



Parasha Yitro

February 11, 2023

Torah: Exodus 18:1-20:23 (26)

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

Ketuvim Shlichim: Hebrews 12:18-29

Shabbat shalom Mishpacha! Our *parasha* today is *Yitro*. It is the name of *Moshe's* father in law, whom we see in other verses by the names of *Ru'el* or *Hobab* and who is described in *Torah* as the Priest of Midian. His purpose in coming to the Israelite camp was to bring Moses's wife and his two sons to him. Jethro's visit was very opportune in timing because he gave Moses some very important advice. Up until now, Moses had been sitting all day judging and resolving disputes among the people. His advice was about dividing up the responsibility of judging the people. *Yitro* told Moses that he should certainly teach them *Torah* and the way that they should walk, but that he should also appoint judges over thousands, fifties, hundreds and tens and then only judge the more difficult cases himself. This was wonderful advice and Moses received it, advice which kept him from burning out because of the stress. But, Jethro decided not to remain with *B'nei Yisra'el*, and returned home to Midian. Was he a follower of the G-d of Israel? We only have his statement to go by: 10, "*Blessed be Adonai, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that Adonai is greater than all gods, since they had acted arrogantly against them*" (Exodus 18:10b-11 TLV). He blessed ADONAI, but whether he served Him or not, we don't know. But, Jethro, the Priest of Midian, was not a Midianite. He was a Kenite, a member of one of the tribes which ADONAI described as being in Canaan when He promised the land to Abraham and his descendants. (Abrahamic Covenant, Genesis 15). When he leaves, Jethro disappears from Scripture, but we do read more about Kenites. *Ja'el* was a righteous Kenite woman who crushed the head of the Canaanite general, Sisera, as we read in the *haftarah* of *Parasha Beshalach* last *Shabbat*. (Judges 5). However limited Jethro's interaction was with Israel, it was extremely important.

In this *parasha*, we also find the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments, which ADONAI gave at Sinai. There is a story that I only get to tell about this once per year. It is a story told by Jews about themselves. ADONAI said to the Midianites, "I have some commandments, would you like one?" The Midianites responded, "What are they like?" ADONAI said, "They are like, 'You shall not steal.'" The Midianites responded, "No, that would ruin our national plan of commerce." Then ADONAI went to the Canaanites and said, "I have some commandments, would you like one?" The Canaanites responded, "What are they like?" ADONAI said, "They are like, you shall not commit adultery. The Canaanites responded, "Oh no! That would ruin our weekends." Then ADONAI went to the Israelites and said, "I have some commandments, would you like one?" The Israelites replied, "How much do they cost?" ADONAI replied, "Nothing, they're free." The Israelites replied, "We'll take ten!" This is a stereotype which is not true, but is a reflection of the type of Jewish humor used by many Jewish comedians of past years. Understanding the Ten Words is an important subject, a subject we've covered many times and we understand well, so they are not a part of our subject today.

In *Parasha Yitro*, Israel is camped in the Sinai Wilderness before Mount Sinai. There are many questions about the location of this mountain? It was somewhere beyond the sea which parted. According to the Hebrew text, that sea was the *Yam Suf*, יַם-סוּף, the Sea of Reeds, which Israel crossed on dry ground and which then closed in on the pursuing Egyptians. (Exodus 13:18). The TLV dutifully reads “Sea of Reeds,” but all Christian Bibles read “Red Sea.” The Jewish Publication Society Bible, 1917 edition reads “Red Sea,” but the 1985 JPS version on Sefaria reads “Sea of Reeds.” Which is it? In Exodus 13:18, *Strong’s Concordance* translates the Hebrew *suf* as Red and further describes it as “name originally given to upper end of Gulf of Suez, extending into Bitter Lakes, shallow and marshy, whence *reeds* (probably also reddish color). That would be near the present day Suez Canal and in a shallow marshy area. Where were the waters parted? No one knows for certain, but for some reason, most translators continue to translate *Yam Suf* as Red Sea. Modern day reports of chariot wheels in the Sea of Aqaba and twelve columns at the base of a mountain in Saudi Arabia remain as unsubstantiated but enticing stories about the mountain being located there. *Sha’ul* spoke of the mountain and is a reliable witness. In his *midrash* on Israel, he said: *25 But this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia.....* (Galatians 4:25a TLV). The Arabia of Moses day is modern day Saudi Arabia, which is to the east across the Gulf of Aqaba. This is just one more of the exciting things that we will learn when Yeshua returns.

In our *parasha*, ADONAI brought Israel to Mount Sinai for a purpose. They are His chosen nation and have been since He cut His covenant with Abraham. (Genesis 15). But now, ADONAI has become much more specific with Abraham's descendants. He had just delivered them from Egyptian slavery after having given them very specific instructions about the Passover. What did Israel do to deserve ADONAI's deliverance? The answer is - nothing! They did nothing to deserve it. In religious terms, what do we call what ADONAI did for Israel? We call it grace. It was an act of “grace,” unmerited and undeserved favor. Why did ADONAI do this? He gave us His reason in this *parasha*: *3 Moses went up to God, and Adonai called to him from the mountain saying, “Say this to the house of Jacob, and tell Bnei-Yisrael, 4 ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to Myself. 5 Now then, if you listen closely to My voice, and keep My covenant, then you will be My own treasure from among all people, for all the earth is Mine. 6 So as for you, you will be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you are to speak to Bnei-Yisrael.”* (Exodus 19:3-6 TLV). ADONAI's chosen nation Israel, was not chosen just to be special in His eyes. They were chosen for a purpose. Israel was called by ADONAI to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Israel not only was, but still is, a “*goy kadosh*,” a holy nation; not because Israel says so, but because the Creator of heaven and earth says so. They were set apart, made holy for this purpose, by the Creator of the universe. Israel is a “*mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh*,” a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” set apart to know G-d for the purpose of introducing all the other nations to Him.

To continue in this highly favored position, Israel had to agree to follow ADONAI. It was not a national decision, but an individual one. To be a part of it, each person had to agree to follow ADONAI, agree to do His will: *7 So Moses went, called for the elders of the people, and put before them all these words that Adonai had commanded him. 8 All the people answered together and said, “Everything that Adonai has spoken, we will do.” Then Moses reported the words of the people to Adonai.* (Exodus 19:7-8 TLV). As it turned out, it was a national decision, because every person individually said yes to ADONAI.

What the people agreed to do, to follow the instructions ADONAI gave to Israel, were for the purpose of their becoming the “*goy kadosh*,” the holy nation, which He had called them to be. ADONAI rescued Israel from Egypt by an act of His grace and now He said, “to be my ‘*goy kadosh*’ you must learn some rules which I have for you to live by.” These rules, the *Torah*, have been understood by Jewish sages for centuries as symbolizing a marriage contract, a “*ketubah*.” This marriage contract took the form of a covenant. ADONAI said “I will do this and you will do this.” Something you almost never hear is that “the Mosaic Covenant was initiated by grace.” But, it was. Why did ADONAI do that? There are possibly many reasons, but the primary one was to make Israel “a nation of priests.” But, how could it be a nation of priests if there were also to be ADONAI’s designated priests within their midst? In this new system which ADONAI would soon begin to describe, only certain men within the Tribe of Levi were to be priests. How then, could each Israelite be a priest? The answer is in the definition of “priest.” A broader definition of priest is “someone who has been ordained to minister before deity.” ADONAI was saying to Israel: “I want each of you to minister to me and to represent me to the nations.” That was how the nations were to learn about ADONAI.

Thousands of years later, *Shimon Kefa*, Simon Peter, was writing to the tribes of Israel in the diaspora, those living outside of the land of Israel, about Yeshua the Messiah. He said: *4 As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house—a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Messiah Yeshua.* (1Peter 2:4-5 TLV). *Kefa* recognized that Israel’s original calling as priests at Mount Sinai was still in effect. And, he emphasized it even further by saying: *9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession,...* (1Peter 2:9a TLV). He was writing to Jews. The original addressees of *Kefa*’s letters were Jews who had trusted in Yeshua. He was reminding them of ADONAI’s calling to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. That was the *p’shat*, the original purpose of his letters. It has an expanded meaning today and includes Gentile followers of Yeshua because through Yeshua we are now a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. In his first letter, *Shimon Kefa* said exactly the same thing that ADONAI had said in Exodus 19. Israel is to be a holy nation, a “*goy kadosh*,” the priests of the King. And, then *Kefa* told us why: *9 ... so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.* (1Peter 2:9b TLV). Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles too, are to declare His praises, not only to Him, but also to the nations. That’s why Israel was called and we Gentiles are called to serve ADONAI. Peter explains this as he continues: *12 Keep your conduct honorable among the Gentiles. Then while they speak against you as evildoers, they may—from noticing your good deeds—glorify God in the day of visitation.* (1Peter 2:12 TLV). Today, we are seeing many Gentiles around the world speak of Jews as evildoers, overlooking the many good things which they have done and are doing. It is undeserved criticism, criticism inspired by the Adversary.

The *Torah* was given at Mount Sinai, a covenant between ADONAI and Israel. As a covenant, it has long been considered by Jewish sages to be a symbolic *ketubah*, a marriage contract. It was given at ADONAI’s initiative. He chose to give it to Israel. Then, His guidelines or instructions followed. In other words, the Ten Words which He gave in Exodus 20, and all of the other instructions which followed became guidelines within the marriage contract. They provided guidance for maintaining a relationship with ADONAI. The Law, the *Torah*, was not for starting the relationship, but for maintaining the relationship with ADONAI which He had already been established. Before he went before Pharaoh, ADONAI told Moses to say this to *B’nei Yisra’el*: *7 “I will take you to Myself as a people, and I will be*

your God. You will know that I am Adonai your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” (Exodus 6:7 TLV). The relationship had already been established and now, these instructions provided the ways of expressing that relationship, the ways of expressing love and gratitude to Him who had delivered them from Egypt and now would continue to lead and deliver them. These instructions also provided ways for enjoying G-d’s blessings and what is expected of a person in a covenant relationship with ADONAI. Messianic Rabbi Dr. John Fisher has stated it this way: “In other words, the *Torah* was not given in answer to the question, what must I do to be saved? The *Torah* was not given to answer the question, how can I enter into a relationship with G-d? The *Torah* was given to a people who were already in relationship with G-d. And, when did they get that relationship as a people as a full-fledged nation? At the Exodus, of course.”

Understanding it this way, we see that Israel had a special relationship with ADONAI. In the context of a *ketubah*, He was the groom, the *chatan*, חתן, and Israel was the bride to be, the *chalah*, כלה. But, after the time that they were betrothed at Sinai, and during the ensuing years, the bride, Israel, became unfaithful and ADONAI divorced her. Isaiah, speaking of Israel, wrote: *1 Thus says Adonai: “Where is the divorce certificate, by which I sent your mother away? Or to whom of My creditors did I sell you? See, you were sold for your iniquities, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.”* (Isaiah 50:1 TLV). But, it was only for a short while. ADONAI loved Israel and had compassion for her. The same man, Isaiah the Prophet, also wrote: *5 For your Maker is your husband —Adonai-Tzva’ot is His Name— the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He will be called God of all the earth. 6 “For Adonai has called you back like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of one’s youth that is rejected,” says your God. 7 “For a brief moment I deserted you, but I will regather you with great compassion. 8 In a surge of anger I hid My face from you a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,” says Adonai your Redeemer.* (Isaiah 54:5-8 TLV). To His briefly abandoned wife, ADONAI now gave restoration, restoration to those Jews who would accept it. Prophecy, Jeremiah wrote: *30 “Behold, days are coming” —it is a declaration of Adonai— “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 31 not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them.” it is a declaration of Adonai.* (Jeremiah 31:30-31 TLV). ADONAI was a faithful husband, but Israel was an unfaithful wife and broke His covenant. But, He took her back and in Jeremiah’s day was preparing to make a New Covenant with Israel. It was not to be one like the covenant He made at Sinai written on stone which they broke. Jeremiah continued: *32 “But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days” —it is a declaration of Adonai— “I will put My Torah within them. Yes, I will write it on their heart. I will be their God and they will be My people.* (Jeremiah 31:32 TLV). ADONAI confirmed this through Ezekiel: *19 Then I will give them one heart. I will put a new Spirit within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 so that they may follow My laws, keep My ordinances and practice them. They will be My people and I will be their God.* (Ezekiel 11:19-20 TLV). It is through the New Covenant that Israel can receive a heart of flesh, the circumcised heart which ADONAI spoke of in Deuteronomy through Moses: *16 “Circumcise the foreskin of your heart therefore, and do not be stiff-necked anymore.”* (Deuteronomy 10:16 TLV). *Sha’ul* also spoke of it. Speaking to Jewish men in the congregation at Rome (Romans 2), he told them that circumcision in the flesh, *b’rit milah*, counts for nothing if they are violators of *Torah*. And then he said: *28 For one is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision something visible in the flesh. 29 Rather, the Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—in Spirit not in letter. His*

praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29 TLV). In saying this, *Sha'ul* explained that because a Jewish man is physically circumcised, he is not a “real Jew” unless his heart is circumcised. All of this relates to ADONAI’s statement in Jeremiah: 32...—*it is a declaration of Adonai— “I will put My Torah within them. Yes, I will write it on their heart.* (Jeremiah 31:32b TLV). It is the same *Torah*, the one given at Sinai, which is written through the New Covenant on the hearts of Jews and Gentiles who enter into it. All of us, both Jew and non-Jew, need to have circumcised hearts, hearts of flesh and not hearts of stone. A circumcised heart is available not only to Jews, but also to the people of the nations. Because Yeshua, the Son of G-d, put the New Covenant into effect by giving His own life as a sacrifice for our sins, everyone can have ADONAI’s *Torah* written on their hearts. It is an individual decision. Each person who chooses to become a covenant partner of the New Covenant has to make the decision for himself just as the individual Israelites and those from the nations that were gathered there with them did at Mount Sinai. Have you said yes to Yeshua?

At Mount Sinai, Israel was betrothed to ADONAI. The Jews and Gentiles who have trusted in Yeshua through the New Covenant are betrothed to ADONAI’s Son Yeshua, under whose feet the Father has put everything. (1Corinthians 15:27). He is the *chatan*, the bridegroom. We are the bride to be, the *chalah*. In the ancient Jewish wedding ceremony, the betrothal period was called the “*erusin*.” In ancient days the betrothal was frequently a whole year or more. As Yeshua’s bride, the *erusin*, the betrothal, has been for about 2000 years. Yeshua will soon complete the marriage through the “*nisuin*,” the actual marriage ceremony. Everyone who has trusted in Yeshua, has repented of their sins and is following after Him, is Yeshua’s bride to be. *Yochanan*, John, in his vision heard this sound: *6 Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude—like the roar of rushing waters or like the rumbling of powerful thunder—saying, “Halleluyah! For Adonai Elohei-Tzva’ot reigns! 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready, 8 She was given fine linen to wear, bright and clean! For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the kedoshim.” 9 Then the angel tells me, “Write: How fortunate are those who have been invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb!” He also tells me, “These are the true words of God.”* (Revelation 19:6-9 TLV). When Yeshua returns for us and we rise to meet Him as described in 1Corinthians 15 and 1Thessalonians 4, He will claim us as His bride. After that, in Heaven, we will celebrate as the bride at the wedding banquet of the Lamb. Shortly after that, Yeshua will return to earth, but this time as *Melekh Mashiach*, King Messiah, and will defeat His enemies. But, to be the bride at the wedding banquet, we are told that we must be ready for that day: *7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready, 8 She was given fine linen to wear, bright and clean! For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the kedoshim.”* (Revelation 19:7-8 TLV). Our righteous deeds are our obedience to ADONAI’s *Torah*, His instructions which cover every good thing that He has called us to do, either for Him or for our neighbor.

The *Torah* that was given at Sinai and the *Torah* that was written on our hearts when we entered the New Covenant by accepting Yeshua’s sacrifice are one and the same. Now that we have circumcised hearts, we would naturally wish to be obedient to ADONAI and do His will. Yeshua has made it clear that not one of ADONAI’s commands has passed away. He said: *17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. 18 Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the Torah until all things come to pass.”* (Matthew 5:17-18 TLV). The word translated “abolish” is a Hebrew idiom meaning to “incorrectly interpret.” To “complete” is a Hebrew idiom meaning to “correctly interpret.” Yeshua makes

it even clearer in verse 19: 19 *“Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps and teaches them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 5:19 TLV). I don't know about you, but I don't want to be known as least in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Yes, salvation is by grace through faith, faith in Yeshua's atoning sacrifice on the stake. But afterward, there is more required: 23 *Then Yeshua was saying to everyone, “If anyone wants to follow Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross every day, and follow Me.”* (Luke 9:16 TLV). When we take up our “cross” daily, we die to self. And then we follow after Yeshua after his example. Yeshua perfectly kept the *Torah*. He didn't disobey one thing. He is our example. We are to be obedient. We are not even to disobey the “least” of the commandments. Yeshua said: 15 *“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”* (John 14:15 TLV). Love must motivate us because He first loved us and died for us because of His love. But, there is more: 19 *Or don't you know that your body is a temple of the Ruach ha-Kodesh who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.* (1Corinthians 6:19-20 TLV). We don't belong to ourselves. We are slaves of Messiah Yeshua, bought with the price of His blood. We must glorify G-d with all our actions. It is our duty to act like Messiah Yeshua to the best of our ability.

When you said yes to Yeshua, you were also saying, just as Israel did at Sinai, *“Everything ADONAI has said, we will do.”* There is no “cheap grace.” ADONAI's grace is precious and it must be more than just a “salvation prayer.” It doesn't end with those words. What the salvation prayer really is, is a commitment to follow after Yeshua, seeking to be like Him in all our actions. When we wholeheartedly seek to follow Yeshua, we are preparing ourselves to be His bride, worthy of being dressed in fine linen. As His followers and disciples, we are Yeshua's examples in the world today. We, here, are just one small part of the Body of Messiah, but we can be witnesses to those around us. Those of us who are called to be a part of this congregation are to be models of what a follower of Yeshua is to look like. May we be faithful witnesses for Yeshua. 9 ...: *“Our Father in heaven, sanctified be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* (Matthew 6:9b-10 TLV). Come soon, King Yeshua! *Shabbat shalom!*