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PARSHAS  
YISRO

DALLAS  
COMMUNITY KOLLEL  
OF DATA

# FAMILY TORAH *Journal*

THE WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF  
THE DALLAS COMMUNITY KOLLEL

## TORAH PERSPECTIVES

RABBI MENACHEM ORDAN



### THE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

Parshas Yisro opens with a striking formulation:

“וישמע יתרו כהן מדין חתן משה את כל אשר עשה אלוקים למשה ולישראל עמו.”

Rashi famously asks, “מה שמועה שמע ורבא”—what did Yisro hear that prompted him to come? Rashi answers that Yisro heard of Yetzias Mitzrayim, Kriyas Yam Suf, and Milchemes Amalek, and elsewhere adds the mon and the be'er. These were not merely miraculous events; they constituted a comprehensive revelation that Hashem alone governs reality and that all natural and supernatural powers are subordinate to Him.

Yet Rashi's question is deeper than a request for information. Many heard these events. Entire nations were aware of them. The Torah itself testifies that the world trembled upon hearing of these miracles. Why, then, did only Yisro respond by uprooting his life and entering the desert to seek Moshe Rabbeinu? Rashi's question is not historical but conceptual: what kind of hearing generates movement, commitment, and transformation?

The Torah emphasizes that Yisro came “אל המדבר”—to the desert. Rashi explains that this phrase is unnecessary for geographic clarity and therefore must serve as praise. Yisro was a man who sat “בכבודו של עולם,” possessing honor, status, influence, and intellectual authority. His decision to leave that world and enter a place of desolation in order to learn Torah reflects an act of mesirus nefesh. The Torah highlights this not to praise Yisro personally, but to teach a foundational principle: Torah is acquired only through a willingness to abandon comfort, prestige, and self-interest in pursuit of truth.

This insight is critical to understanding why the parsha of Matan Torah bears Yisro's name. From a purely historical or genealogical perspective, this seems counterintuitive. The greatest event since Creation—the revelation at Sinai and the acceptance of the Torah by Klal Yisrael—is named after a man who originated outside the covenant. The Torah's choice signals that Matan Torah is not defined merely by lineage or national identity, but by a specific spiritual posture: the uncompromising pursuit of emes.

The world itself was created for Torah. Chazal teach that the existence of heaven and earth was conditional upon Klal Yis-

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## Meaning — BEHIND THE *Minhag*



RABBI HILLEL MULLER

### UPSHEREIN

This past Sunday we made an Upsherein for our three year old son. An Upsherein is a time-hallowed Jewish tradition to allow a boy's hair to grow untouched for the first years of life.<sup>1</sup> On his third Jewish birthday, friends and community members are invited to a festive haircutting ceremony: the upshernish (“shearing”) in Yiddish, or chalakah in Hebrew.



Although you won't find mention of the Upsherein in the Gemara or Shulchan Aruch it has been observed in Jewish communities for many generations particularly among the Chassidim.

Exactly when this custom started is unclear. The earliest recorded mention is in the highly-regarded responsa of the 16th-century rabbinic authority Rabbi David Ibn Zimra (the Radbaz). There, he addresses the custom to perform this haircut at the gravesite of Samuel Hanavi.

A few decades later, Rabbi Chaim Vital testifies that his teacher, the Arizal, took his three-year-old son to the resting place of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron to cut his hair for the first time. He does not speak of the Arizal's act as an innovation, but as an observance of the ancient and revered custom.

The question is why at the age of three. When a child turns three, his father is obligated to teach him how to read the Torah and follow its directives. The Upsherein is also an educational ceremony, guiding the child in the observance of

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SHABBOS ENDS: 6:49 | RABEINU TAM 7:16

rael's acceptance of the Torah. Without Torah, the world has no purpose, no justification, and no enduring meaning. Torah is not one value among many; it is the organizing principle of existence. Consequently, those who reject Torah—even while acknowledging its truth—remain detached from the purpose of creation.

This distinction is essential. Intellectual recognition of truth does not equate to submission to truth. Many nations recognized the power of Hashem and the authenticity of the miracles. Yet recognition alone did not compel them to change their lives. Truth that does not demand sacrifice is not yet Torah truth. Yisro differed because he was not satisfied with acknowledgment; he demanded alignment. When truth required him to relinquish honor and certainty, he did not hesitate.

The Rambam articulates this principle with precision in Iggeres Ha-Mussar. He commands the individual to love truth and justice and to cling to them unwaveringly. Success achieved through truth, he explains, is like a structure built upon solid rock—enduring and stable. Success achieved through falsehood is like a structure built upon sand—inevitably destined to collapse. More radically, the Rambam insists that even when truth leads to apparent loss and suffering, it should be sweeter to a person than falsehood that promises immediate gain. This is not a call to stoicism but to spiritual clarity: truth is valuable not because it is profitable, but because it is real.

This teaching reframes the entire concept of spiritual success. The metric is not comfort, recognition, or achievement, but fidelity to emes. Truth is not merely spoken or known; it is lived, chosen, and often paid for. The seal of the Ribbono Shel Olam is emes, and one who aligns with that seal aligns with the deepest structure of reality.

Yisro exemplified this alignment. He had encountered false systems and exhausted them. When he recognized that Hashem alone is the true power and that Torah articulates His will, he concluded that nothing else in life carried intrinsic value. The pursuit of truth became not a philosophical preference but a moral imperative. That is why the Torah identifies him as the paradigm figure for Matan Torah.

This also explains the honor Yisro ultimately received. Chazal teach that one who flees from honor is pursued by honor. But this is not a reward mechanism; it is a metaphysical truth. Honor attached to falsehood is fragile and temporary. Honor that emerges from truth is stable and inevitable. When a person abandons kavod for emes, the kavod that follows is not social validation but spiritual weight.

Yisro's integration into Klal Yisrael, and the enduring role of his descendants within the leadership and judiciary of the nation, further reinforce this principle. Torah leadership is not inherited through ancestry alone but earned through devotion to truth. The capacity to serve as a conduit for Torah depends on one's willingness to subordinate ego, comfort, and convenience to divine will.

Ultimately, Parshas Yisro teaches that Torah cannot be received by those who merely admire it, analyze it, or even believe in it intellectually. Torah is given only to those who cherish truth enough to live by it. The moment of Sinai was not only a revelation of commandments, but a revelation of the type of human being capable of bearing them.

Matan Torah is therefore inseparable from the trait of Yisro: relentless pursuit of emes. Without that trait, Torah becomes information rather than obligation, wisdom rather than covenant. With it, Torah becomes the axis upon which the world stands.

This is why the parsha is called Yisro. The Torah is telling us that before there can be revelation, there must be readiness; before there can be commandment, there must be commitment; and before there can be Torah, there must be an uncompromising love of truth. ▲

## Meaning Behind the Minhag

>>> continued from front

a new mitzvah. Hence a child's third birthday signals the beginning of his formal Jewish education, an appropriate time for the Upsherein ceremony.

Some say that the Torah hints to age three as the proper time for a child's first haircut, based on the verse where the word *Vehitgalach* - "And he shall shave his hair" is written with the letter *gimmel* enlarged, since the numeric value of the letter *gimmel* is three. R. Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer in his gloss to *Midrash Rabbi Akiva*; *Ateres Yeshua Moadim* p. 33a. He adds that the word *Vehitgaloch* ["he shall be shorn"] is written in the 33rd verse of the chapter, which alludes to the well known custom of celebrating the Upsherein on Lag Ba'omer - the 33rd day of the Omer (when the child's third birthday falls in close proximity to the holiday).

Others point to a Midrashic source (*Medrash Tanchuma Parshas Kedoshim*). When a Jew plants a fruit tree, the Torah teaches that he may not partake of its fruit during the first three years of its growth. The fruits of the fourth year must be sanctified and brought to Jerusalem to be eaten there. This prohibition is called *orlah*, meaning "uncircumcised" or "concealed." During those first years, the nourishing qualities contained in the fruit are not yet apparent; they are concealed within the fruit and we are forbidden to access them.

The Midrash explains that this law can be applied to a Jewish child, since the Torah compares man to a tree. In his first years, a child cannot speak clearly or fully comprehend. During this time there are few tangible returns for a parent's efforts. When the child turns three and is now able to communicate and understand, we sanctify him (like the fruits of the fourth year) by educating him in the observance of Torah and mitzvot. We inaugurate this process by cutting his hair and leaving the peyot, thereby fulfilling a mitzvah which will serve as a springboard to further mitzvos in his life ahead. (*Responsa Arugas Habosem Orach Chaim* 210; *Responsa Maharam Brisk Vol. 2:98*; *Panei'ach Raza* (Parshas Kodashim); *Likutei Sichot, Vol. 27 p. 370.*) (Chabad.org and other sources) ▲

# DID YOU KNOW



RABBI BINYAMIN SCHIERMEYER

1

That the 10 commandments were said over in Egyptian. (Raboseinu Baalei Tosafos in the Sefer Hadar Zekainim)

That whole giving of the Torah only took 3 hours. (Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer)

2

3

That there is a source that alludes to the fact why Jews sway back and forth (Shukul) when learning Torah. The Bal Haturim learns it from the verse, "Vayar Ha'am Vayanu'u". "And the nation saw and shook." This was stated with regards to receiving the Torah. So too, when we learn we also shukul. The Zohar learns it out from the verse, "Ner Hashem Nishmas Adam". "The light of Hashem is a Person's Neshama." And when a Jew learns Torah, he kindles that light, and the light can't stay still. The light needs to move back and forth.

פאָרשאַ פֿיקס אָרעל

PARSHA PIX SOURCE

## Climbing HIGHER



RABBI YOSEF CHAIM PINKUS

Purim follows shortly after Tu Bishvat. Because of the dictum of *shloshim yom kodem l'chag*, combined with all the excitement and anticipation, we tend to mentally jump from Tu Bishvat into Purim season right away.

It is true that there is nothing in the schedule, holiday-wise, that demands our attention during this period. The Jewish calendar is full of lull periods where the main goal is, as discussed regarding Cheshvan, to live Jewishly, work on step-by-step growth, implement the inspiration from previous holidays, and look forward to what is yet to come. However, one is not fully bound by the calendar. There is something called a personal holiday—a day which you dedicate to thanking Hashem for something that has come to you.

This is memorably codified in *Chayei Adam* (155:41). He writes that one who experiences a miracle, and all the more so if a city experiences a miracle, is able to establish a day as a personal Purim. One should have a *seudah* in recognition and give thanks to Hashem for the miracle that occurred. This would be considered a *seudas mitzvah*.

The *Chayei Adam* goes on to describe how he personally experienced a miracle that led him to establish a personal Purim for his family. He retells that on a day in Kislev, there were several explosions that occurred due to improperly stored gunpowder. The houses in his courtyard suffered significant damage with collapsed walls, and thirty-one people died as a result of this tragedy. The family of the *Chayei Adam* all experienced severe injuries, but none of them died. He felt that this was miraculous, saying that Hashem clearly felt that some punishment needed to occur, but instead of taking lives, He merely "took blood". On that day, he established a personal Purim on himself and all his descendants to follow. This would be the classic example of a personal Purim for a miracle that one has experienced individually. Something like this can happen any day throughout the year.

In addition, there are even larger-scale Purims. As the *Chayei Adam* states, if a city experiences a particular miracle, they too can establish such a day. Looking through Jewish history, you find that there have been numerous occasions where particular regions or towns experienced a miraculous salvation and, because of that, established days of Purim in recognition and thanks to Hashem for having saved them.

One well-known example is the Purim of Saragossa. Saragossa is the Ladino name for Aragon, and the 1420s King of Aragon, King Alfonso is the most likely candidate for this story's historical setting.

According to this tradition, the story of Saragosa is as follows. The king established that the Jewish community should come in front of him and praise and bless the king. The Jews were obligated to bring their *sifrei Torah* alongside them. There was a conversation among the rabbis in the town about whether this was appropriate. Ultimately they decided to engage in subterfuge. Because Sephardic *sifrei Torah* are fully encased inside decorative metal cases, they could remove the scrolls from inside and just use the cases as part of the parade. This would be more befitting for the sanctity of the *sefer Torah*. This practice occurred without incident for many years.

However, an apostate Jew informed the king about this practice. It was presented as disrespectful to the king. The king was incensed. Without revealing why, and pretending it would be no different than any other time, he ordered the Jews to come the following day and present their Torah scrolls. During that night, the *shamash* of the shul had a dream telling him to put the scrolls back into the cases, unlike the usual practice.

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RABBI ELI PERLMAN

HOW DOES THIS SCENE  
CONNECT TO THE PARSHA?



SEE PAGE 3 FOR THE ANSWER

**Climbing Higher** >>> continued from page 3

Unclear why, he nonetheless did so.  
 When they came to the procession before the king, the king was uncharacteristically stone-faced and serious. He called over one of his assistants to open up the *Sifrei Torah*. There was a sense of trepidation in the crowd. When it was discovered that the Torah scrolls were in fact actually inside their cases, the king turned on the apostate Jew, accused him of treachery, and ultimately hanged him in his anger for having been played the fool by this man.  
 This event was viewed as a salvation for the Jews of Saragosa. If they had in fact been found to be disrespectful of the king, he would have certainly inflicted great damage upon the people. This occurred during a period prior to the expulsion when pogroms and miniature expulsions from regions of Spain and surrounding areas were perfectly commonplace, so it was a very reasonable concern.  
 They felt they had been miraculously saved and established a personal Purim for the city and its descendants throughout all time. In fact, even in relatively modern times, there have been descendants from the region who maintain this Purim practice with festive meals, celebrations, and even a megillah style reading of a text detailing the story, all in commemoration of this great miracle.  
 The date that this is typically celebrated on is the 17th of Shevat. It stands as a reminder nonetheless that even in a period which may not traditionally have a yom tov attached to it, there is still the ability to create meaningful celebrations due to *hakaras hatov*. ▲



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