

Parshas Yisro

This week's Parsha, Yisro, we are given the Torah in its physical manifestation, from which we can learn, and cherish it. Included in these events are the laws that were given to Moshe at Sinai, along with the "oral tradition" and the "written law".

The Haftora comes from Yishayahu and there is a difference between Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities regarding what is read. The gist of the reading for both communities is close enough.

The Haftora relays the vision of Yeshayahu, where Hashem calls him to prophesy, he feared death (for "seeing" the divine), but an angel took a coal from the altar and touched Yishayahu's lips and stated that impure lips have been cleansed and he was atoned.

I want to propose 5 connections between this week's Parsha and the Haftora.

- 1) The gemara relates (in Berachos 88) the events of Matan Torah, and the imagery that was visualized, including Moshe conversing with the angels. Much in the same way Yishayahu depicts for us what he "saw" (the 6-winged angels).
- 2) Based on Medrish, we know that Moshe had a speech impediment, due to Moshe eating a coal as a baby. The use of a coal at the lips (in the case of Yeshayahu to purify the

iniquity of his mouth) is familiar, it would therefore seem that every word that exited Moshe's mouth was devoid of iniquity, and divine.

- 3) Another connection could be to allay any concern that other prophets (in this case Yeshayahu) was able to visualize Hashem. We see it is clearly different than what Moshe was able to comprehend (which therefore doesn't contradict what is written about Moshe in Devarim that no one like him arose who spoke with Hashem face to face.) The level that Yishayahu and Yechezkiel and others saw was not what Moshe saw.
- 4) We see Yeshayahu as an example of the way there is no chronology in Torah. Really the medrish explains, Yishayahu should have started at chapter 6 (the chapter for our Haftora) yet it has 5 chapters preceding stating historical context of Yishayahu and his time. Much like the Torah should have started (according to Rashi) with Hachodesh Haze Lochem, i.e., the birth of the nation, and closely thereafter the giving of the Torah, yet it is preceded with a history from creation, which provides context, and evidence of our purpose here on earth. The Haftora starting at chapter 6, is like where we are in the chronology of the Torah, in that we are at the birth of the nation, the gift of the Torah, and that the principals stated are everlasting¹.

¹ In a circuitous way, it is a reflection on the connection between Matan Torah and Bereishis. Just as when Hashem created the world, everything was created just for the potential capacity, until the giving of the Torah where the physical experience of Torah (i.e.,

doing a mitzvah using physical and known items) amalgamated that which was practiced on a wholly spiritual level, prior to Matan Torah. Just as Bereishis until Matan Torah sets the foundation of the chronology of the world until the point of Matan

- 5) Haftora's from Nach are a message that applies to us, as part of the holistic messages from the Parsha. In this week's given that we receive the Torah, we need to be on the path of keeping Torah. The prophets remind us of what befalls those who don't, and yet, what will arrive as well (Mashiach)-again a reference to part of the content of the Haftora. At the moment of Matan Torah, the Jews were extremely connected (and remain so to this day) to Hashem. We became wed to Hashem on that day, and merged the spiritual and physical worlds, giving us the Hiluch- (i.e., halacha) of how we need to conduct ourselves to ultimately bring Mashiach. In this moment we were on top of the world, we defeated physical enemies, and purified ourselves to the holiest spiritual realms to receive the Torah. But what happens the next day, and generations later. When the physical demands on us sway us from the righteous path. The prophets in those times reminded us of and gave us strength not to wane from our path when hope was diminished, and the outlook seemed bleak. Their prophesies are as applicable now, as they were then. And the truth of their words, and the fact that they manifested, logically means that everything else that has yet to come, will. Their message of sticking to Torah therefore is unwavering, and still relevant and applicable.

Everything that the prophets recorded took place. In the moment of the events of Matan Torah, it is possible not to fathom that we would stray from a righteous path. But hindsight shows that we may have. Or that our adversaries got strong and conquered us. So, we are given hope, that even though in time we are far from the events of Matan Torah, the Torah relates to us equally now as it did then.

This theme connects to the namesake of the Parsha. We are told that the parsha is forever named after the father-in-law of Moshe, due to his helping Moshe organize the court system such that all issues could be dealt with timely and correctly. One can ask, nevertheless, does this warrant arguably the most important event in our early history as a nation to be named for someone who made an administratively good suggestion? (For example, if I work at a company called a name, and I make a monumental suggestion that brings profits to the company, will they change the name of the company to my name?) The answer is obviously yes, and the reason is because of Yisro's sacrifice. The Parsha begins with "Vayishma Yisro". All that attracted Yisro to the greatness of Hashem was hearing that amazing things took place (splitting of sea, defeat of Egypt, defeat of Amalek). Whereas the Jews saw all those events take place, it is reasonable to think that they would listen to and accept the edicts of the Torah. In fact, once they received the Torah, they were so eager to follow its laws that they inundated Moshe with questions. Yisro saw their love of Torah, and almost, it

Torah, similarly Yishayahu's important prophecies only begins after the first chapter introductions are stated.

seems, set the way forward for laws to be discussed and passed at various levels of courts, that adapt to their times, while remaining steadfast to the tenets of the Torah (by setting up the hierarchy of rabbinical courts, there was a path to rabbinical discussion, as long as the solutions were found using the principals of the Torah). Therefore, the profundity of Yisro's suggestions was about imbuing Torah and Halacha for all the Jews to connect with, because Torah needs to be part of us from the seemingly most mundane activity to the questions that only the top court could answer (i.e., issue to come to Moshe).

Yisro didn't have to see Hashem in the way the rest of the Jews did to know how great He is. All he did was hear how great Hashem is, and he accepted the greatness of Hashem. This act of self-sacrifice, even though he was a great (and knowledgeable) priest, is what is evident, and applicable to us today. Our generation may not have seen Matan Torah per se, but we heard how great it was, that the Torah is still relevant and remains true to this day. We are still here. This is true at the time of Matan Torah, when Yisro heard, when Yeshayahu prophesied, and the rest of history until now. Furthermore, we can see that everything that is supposed to happen does, and therefore everything that is said to happen will. According to Chassidus, prior to Matan Torah, all spiritual things remained spiritual, and all physical things were physical. There was not merging of the two states. Matan Torah allowed for the two to co-exist such that we can derive spirit out of physical and bring everything closer to Hashem in a manifest way. The merging of seeing and hearing similarly took place at Matan Torah, as elaborated in

multiple places in Chassidus. Yisro himself started his journey with the Jews on "hearing", the Jews came to Matan Torah from "seeing", and at Matan Torah, the two were both presented. Even now, when we cry out to Hashem we say "Shema Yisrael", which is a greater leap of faith in service to Hashem. Yisro began his journey with a fantastic leap of faith

May we celebrate Shabbos with Mashiach
Now! Good Shabbos.