

HAVURAT YISRAEL WEEKLY NEWS

17 Shevat 5785

SHABBAT YITRO

February 15, 2025

Shabbat Shalom!

5:12 pm Candle Lighting
 5:15 pm Mincha, Kabbalat Shabbat and Maariv
 8:45 am Mishnayot class — Rabbi Algaze
 9:00 am Shacharit
 9:27 am Latest Shema
 Parasha p. 394 Haftorah p.1154
 4:15 pm Parasha Class — Rabbi Levitt
 4:30 pm Gemara Class — Rabbi Algaze
 5:00 pm Mincha
 6:11 pm Maariv & Havdalah

Kiddush & Seudah Shlisheet sponsorships available.

Upcoming Sponsorships

February 22 — Rabbi David & Tamara Algaze and Arasheben family.
 March 29 — Michael & Alice James

The Havurat Yisrael Kiddush

One of the most characteristic features of Havurat Yisrael is the time we spend together. Even after the food is gone and the tables are clean, people still stay to chat and mingle, thus developing the special bonds that unite us. It is sad to see that some Shabbatot go without a sponsor. Please consider sponsoring a kiddush so that all our dates are filled with sponsors' names.

Mark Your Calendar!

◆ Thursday June 12 — Journal Dinner

Lunch & Learn Lecture on Tu Bishvat day with Rabbi Levitt



Shabbat Across America — Friday March 7

Enjoy a delicious Friday night dinner with neighbors of the community

Newcomers \$10 per person
 All others: \$35 p/person; Kids under 12: \$20
RSVP by Thursday March 6th



A unique opportunity to see your very own matzot being baked and bring them home.

Save the date: Sunday March 9. We are going to visit one of the best matzah bakeries, Pupa Tzehlm. This matza is the favorite of Rabbi Algaze because it is perhaps the thinnest of matzot. We will see the entire process of preparing the Matza and you can buy the best Matza Shmurah on the market, prepared in front of your own eyes.



Tu Bishvat Seder at Havurat Yisrael

A wonderful Seder with many blessings, delicious food made by Simcha Kulaya and great explanations by Rabbi Avrohom Levitt was held. Thank you to the sponsors of the seder:

Rabbi David & Tamara Algaze, Jerry & Jennifer Revich, Louis & Rachel Ordentlich, Yehuda Mendieta, Mark & Gail Silverman, David & Debbie Sosnowik, Shimon and Sarah Mizrahi & Rachelle Alkalay.



SUNDAY February 16 / 18 Shevat	MONDAY February 17 / 19 Shevat	TUESDAY February 18 / 20 Shevat	WEDNESDAY February 19 / 21 Shevat	THURSDAY February 20 / 22 Shevat	FRIDAY February 21 / 23 Shevat
8:00 am Shacharit 9:00 am Breakfast 9:30 am Torah Class in Spanish—R. Algaze	6:30 am Gemara class 7:00 am Shacharit 7:00 pm R. Algaze Class	6:30 am Gemara class 7:00 am Shacharit 7:00 pm Parasha Class with R. Levitt by Zoom	6:30 am Gemara class 7:00 am Shacharit	6:30 am Gemara class 7:00 am Shacharit 8:00 pm Class with R. Levitt	6:30 am Gemara class 7:00 am Shacharit 5:19 pm Candle Lighting 5:20 pm Mincha, Kabbalat Shabbat

HUMAN NATURE AND THE TORAH

By Rabbi David Algaze

“Jethro, the minister of Midian, Moses’ father in law, heard everything that G-d did to Moses and to Israel His people—that G-d had taken them out of Egypt.” (Shemot 18:1)

Yitro, Moses’ father-in-law, comes to Moses to celebrate with him the many wonders that G-d had wrought for them and to express gratitude to G-d for all the miracles and favors which He had showered on Israel. The question is at what point did he come? Did Yitro decide to join Israel because of the miracles without the obligations of the Torah or was he also impressed with the Torah’s wisdom and wished to accept its authority over him? Despite the fact that his arrival is set before the chapter of the Giving of the Torah, the Rabbis disagree as to when Yitro actually came, before or after the Torah. Rabbi Yehoshua holds that Yitro came before, as the order of the chapters show, while Rabbi Elazar Hamoda’i thinks that he came afterwards. (Zevachim 116 a)

The same dispute as to the timing of Yitro’s journey occurs among the later Bible commentators. Rashi’s position is unclear; while commenting on the first verse of the parasha he says “What was it that he heard and came? –The parting of the Sea of reeds and the war against Amalek,” suggesting that he came before the Torah was given. However, on another verse referring to Yitro’s joy, Rashi says that it was about the good things that G-d had given Israel, “the goodness of the manna, the water well and the Torah”(v.10) implying that he came after the revelation at Sinai. Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) maintains that Yitro came after the Torah was given to Israel and he adduces several proofs including the simple fact that the war with Amalek took place in a region called Rephidim and that they journeyed to Sinai directly from Rephidim, as the verse narrates, “and they journeyed from Rephidim and they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai” (19:2). Since the arrival in Sinai took place immediately after they left Rephidim, the scene with Yitro must have happened subsequently to this chapter. Other commentators, primarily Nachmanides (1194-1270) and Abarbanel (1435-1508), strongly disagree with Ibn Ezra and insist that Yitro arrived before the giving of the Torah especially because Moshe does not include this majestic revelation in his story to Yitro. The Tosafot on Avoda Zara 24b, s.v. Yitro, also agree with the position of Nachmanides.

The significance of this debate has many lessons. First, we must remember that the Rabbis did not see the Torah as a book of history that followed a strict chronological order (*“en mukdam ume’uchar baTorah”*), but rather as a book of lessons and concepts. Nachmanides asserts that in general we should accept the order in the Torah as chronological unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, but those who maintain that the order need not be as it appears in the Torah have a different point of view. They maintain that the placing of Yitro’s story out of sequence has some important lessons.

The clear juxtaposition of the accounts of two non-Jews, Amalek and Yitro, is very instructive. Amalek attacks Israel without reason and his motive is sheer hatred and envy. Yitro on the other hand comes with admiration and joins the Jewish people as a convert (*ger*). This placing together suggests that we should not view all non-Jews as hostile or inimical to the Jewish message, thus preserving the universalist tone of the Jewish mission. Immediately after the tragic story of Amalek attempting to thwart Israel’s march, the Torah goes out of its way to introduce a tale out of sequence in order that we should not be left with the impression that all non-Jews must be seen with suspicion and fear. When Yitro saw that G-d performed miracles for Israel as He took them out of Egypt and fought for them against their enemies, he understood that G-d loved Israel and he wanted to be a part of this nation beloved by G-d. (Maskil le David by Rabbi

David Shmuel Pardo, 1718-1790)

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, the son of Rav Abraham Kook, connected this controversy to a discussion about the humanist aspect of the Jewish people. Rav Kook’s father writes in Orot, p. 155, that the human aspect of the Jew may not be identical with the human aspect of all other human beings. Those who contend that Yitro came before the giving of the Torah wish to suggest that the Jewish people had a human element like every other human being and that the teachings of the Torah were superimposed on top of that aspect they shared with the rest of humanity. On the other hand, those who maintain that Yitro arrived afterwards are stating that the humanistic aspects in every Jew are the result of the Torah itself and they stem from the teachings of the Torah. Rav Kook explains that at first G-d wanted to the human aspect of all men be the same and that the Torah would be like a crown on top of that natural form. However, as Man degenerated into baser forms, human nature was debased as well. The holy teachings could not simply be placed on top of the base nature because it would be ruined by it. Therefore, it was necessary for Israel to undergo the harsh experience of enslavement in Egypt—called “the iron crucible” for its function as a refinery that purified the human nature in them. After this inhuman and sadistic experience, the Jew became more sensitive and caring, resenting all callousness and cruelty. In that fashion the human spirit of Israel became more refined and cleaned of impurities; thus, they were able to receive the more complex and demanding spiritual principles of the Torah. In Egypt, Israel became a new creature, not only in its spiritual dimension, but even in its physical/secular aspect that would make him more suited to the exigencies of the Torah and its unique values. Jacob, the Man, becomes Israel the receptacle for the divine inspiration. This special human dimension of the Jew may be what made him survive under great stress, crises and many predicaments throughout its history.

Therefore, Yitro’s coming after the Torah implies that it was necessary to be touched by the atmosphere of Torah even before being able to accept its precepts. Yitro’s nature, coming after the Torah’s arrival, was somewhat transformed even before he was ready to submit to the yoke of Torah. This is what is meant in the Passover Haggadah when we say, “Had G-d brought us to Sinai and not given us the Torah it would have been sufficient for us. (*dayenu*).” The Torah can only come atop a person with some sensitivity and moral constitution. The study of Torah is also a way to refine the humanistic dimension in us and to restore the pure original nature with which G-d endowed Man.

New Way to Pay!

Use this QR code to easily make a payment to the shul.



Refuah Shlema Alte Ester Riva bat Devorah Shifra, Chava Naomi bat Doba Chana, Yaakov ben Leah, Tzvi ben Sara, Talia Leah bat Sarah, Miriam bat Rivka, Reuben ben Malka, Baruch Chaim ben Basha, Malka bat Simcha and, Hannah bat Yehudit, Binyamin Baer ben Chana, Hillel Zvi Yehuda ben Tzina, Joseph David ben Rachel, and Abraham ben Devorah Shifra, Israel Ben Devora Shifra, Sherry Plutzer and Sarah Bat Sarah.