



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Learning Life Lessons

“*Vayishma Yitro*—And Yitro heard...” (*Shemot* 18:1) Rashi famously asks, “*Ma shemua shama u’va*—What news did he hear that [made such an impression that] he came?” To which Rashi offers two interpretations based on the Midrash, Yitro heard about the Splitting of the Sea, and the war with Amalek. What was it specifically about these two events that led him to come? Further, why does Chazal categorize it as the “war with Amalek” and not the victory over Amalek?

The Tosher Rebbe zt”l in *Avodat Avodah* explains that perhaps Yitro’s mindset was as follows. Yitro was already aware of Hashem’s

greatness; however, he was waiting for the appropriate time to join *Am Yisrael* and convert. He was therefore looking for a sign, an opening, an indication that it was the proper time to come. When he heard about the events at *Yam Suf*, and that all of the waters the world over simultaneously split, he understood it as signifying that the wellsprings of wisdom opened in the world, allowing *Am Yisrael* to access the depths of Torah wisdom.

He recognized that the Jewish people not only reached a very high spiritual level but that they were only worthy of this level having undergone tremendous suffering in *Mitzrayim* and displaying intense *mesirut nefesh* by following the word of Hashem and jumping into the sea. Therefore, when Yitro heard and understood these events, he began to wonder if he too, was worthy of receiving the Torah. He asked himself,

“Do I also possess the capacity to grasp the depths of Torah wisdom?” Upon hearing about the war with Amalek, he recognized that this too was necessary before the Torah was actually given.

Yitro concluded that when one battles with “Amalek”—the forces of the *yetzer hara* within himself—he is also worthy of being a conduit to receive Torah. It is not so much as **winning** the war against Amalek; it is rather **engaging in a continuous battle** against the forces that aim to detract us from committing to an ongoing relationship with Hashem. When Yitro perceived this, he knew he could be part of the people who constantly strive to touch Infinity.

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It is imperative for us to remember that victory is not the end goal. We must focus on aligning ourselves with Hashem's Will, hour by hour, situation by situation.

Rav Brodie, the Chevron Rosh Yeshiva zt"l, shares another lesson from this Rashi. Yitro "heard," he understood two essential lessons from these events. He realized that people could see and experience a miracle such as the Splitting of the Sea and yet remain unmoved and unchanged. Even further, that people could be more than unaffected, they can miss the entire point and actually go out to fight against truth! The Midrash specifically delineates "the war with Amalek" to emphasize their sheer audacity in attacking the Jewish people.

As the principle figure in this week's Torah reading, Yitro is the model of one who hears about Hashem's wonders and is moved to change. His actions inspire us to take lessons from every circumstance, motivating us to constantly change and grow. ■



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