The reason you are beloved by the Holy One is not because you are descended from Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov – to the contrary, the reason Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov were beloved by the Holy One was *because the Holy One knew they would in due time bring you forth upon the earth, and you would receive and walk in the world-changing revelation stream He is about to release from the summit of Mount Sinai*.

What a story! But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. Before we go any further let us pause and check out a parsha ***Yitro*** travelogue.

A Yitro Travelogue

Before it is over this will be one of the most action-packed, exciting parshot of Torah. But it will start off quietly, with what will seem like a very mundane diplomatic event. A diplomat from another kingdom – one without either a *Deliverance from Bondage* history or a *Yeshuat Adonai Parting-the-Sea* experience

- will come calling. He will talk a lot. He will impress us with fancy human words. He will deluge us with personal opinions. He will pontificate about abstract concepts. He will talk like an ivory-tower theologian, criticizing, nit-picking, fixating on numbers, and promoting theories as if they were truths. He will introduce crowd-drawing, attention-getting, hyper-emotional, flesh-pleasing sacraments. It will all be extremely enticing. But our hearts will not burn within us. Our spirits will not soar with *emunah*. And our lips will not tremble. Our tongues will not thirst for the sweet waters of the river of life. Our eyes will not be lifted up to the mountains from whence cometh our help. Our souls will not cry out for the manifestation of *Yeshuat Adonai*. We will not find our hands being lifted up toward Heaven's courts. Our feet will not be moved to dance. *Hmmmnn*. Could this possibly be a test?

1. The Great Distraction – The Visit and Seductive Message of Yitro

After hearing about what the Holy One has done for the Hebrew and mixed multitude refugees that followed Moshe out of Egypt, Moshe's father-in-law *Yitro the Midyanite* will pay a diplomatic visit to the camp. Moshe will tell the Midyani the wonderful story of the Holy One's deliverance of His people from bondage in Egypt. He will testify to him of the great miracle the Holy One performed at the sea of reeds. He will show the Midyani the strange substance that falls from Heaven each day in sufficient quantities to feed 3 million people. He will regale Yitro with the story of how the Holy One brought forth a river of water from a desert Rock. And he will debrief his father-in-law about the great victory the young untrained men of the camp recently enjoyed over the powerful forces of Amalek.

While Yitro is visiting Moshe will continue his Divinely sanctioned practice of sitting day-by-day to hear all questions and disputes among the people and to explain in the name of the Holy One the spiritual principles applicable to every situation posed to him. Yitro will *not approve*. He will, in fact, be appalled. He is not a prophet of the Most High. He has never even met one. He has no grid whatever through which to understand the forerunner and forth-teller calling upon his son-in-law. He has no frame of reference through which to understand the 'revelation stream lifestyle' to which the Holy One has called Moshe. He has no way to process the amazing and things the Holy One is about to do on this mountain. He has no clue what the Holy One plans to do through the children and children's children of the people who have followed Moshe out of Egypt, through the desert, past the Amaleki, into his territory. He does not understand anything about the dynamics of the new Kingdom that is being formed on the earth to mirror the Courts of the Great King in Heaven.

Yitro knows only organizational models. He traffics only in institutional methods.

Appalled at what He sees through his myopic eyes of flesh, Yitro will scold Moshe – and indirectly the Holy One - like a schoolboy. He will exploit the honor Moshe accords him as an elder and as his father-in-law. He will manipulate the humble prophet – who is just learning the revelation stream lifestyle himself - into adopting a secular/humanistic approach institutional approach. He will effectively limit Moshe’s personal involvement to a few very special cases. He will tell Moshe – the only one who has heretofore had any relationship with the Holy One, and who has been empowered for this purpose – to delegate the bulk of the work the Holy One assigned him to a complicated bureaucracy of hirelings not one of whom has even had an encounter with the Holy One, much less walked with Him and spoken to Him face-to-Face like Moshe has.

Yitro will not join the budding Covenant nation. He will not forsake his Midyani ways and mindset. After he sows his seeds of form-over-substance confusion, he will ride right out of the Camp of the Redeemed on the same camel on which he rode in.

2. Arrival at the Shining Mountain

Finally, early in the third month after our departure from Egypt we will at long last arrive at the base of Mount Sinai. The chronicles of our visit here will comprise the heart and the soul – not to mention most of the narrative - of Torah.

3. Moshe Ascends the Mountain Alone – Part I

Our adventure at Sinai will begin with a little mountain climbing. Moshe will scale the mountain of the burning bush alone. Along the way the Holy One will apprehend him a second time. This time, instead of sending the son of Amram to an incredulous Pharaoh to declare ‘*Shelach ami!*’, the Holy One will send Moshe to the Redeemed Community he led out of Egypt to present a proposal even more outrageous that what He had him tell Pharaoh. This time the Holy One will have Moshe declare the most amazing betrothal proposal ever spoken. With the following beautiful words the Holy One will have Moshe extend to ordinary human beings like himself an offer of eternal and blessed ***b’rit*** [covenant]:

Atem re'item asher asiti l'Mitzrayim

'You have seen what I did to the Mitzrim [Egyptians],

v'eisa eitchem al-kanfei nesharim v'avi eitchem elay
and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself.

V'atah im-shamoa tishmei'u b'qoli

Now therefore, if/when you will indeed sh'ma my voice,

Ush'martem et-briti

and sh'mar my covenant,

viheyitem li s'gulah m'kol ha-amim
then you shall be my own possession from among all peoples;

ki-li kol-ha-aretz
for all the eretz is mine;

V'atem tiheyu-li mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh
You will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to Me.'
[Exodus 19:3-6]

Moshe will then return to camp and will instruct us to *sanctify ourselves for three days* in preparation for a divine encounter on the mountain.

4. The Betrothal Ceremony That Changed the World

On the third day of our consecration period the stillness of the morning will be shattered by loud thundering accompanied by lightning and a thick cloud. The sound of an exceedingly loud *shofar* will be heard from the summit. The mountain will shake. Its summit will be enveloped in a cloud of smoke. All the while the *shofar* sound issuing from the fire on top of the mountain will grow louder and louder.

The sounding of the great Shofar of Heaven will serve as the signal for the Redeemed Community to approach the Holy One's Manifest Presence *en masse*. All 2 million or so of us will begin the slow process of ascending the mountain toward the shade of His *Chuppah* [outdoor canopy]. Suddenly the Voice of the Holy One will seemingly come forth from everywhere at the same time - and the glory of the Holy One will be seen by every man, woman, and child the Holy One redeemed from Egypt.

Ten audible pronouncements will then issue forth from Heaven. Some call these Divine pronouncements the 'Ten Commandments'. But they will not be 'commandments' in the sense most people think – they will be much *more* than commandments. What they will be is *prophetic empowerments*. They will change our spiritual DNA forever.

5. The Runaway Bride

Alas all the excitement will prove to be too much for this generation of redeemed slaves to handle. We will tremble in sheer terror at the thunder and lightning, at the sound of the great *shofar*, and at the smoking mountain, much as we used to tremble at the shouts of our Egyptian taskmasters. Like a blushing and immature Bride-to-be, B'nei Yisrael will *shrink back in fear and trembling* from the Voice of the Divine Bridegroom. She will *run away*. She will *hide herself from His Face*. In a panic she will beg the Holy One *not* to speak or relate to her *al-paneh* anymore, but speak to her only through a mediator - Moshe. The result of all this, we will

learn, will be the introduction of a temporary Tabernacle/‘courts of Heaven’ means of interfacing and cross-platforming – a medium of chaperoned interaction that will serve as a powerful teaching, training, and trust-building paradigm until ... well, until it doesn’t.

A Quick Look at Haftarah Yitro

Isaiah 6:1 - 7:6; 9:5-6

The Haftarah reading that the sages of Israel appended to parsha **Yitro** is taken from the writings of the most studied major prophet of the TaNaKh, *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah]. It will revolve around a dramatic appearance of the Holy One to Yeshayahu that occurred ‘*in the year Uziyahu the king died*’.

According to historical sources Yeshayahu was a *Yehudi*, and a nephew of Amaziah⁴ - i.e. the king who reigned in Y’hudah immediately before Uziyahu⁵ assumed the throne. **Sotah 10b**. In Rabbinical thought Yeshayahu’s writings are considered second in stature and authority only to the Torah of Moshe. Yeshayahu was the ultimate visionary - a man who seemed to *see* everything, from the particulars of Israel's role in the world to the message the Holy One wished to convey to all the peoples of the earth. It was to Yeshayahu that the Holy One revealed that the calling of Israel was not just to be a people set apart to the Holy One but to be, at the same time, **a light to the nations**.

The passage we will read this week consists of Yeshayahu’s prophetic calling. It deals with a *visual* experience as well as an *auditory* experience of the Holy One’s Presence and Glory. We will discover that Yeshayahu, like the Redeemed Community at Sinai, both *saw* and *heard* the manifestation of the Holy One. The reaction of Yeshayahu to this revelation will, however, be much different than that of the Redeemed Community in parsha *Yitro*. The Redeemed Community of the Exodus was frightened of, and hence ran from, the Holy One’s Voice. Yeshayahu, on the other hand, like Moshe, just wanted to get closer to the Holy One, to be caught up in the glory and the power of the Words of His Mouth.

The haftarah begins in the year of the death of King Uziyah of Y’hudah. Yeshayahu then tells us:

⁴ The details of the reign of Amaziah are recorded in II Kings 14 and II Chronicles 25.

⁵ **Uziyahu**, commonly known in English language texts as *Uzziah*, was the son of Amaziah. Uziyahu became king of Y’hudah in approximately 790 BCE at the age of 16. 2 Kings 14:21-22 says that after the death of Amaziah of Judah, "all the people of Judah took Azariah (Uziyah), and made him king in the place of his father. Uzziah's 52-year reign is described in 2 Chronicles 26. During Uziyahu’s reign Y’hudah attained independence and became a strong nation again. Approximately 40 years after assuming the throne, however, c.751 BCE, Uziyahu was stricken by the Holy One with *tza’arat* after he usurped the high priests’ duties and offered incense in the Temple [See **2 Chronicles 26:16-21**]. Uziyahu is believed to have died c 739 BCE.

V'er'eh et-Adonai yashev al-kise ram v'nisa
Then I saw the Holy One sitting upon a high and lofty throne,

V'shulav mele'im et ha-hechal
and His train filled the Temple.

S'rafim om'dim mima'al lo
The serafim stood above Him.

V'kara zeh el-zeh v'amar
And one called to another, and said,

K'dosh k'dosh k'dosh Adonai Tzeva'ot
Holy, holy, holy, is the Holy One of hosts;

melo chol ha-aretz kevodo
the whole earth is full of His glory.'

[Isaiah 6:1-3]

This vision literally changed Yeshayahu's life. The words he heard from the Serafim pierced his soul and surged through his being. It was more than his natural mind could handle, and he came completely 'undone'. Alas is it not time you and I saw such a vision, heard such pronouncements, and became 'undone' as well? May the characteristics and talent that we think of as our strengths all die, and may those fleshly things in which we have heretofore trusted be completely consumed in His Fire.

This Week's Corresponding B'rit Chadasha Readings

I Peter 1:22 - 2:10

In this week's B'rit Chadasha readings we will read words written by *Kefa* [known in our English Bibles as *Cephas* or *Peter*] to the "*elect exiles of the dispersion*". Who were these '*elect exiles of the dispersion*'? They were Hebrew people, living in exile [i.e. in nations other than in Eretz Yisrael] who had accepted Yeshua as Messiah and adopted His pure Torah lifestyle.

Kefa had been present when Yeshua of Natzret taught the principle that "***the seed is the word of God – i.e. the Torah. Luke 8:11.*** Hence Kefa says of the redeemed of the Holy One that we have ... *been sired, not through perishable zerah (seed), but through zerah that is without shachat (corruption), through the Dvar the Holy One (word of God) ...* . And Kefa said further: ***the Dvar Eloheinu (the Holy One's word) endures l'olam (forever).***"
Quoting YESHAYAHU (Isaiah) 40:6-8.

The Incorruptible Seed – i.e. the Zarah without Shachat - is ...

The incorruptible seed of which Kefa spoke is the Torah [i.e. instruction, teaching] the Holy One gave us at Sinai, about which we will read beginning in this week's parsha and continuing throughout the rest of Torah. Not only is that Torah not corrupted, it is also incorruptible – i.e. it is so perfect that it *cannot be corrupted*.

And being incorruptible, the Torah must *endure forever*. Because the Torah is God's Word, it simply must, by definition, endure – and remain applicable and effectual – *l'olam* – i.e. forever. The Torah is *a prophetic description of both Messiah and His Bride acting in unity*. It is the *Divinely ordained lifestyle – indeed the essential life force – of all those the Holy One has Redeemed*. The Torah of the Holy One is not a 'law' book. It is *a spiritual power generator*. Its words are *life, and health and peace*. Hence the psalmist says: *Great peace have those who love Your Torah, and nothing causes them to stumble*. Psalm 119:165.

Kefa knew that Yeshua of Natzret did not come to abolish or supersede the Torah⁶, or to limit its application in any way whatever. Kefa knew that the reason Yeshua came was to *strip away the misunderstandings, misapplications, and shrouds placed upon the Torah over centuries by the 'traditions of men' – i.e. by man-made forms of religion*. Kefa knew it could not have been otherwise, or the Holy One would have been made out to be a *liar* - and His Precious and Holy Word would have been made out to be a lie. When properly understood, you see, the Torah of the Holy One has never been and can never be superseded by a 'new' covenant. When seen for what *it is* rather than as the trite little list of *dos* and *don'ts* which religion has declared it to be the Torah of the Holy One has never been and can never be replaced by a 'new testament'. And when it is caused to germinate in our spirits by the *Ruach HaQodesh* the Torah of the Holy One has never been and can never be improved upon. The issue is whether men will allow it to be written in their hearts and in their minds, and energize their spirits, or will view it as an external standard of righteousness to which they can attain in the flesh, independent of the seed-like empowerment His Words provide and His Breath causes to sprout and grow in season.

*May you taste and see that the Holy One is good;
and may you learn the secrets of worshipping Him as do the serafim around His throne.*

The Rabbi's son

⁶ In Matthew 5:17-19 Yeshua said plainly: *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Torah or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. For most assuredly, I tell you, until heaven and eretz pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished. Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least mitzvot, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week
Petition # 14: ***Modim Anachun – We Give Thanks***

Modim anachnu lach Shoato hu
We gratefully thank You- for it is You,

Adonai Eloheinu v' Elohei Avoteinu
Oh Holy One our God, and God of our ancestors

L'olam va'ed Tzur chayeinu
Rock of our lives forever and ever,

mogen yeshuaeinu ato hu
Shield of our salvation you are He

Ato hu l'dor v'dor
You are He – from generation to generation

Node lecha u'nasefer t'hiloteicha
We will thank you and publish Your praise

Al chayeinu ha-masurim b'yodeicha
For our lives, which we have entrusted to Your Hand

V'al nishmateinu hf'kudot lach
And for our souls, which You keep secure.