

פרשת בהעלותך contains a collection of different stories. It begins with Aaron's role in lighting the Menora as part of the consecration ceremony for the Tabernacle. It continues with the observance of the second Paschal sacrifice and Pesach Shayni. The order for how the tribes marched in the desert is followed by a command to fashion trumpets and how and when they should be used. This is followed by the story of Moses asking his father-in-law, Yisro, to remain with the people and accompany them on their impending journey to the land. Yisro refuses and says that he desires to return to his native land. Moses again implores him to stay. The next topic is the well known section of ויהי בנסוע הארון, the orders to begin and halt the march. The common theme of these stories is positive. The people acted properly and prepared for the soon to be realized conclusion to their long nightmare in exile and the fulfillment of the covenant with אבותינו, the covenant with Abraham entered into so many years ago that obligated them to a long exile and to be followed by the internal inheritance of the land of Israel.

Suddenly, the narrative changes drastically. The people who only a few verses could do no wrong suddenly could do no right. They lamented their limited diet and the morality laws that now restricted their intimate relationships. Moses acts inappropriately as well as he does not defend the people but rather acts in an accusatory manner. Moses, it appears, expressed incredulity when Gd told him he would provide 30 days of meat to each individual. 70 individuals are selected to aid Moses in running the affairs of the people, yet 2 that should have been included, Eldad and Meidad, remain outside of the group and prophesy that Moses will die in the desert and Joshua will distribute the land to the people. The Parsha concludes with the episode of Miriam and Aaron speaking negatively of their brother Moses and Miriam's subsequent punishment with leprosy. As easily as they reached the climax of acting properly before Gd, they quickly reverted to the depths of rebellion. Where is the transition between these states?

I believe that the story of Yisro provides the transition. The Yisro story is spread across several Parshiot in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, שמות במדבר דברים. We must look at all these individual stories to get a fuller picture of the important role Yisro played in the life of Moses and by extension, the Jewish People.

We are reintroduced to Yisro when he takes his daughter Tzipporah, Moses' wife, and children and travels to the desert to reunite the family. Though there is some disagreement among the commentaries as to when Yisro arrived, apparently, he remained for some time. The Torah describes a scene where Moses was surrounded by a mass of people in search of Gd's guidance and justice. Yisro observed the situation, as the Torah says וירא יתרו and Yisro "saw". He rebuked Moses, telling him that acting as lone judge and minister diminished the honor of the people. More importantly, it would not facilitate his true role as משה רבנו, Moses the great teacher who was to teach the people Torah. Without his role as teacher, the success of the entire redemption enterprise was in grave jeopardy. He advised Moses to establish a system of justice to assist him and lighten his load to allow him to better focus on his main mission, to teach Torah to the Jewish People and prepare them for entry into the Land of Israel. Yisro advised Moses to consult with Gd and seek His guidance and approval, which Moses did and obtained.

The story of appointing judges is retold and is repeated in פרשת דברים and juxtaposed to Gd's command to rise up and inherit the land. The establishment of a system of justice, recommended by Yisro, and ordained by Gd, was the prerequisite to the Jewish People conquering, dividing and settling the land (ירושה) (וישיבה). The requirement to appoint judges would have been given to Moses with or without Yisro's insight, but his suggestion made a strong impression on Moses and the Jewish People. The next story in פרשת דברים relates the gathering of a chaotic mob around Moses, urging him to send spies to explore the land. Moses said ויטב הדבר בעיני, the suggestion found favor in my eyes, and he agreed to send the spies. In doing so, he chose to follow the demands of the mob instead of trusting Gd's assurance that the land was excellent and therefore no spies were necessary. What is the connection between these two stories in פרשת דברים? What does Moses mean that their suggestion to send spies "found favor in his eyes"?

Perhaps we can find an answer in the third chapter devoted to Yisro, in פרשת בהעלותך. The Jewish People were poised to start their march into the Promised Land. Gd was prepared to fight their battles. All systems were go for entry to the land. Suddenly there is a small sidebar regarding Yisro, here referred to as Chovav, Moses' father in law, announcing his intention to return home. Moses pleads with him to remain. Yisro refuses and instead returns home. Immediately after that episode, everything unravels. The people complain, Miriam is punished,

culminating with the final tragedy of sending the spies, which according to several commentaries was the real sin for which Moses was denied entry to the Land of Israel. What is the relevance of Yisro's departure to this sequence of events?

Moses told Yisro that he has known their travels and uses the phrase *והיית לנו לעינים*, and you have been and will continue to be a set of 'eyes' for us. Moses pleads with Yisro to remain. Yisro, we need you to stay with us. More importantly, I need you to remain with us. Yisro, you have observation skills and insights into leadership situations that challenge me. I noticed these skills two years ago when you saw how the people gathered around me looking for justice and seeking Gd. You, not I, came up with the suggestion to install a system of justice that was actually a pre-requisite for them to inherit and maintain control of the land.

Moses was afraid of his father in law abandoning him. Moses pleads with Yisro to remain in order that he can have the benefit of Yisro's 'eyes', his counsel and advice, *והיית לנו לעינים*. With Yisro's departure, Moses loses that important source of guidance and advice, and he ultimately sends the spies on that fateful mission. One may well imagine, had Yisro remained behind, when the people suggested sending spies to scout out the land and determine the best entry route to the Promised Land, Moses might have simply turned to Yisro and asked his opinion. Moses could have countered the people's demand for spies by saying that there is no need to send them for we have access to the insightful Yisro. Yisro, the world traveler would be a great source of information about the land itself and the easiest path to conquer it. Moses says, *ווייטב הדבר בעיני*, the suggestion to send spies found favor in my eyes. Had Yisro remained at his side, it would not have found favor in Yisro's. Perhaps he could have advised Moses regarding the other issues that arose, including the *מתאוננים* and the 70 individuals that were to assist Moses as prophets in administering to the people's needs. Perhaps he could have explained to Miriam and Aaron that as his father in law, he understood why it was necessary for Moses to separate from his daughter and family, precluding them from speaking poorly of Moses. And perhaps Yisro could have counseled Moses not to send the spies, and Jewish History would have unfolded much differently.

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