

# JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

## Yitro

### Preparing One's Self for Receiving the Torah

Parshat Yitro includes one of the absolute most important narratives in our history a Jewish Nation. Actually, our very first: the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Chapter 19 begins, "In the 3<sup>rd</sup> month (Sivan) after the Jews left Egypt, on this day, they came to the Sinai Desert. And they travelled from Refidim and they came to the Sinai desert, and they camped in the desert, and the Jews camped there opposite the mountain" (19:1-2) There are several questions inherent in the actual formatting of these verses that beg to be addressed. Let's start slow.

Why would the Torah tell us that the Nation came to the Sinai desert, then tell us where they came from, then repeat to us that they arrived in the Sinai Desert? It's both out of order, and repetitious!

The Ohr HaChaim (a basic commentator from late 17<sup>th</sup> century Morocco) explains with a fascinating concept from Bereishit Rabbah 55:8. When a person has an intense love and excitement for something, logic can sometimes be replaced by impulse. To quote, "Love blinds a person's logic". Hashem had been waiting since the beginning of creation for the Jewish People to come to Mount Sinai. In fact, all of creation had been anticipating their arrival, for we know that the world was created for the Torah to be received. Finally, after nearly 2500 years, they Jewish People came! The Torah, in its "excitement" for the moment, immediately announces their arrival, and only afterwards details the travels leading up to it.

Beautiful explanation, yet there is more to be addressed, and the Ohr HaChaim continues to enlighten us. Before we accept the Torah upon ourselves, there are several "prerequisites" that we must acquire, that will enable us to truly become Torah Jews.

Why the repetition of the Jewish Nation's arrival? Wouldn't it have been sufficient to say, "and they came to the Sinai desert from Refidim"? The answer lies in the etymology of the word "Refidim". The word comes from "rifayon", which means laziness. Because of the Jewish Nation's laxity in Torah study during their travels, Amalek was able to attack the spiritually weak Jews, alluded to in the name, Refidim. (As an aside, right after the victory in Refidim, Moshe instituted that we



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should never go three consecutive days without Torah study, hence our Torah readings on Monday, Thursday and Shabbos.) By telling us that the Jewish Nation *left* Refidim, and *came* to the Sinai desert, the Torah hints to us that the only true way to accept the Torah is by leaving laziness behind and moving forward. Another look at the text reveals another superfluity. "...And they camped in the desert". If the Jews arrived in the desert, and were there for some time, isn't it obvious that they camped there?

Answers the Ohr HaChaim with another life lesson needed for a Torah life. One of the outstanding qualities of a desert, is its' availability to all. A no-man's land of some sort. Often when it comes to discussing intellectual subjects, only those smart enough to grasp the material are invited to participate. Not so with the Torah. Everyone is accepted. From young to old, beginner to experienced, all have a share in Torah study and it is incumbent upon those who are more knowledgeable to make themselves 'like a desert' and to share their knowledge with others.

A look further on in the narrative brings us to a third beautiful idea. Verse 19 reads, "Vayichan sham Yisrael", loosely translated as "and the Jews camped". Literally however, "vayichan" means "and he camped" in the singular form. But we are referring to the entire nation, numbering in the millions! Why the singular form? Unity. That is the answer. The Jewish Nation came together as one to accept the Torah. All squabbles and fights were left aside to receive the Torah. What a lesson we must take from here. We can only lead true Torah lives when we are together. Let us learn from these two seemingly simple verses the important qualities of distancing one's self from laziness, humility, and unity. May our efforts in improving these qualities help us ready ourselves to truly accept the Torah and all of its beauty.

*Shabbat Shalom!*

