



## DIVREI MENACHEM

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# Whatever Happened to Yitro?

In this week's Parsha, we read of the preparations Moshe made to take revenge against the Midianites, the primary cause of Bnei Yisrael's undoing in the recent orgy with the Midianite women. Only Pinchas' intervention stymied the event and prevented more people from dying in the horrendous plague that followed that tragic episode.

Notably, Hashem indicated that the pending battle was vengeance for the *Children of Israel*, while Moshe signaled that the war would represent *Hashem's* vengeance against Midian.

How beautiful is the mutuality between Hashem and Moshe, as each "partner" prepared for the confrontation with the other's honor at heart!

But even as we gird ourselves for the upcoming conflict, we might ask how Moshe felt about the massacre of an entire nation of which Yitro had been a leading figure. Furthermore, Moshe had lived in Midian and owed much to his Midianite father-in-law.

Following the Talmud (Sanhedrin 106a), Yitro had been the first to praise Hashem for the wonders God performed during the Exodus (Shemot 18:10). Even Moshe had not yet

expressed such gratitude.

Moreover, according to some interpretations, the words "Vayichad Yitro" (ibid, 18:9) indicate not only that Yitro rejoiced over the Exodus but also that he then circumcised himself and became a Jew (Tanchuma, Yitro, 5).

Nevertheless, following the Torah narrative, after Yitro's auspicious visit with Moshe in the desert, Moshe sent off his father-in-law, and "he [Yitro] went to his Land." Perhaps, Moshe understood that with all his virtues, Yitro had not abandoned his belief in other gods; he just saw Hashem as "greater than all the gods" (ibid 18:11).

So, according to Rabbi Joshua, Moshe purposely sent his father-in-law away so he would not be present at the Revelation. Or, following Rashi, after the Asseret Hadibrot (cf. also Bemidbar 10:29-32), Yitro eventually returned to Midian to convert his fellow landmen.

Notwithstanding dissenting views that Yitro finally stayed with the people on their journeys, following our line of thought, Yitro would have been among those that would suffer in the upcoming war of revenge. Thus, one might have expected that Moshe would resist fighting Midian just before his demise. But no! Moshe would not let it be said (after his death) that he was guilty of nepotism. Moreover, this was the word of God, and so, ultimately, the legion "massed against Midian, as Hashem had commanded Moshe." ■

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