



Where There is Unity There is Also Victory

By Noah Beckoff ('22)

Parashat Yitro, with all of its divine greatness at Har Sinai, starts with something a little less divine, Yitro deciding to check on his son-in-law. Yitro sees the strain that Moshe is dealing with, judging the nation from morning to night. He immediately goes full father-in-law on Moshe and for seven straight Pesukim he tells Moshe how to delegate the roles of the judging system that Yitro has created. And Yitro being the amazing father-in-law that he is, he gives it to Moshe as straight as he can, he tells Moshe “לא טוב הדבר אשר אתה עשה” (Shemot 18:17), “The way you are doing this is awful” but his language is very strange. When was the last time the Torah had used the phrase לא טוב? There is only one other time in the Torah that this phrase is used, and it's in Parashat Bereishit. HaShem has just created man, and tells Adam HaRishon “לא טוב היות האדם לבדו” (BeReishit 2:18). Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Z”l says that these two instances can be used together. Yitro is trying to tell Moshe Rabbeinu that his way of doing things is not right, he cannot do it alone. From Adam HaRishon until that very moment, no one was able to do it alone.

Yet, Yitro ends his advice to Moshe a little strangely. Instead of saying, “and after every case each man will go back home in peace”, he says, “וגם כלה העם הזה” “על מקומו יבא בשלום” (Shemot 18:23). Most Mefarshim just assume this to mean that after each case, everyone will go home in peace, but the Or HaChaim HaKadosh thinks a little differently. He reads the Pasuk very literally, “And the entire nation shall arrive at its destination in peace”.

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh explains that Yitro said this because he understood that the only way for the Jewish people to receive the Torah and become HaShem's nation was to unite under the common goal of peace. This is why, the Or HaChaim explains, once Moshe accepts this advice and Yitro leaves, do the Jewish people arrive at Har Sinai. We would reach our destination once we came together and strove for peace.

I truly do hope that we all take the messages of Rav Sacks and the Or HaChaim to heart. Hopefully we can all see that we can use a helping hand or two and that if we come together with those people we will be able to achieve great accomplishments.

Count Your Blessings, Don't Be Jealous

By AJ Sepowitz ('22) and Joey Zelig ('22)

The Aseret HaDibrot share one similar theme. They all provide the opportunity to draw closer to and connect with Hashem. However, two commandments that stand out are, “Lo Tachmod,” “don't be jealous” (Shemot 20:14), and “Kaveid Et Avicha Ve'Et Imecha,” “honor your father and mother” (ibid 12). These two commandments mesh with each other and can teach us a lesson of great importance.

When compiling a list, often you save the best or most significant for last. However, the Aseret HaDibrot display the complete opposite thought. “Lo Tachmod” seems like the least significant commandment out of the ten. Some may wonder if it even belongs, as it relates alongside nine other extremely important and crucial commandments. So why is “Lo Tachmod” placed in such a key position?

“Lo Tachmod” stresses the point that Hashem made every single person for a reason. Everyone has their own amazing qualities that make them special. When one is jealous of someone or something that they don't have, they are not accepting or appreciating their specific qualities given to them by Hashem.

Ibn Ezra shares a deep lesson that we can apply to this question. “Da Ki Ish Kefari SheYesh Lo De'ah Nechonah VeHu Ra'ah Bat Melech SheHi Yafeh, Lo Yachmod Otah

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BeLibo SheYishkav Imah,” “a commoner does not desire the princess” (Ibn Ezra Shemot 20:14 S.V. Lo Tachmod). He is aware that she is simply out of his league and he will never be able to marry her.

One may wonder how Hashem can possibly command us not to be jealous when it is such a natural feeling. It is human nature to want what other people have. Just like the commoner understands that he should not even desire the princess because she is so far removed from him, this is how we should look at other people. If your friend has a brand new 2021 Jeep Wrangler and you have a rundown 2007 Honda Civic, you should understand that this is what Hashem wants for you. If you apply this to little things such as a car, then you should certainly apply this to the more meaningful things in life such as one’s reputation or family. You lose yourself when you try to be someone else. This lesson from Ibn Ezra can only help you love yourself to the fullest. The way to avoid jealousy is through Emunah. All that must be done is to understand one thing: that everything you have, and everything you don’t have, is because of Hashem.

So what is the connection between “*Lo Tachmod*” and “*Kaveid Et Avicha*”? Jealousy is not appreciating who you truly are and wanting to be like someone else. This can also be looked at as a violation of Kibbud Av Va’Eim. Your parents gave you all your attributes and traits. A desire to be like others is in essence affirming that you are not appreciative of how your parents made you. Your parents imparted everything to you; food, a home, your smile, and stature. You must appreciate who you are to not fall into the trap of “*Lo Tachmod*” and to fulfill the Mitzvah of Kibbud Av Va’Eim to the fullest. We are all amazing and beautiful in our own ways and we shall continue making the world a better place by contributing in our own special way. Have an amazing Shabbos!!

A Pretty Penny

By Gavi Kigner ('22)

In the midst of miracles, Yitro reveals a secret to being able to lead. Yitro advises Moshe should take “*Anshei Chayil Yir’ei Elokim Anshei Emet Son’ei Betza*” (Shemot 18:21) and Moshe takes only what the Pesukim call “*Anshei Chayil*”. It is strange, but it is simple: as Ramban explains, “*Anshei Chayil*” includes all the other terms within it. In short, this term means people who are fit to lead large groups. But the most unusual term comes at the end of the Pasuk: “*Son’ei Betza*,” which literally translates to “money haters”. It might be simple to say this means they hate bribes, but the Pesukim do not indicate that. In fact, the Torah warns against taking

bribes because it can blind anyone, so would Moshe Rabbeinu not know that he should not take people who do not accept bribes? Perhaps, as Yitro might have not understood what Moshe knew at that point in time, but perhaps there is another way to look at it. In short, Ramban posits that this means that the people who judge can detach themselves from the money at stake. Some people will judge a case and realize the magnitude of what is at stake, and this will somehow factor into their judgment. But that is not the case for what Yitro is trying to say. It is important that they do not even care how much money is on the table because they just do not like money.

In fact, it is a question whether a court case with less than a Prutah (the Halachic threshold for what is considered money in Torah) at stake is really considered a court case in Judaism (Bava Metzia 55a). Rabbeinu Asher holds that it is not considered money, but Rambam does, because for Rambam there are principles at stake. The people who judge, the people who lead, are meant to be people who care about everything, large and small, all the same. And this is because they have to detach themselves from the value. Judges can not say that twenty dollars is practically nothing in the grand scheme of things. Judges, and by extension leaders, have to care about everything, no matter how big or how small it is, to the same extent.

Making Sense of the Sambatyon

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 65b) tells of the river Sambatyon that runs wild during the week casting stones (as noted by Rashi) but is calm on Shabbat. This deceptively simple story has profound implications, even regarding the interface of Shabbat and modern technology.

The wicked Turnus Rufus, the Roman governor of Judea, asked this question of Rabi Akiva as well. Turnus Rufus said to him: And what makes this day, Shabbat, different from other days? Rabi Akiva said to him: And what makes this man, referring to his interlocutor, more distinguished than other men? Turnus Rufus said to him: I am more distinguished because my master, the emperor, wants it that way. Rabi Akiva said to him: Shabbat too is unique because my Master wants it that way, as he has sanctified that day.

Turnus Rufus said to him: This is what I mean to say to you: Who is to say that now is Shabbat? Perhaps a different day of the week is Shabbat. Rabi Akiva said to him: The Sambatyon River can prove that today is Shabbat, as it is calm only on Shabbat.

A Non-Literal Approach to the Sambatyon

We suggest a metaphorical understanding of the Gemara.

The Sambatyon may be seen as a metaphor for Shabbat observers. Our week is full of turbulence and rough and tumble, but on Shabbat, life proceeds quietly and smoothly. In the words of Rashi to Bereishit 2:2 “*Bat Shabbat, Bat Menuchah*”, Shabbat arrives, tranquility arrives. Shabbat is most welcome to its observers who sing Zemirot extolling its beauty and the love we Jews have it (i.e. “Ohavim LeShomro” and “Mah Yedidut Menuchateich” and the stories that appear on Shabbat 119a). For those who embrace Shabbat it is not a day of oppressive restrictions, but a day of release from the weekday frenzy and an opportunity to recharge our batteries and begin the next week fresh.

Shabbat observers often wonder how those not blessed with Shabbat manage to cope with the stresses of life. They certainly feel how Shabbat dramatically enhances their quality of life.

The Shabbat rest of the Sambatyon projects an image of Shabbat described by Rashi to Shemot 20:9 where we should feel as if all our work is done. We not only refrain from work we do not even think about our work responsibilities and activities.

The special peace of Shabbat might capture the idea of our being blessed with a Neshamah Yeteirah, an added soul, on this holy day (Beitzah 16a). It also may explain the special taste of Shabbat food that is bestowed only on those who observe the Shabbat as recounted in Shabbat 119a:

The Roman emperor said to Rabi Yehoshua ben Hananya: Why does the fragrance of a cooked Shabbat dish diffuse? He said to him: We have a certain spice called dill [Shevet], which we place in the cooked dishes and its fragrance diffuses. The emperor said to him: Give us some of it. He said to him: For anyone who observes Shabbat, the spice is effective, and for one who does not observe Shabbat, it is not effective.

Shabbat Shalom

The Nehar Sambatyon metaphor also helps understand the traditional Sephardic greeting of “Shabbat Shalom”. The usual explanation of this practice is that it expresses the notion of “*SheLo Yehei Diburcha BaShabbat KeDiburcha BaChol*,” that your Shabbat speech should differ (Shabbat 113b) from your regular speech. Instead of simply greeting Shalom as we do in the week, on Shabbat we add “Shabbat Shalom”. The Shabbat Shalom also serves as praise for Shabbat for which we possibly fulfill, at least on a Torah level, the Mitzvah of Kiddush (see Rabi Akiva Eiger to Orach Chaim 271:1 s.v. KeSheYavo). Rav Moshe Shternbuch explains that since Shalom is a name of Hashem (Shabbat 10b) when we say

Shabbat Shalom we note that we are observing Shabbat for Hashem conforming with the Pasuk “*Shabbat LaHashem Elokecha*” (Shemot 20:10).

The chaotic Sambatyon finding peace on Shabbat (“*Yonah Matz’ah Bo Mano’ach*”) fits perfectly with the greeting of Shabbat Shalom. Finally peace descends on this special day upon us giving us a taste of Olam Haba. My son Binaymin notes that Shomrei Shabbat feel the entire whole is at peace on Shabbat, making Shabbat Shalom the perfect greeting for this wonderful day. The Shabbat candles, which promote peace (Shabbat 25b), also convey this potent point.

Proof of Shabbat

The question, though, is how does the metaphorical explanation of the Sambatyon’s rest on Shabbat, prove to Turnus Rufus that we are observing Shabbat on the correct day? The answer is that the peace at which the world finds itself on Shabbat is the proof that we observe Shabbat on the correct day, meaning the seventh day of creation. Following Shabbat 119a, the peace of Shabbat is reserved for those who love Shabbat.

Shabbat for Everyone

The Sambatyon story communicates that Shabbat is for the entire world. If so, why do Chazal teach that a Nochri who observes Shabbat is Chayav Mitah? My son Binyamin suggests that this prohibition applies only if the Nochri observes Shabbat as we do. While Shabbat in a certain sense is universal since it is part and parcel of the Creation, it also represents, as we emphasize no less than three times each Friday evening, the special Brit between Am Yisrael and Hashem.

Binyamin’s idea fits well with the practice of conversion candidates who observe Shabbat except for one violation. Interestingly, Rav Hershel Schachter raises the possibility that the Nochri should not suffice with a rabbinic violation, but be sure to violate Shabbat on a Torah level. A Torah level violation might be necessary to distinguish a “Nochri appropriate Sabbath” from a Jewish Shabbat observance.

Binyamin’s approach might also fit well with Rashi (Yevamot 48b s.v. Ger Toshav) who very surprisingly writes that a Nochri must observe Shabbat since violation of Shabbat is equated with Avodah Zarah (Chullin 5a). The Nochri is expected to observe a form of Shabbat but Rashi agrees that he is forbidden to observe Shabbat in a manner identical to Jews.

Shevitat Keilim

The Sambatyon story may also explain Beit Shamai’s surprising opinion requiring Shevitat Keilim, that even our utensils must rest on Shabbat (Mishna, Shabbat 1:5-6). For example, Beit Shamai forbids setting a trap before Shabbat to ensnare animals on Shabbat.

Beit Hillel, however, limits the peace of Shabbat to our activities. Our animals are included in Shabbat (Shemot 20:10) indicating that our utensils are not included. However, Beit Hillel might agree that Keilim that make a great deal of noise “Avsha Milta” interfere with the Shabbat peace and are forbidden (Shabbat 18a and Rama Orach Chaim 252:5).

Electricity

Twentieth century Poskim struggle to pin a precise prohibition on use of electric appliances which do not have a heated filament. Family members of Rav Moshe Feinstein report that he referred to this question as a “riddle” and family members of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik report that he called this issue an “enigma”. Rav Asher Weiss (Teshuvot Minchat Asher 1:39), however, notes that nonetheless the Jewish people have accepted that all use of electricity constitutes a serious Shabbat violation. Rav Asher beautifully states that it is if a Bat Kol (heavenly voice) rang out prohibiting all use of electricity on Shabbat and Yom Tov.

The powerful image of the rambunctious Sambatyon at rest on Shabbat lies behind the Jewish people’s collective intuition that all electric use is unfitting for Shabbat. There is no doubt that one cannot achieve a proper Shabbat atmosphere with electric use on Shabbat, as noted by Rav Asher Weiss (Teshuvot Minchat Asher 3:25) in his strong denunciation of the “kosher switch”.

A Gray Area – E-Commerce Websites on Shabbat

A gray area of application of the Sambatyon story is the operation of e-commerce websites on Shabbat and Yom Tov (see Gray Matter 4:130-138 for a summary of the opinions). The issue to a gray extent boils down to whether the operation of e-commerce websites interferes with the peace of Shabbat. In other words, we must conclude the hustle and bustle of e-commerce websites when Shabbat begins, just as the raging Sambatyon comes to a rest on Shabbat.

Conclusion

The Gemara makes a stirring observation about the Jewish People - “*Im Lo Nevi'im Bnei Nevi'im Heim*,” “if the Jewish people are not prophets they are the descendants of prophets” (Pesachim 66a). This expression is the Gemara’s eloquent and elegant way of expressing respect for the spiritual intuitions of the Jewish People. The compelling image of the furious Sambatyon resting on Shabbat plays a central role in cultivating our intuitions on Shabbat which are crucial today as we evaluate Shabbat use of new technological breakthroughs.

More than ever, pure Halachah does not alone help us formulate Halachic decisions and policies. We

must also consider the values and goals set forth by Aggadah, which add a crucially important voice.

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