

# THE COMMUNITY PARSHA SHEET



PARSHAT YITRO

London's Leading Young Professionals Platform and Jewish Communal Centre



**RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL**  
TAL Founder & Director

## DO YOU HEAR THE SILENCE?

When was the last time you experienced pure, absolute silence? No planes or passing cars, just the sound of life doing its thing all around you—the trickle of the stream, the songs of the birds, the wind passing through the trees. These moments of natural silence are immensely rare, and it's impacting our health. But there are people working to save them from extinction!

How would you define silence?

Have you heard of Gordon Hempton? He is known as the Sound Tracker and has come up with the following impressive definition - "Silence isn't the absence of something, but the presence of everything".

How very true! The above quote is the definition of silence from a man who has been traveling around the world recording the vanishing natural sound landscapes for over 37 years.

Sometimes there is so much noise that we are not able to appreciate the silence. At other times we hear the noise but are not prepared to listen to the noise. And I will explain; Our Parasha is full of sounds.

The Parasha begins with the words Vayishma Yitro – and Yitro heard. As we progress through the Parasha, we again find sounds – this time the sounds of the Shofar and voice of G-d at Har Sinai.

The first Rashi in this week's Parasha explains why Yitro joined the Jewish people. The Torah says "Vayishma Yitro" and Yitro heard about the miracles of Kriyat Yam Suf and the defeat of Amalek. The Ba'alei Mussar explains that the true translation of Vayishma isn't "and he heard," rather it is "and he understood." Yitro wasn't the only one to hear about G-d's great

miracles. Our Sages say that when the waters of the Yam Suf split, all the waters in the world did so as well. Yet Yitro was the only one to understand that these miracles were more than a world-wide message; they were personal as well.

Yitro heard and that made him contemplate, "If there is a great Creator performing these awesome miracles then I, Yitro, must serve Him and devote my life to that service." This is what made Yitro so special. When something was clear, he didn't ignore it, he obligated himself to follow that truth.

We have to listen for the truth, be receptive to it and be able to change who we are based on the messages that G-d is sending us. The art of listening is about shifting our positions and seeing the world from a completely different perspective. Yitro exemplified this ability.

It is in this week's Parasha that we have the Ten Commandments and how befitting is it that the Parasha is called Yitro. This is to teach us that the starting point to receiving G-d's Torah is to be a good listener. In fact, often when the Talmud wants to bring a proof of something in the discussion concerning a particular Halachah, it says Ta Shma, "come and listen."

The story is told of a big banker who used to do all the lending in town. He would charge 12% a year. 1% per month. All his customers would use Heter Iska and he had the monopoly over the entire region.

One day he decided to increase by 0.5% a month to 18% a year.

When challenged he told everyone that surely 18 is a great number – it represents Chai – life!

All the merchants were furious.

"Our whole profit margin is 30%."

"This is really going to eat away at our hard work. We work from 8am-8pm in tough terrain, and you are just sitting down in your office making the money easy. You are killing

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**DVAR TORAH**  
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Quiz

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us. At least keep the interest as it is!" Their words fell on deaf ears, nothing seemed to help. A group of merchants decided to go to the great Rabbi of the area and plead with him to knock in some common sense to the lender. The Rabbi replied that unfortunately he didn't have much influence on this individual, but he would try and come up with something. The months past and Yossi, one of the richest people in the area passed away. The Rabbi attended the funeral and gave words of Hespel (eulogy). As he began to speak, he noticed that the lender was in the front row. He thought to himself that now was the moment he was waiting for to influence the lender to back down and ease of with the interest. After words of consolation to Yossi's widow and orphaned children, he turned to the congregation and said; "Yossi was a kind person, someone who gave to everyone. Whoever came into his house starving, left full and satiated." The Rabbi noticed the lender shake his head in agreement. And now the Rabbi pounced on his chance. "Nothing accompanies a person from this world to the next. Not gold, silver, diamonds, they all stay here. Only good deeds and Torah are the currency in the

next world." Again, the Rabbi noticed the lender nodding and agreeing. He continued "Yossi gave Tzedaka every day – millions of good angels were created with his kindness. When a person is born their hands are tight fisted, they want to conquer the world, they think it's all theirs. Yet when they leave the world, the hands are open, symbolising nothing is taken to the next world, not even a penny. My friends remember this and take this to heart. Why focus so much on wealth in this world, we need to focus on what's really important." The Rabbi finished speaking and the burial was complete. A few minutes later after everyone had gone to wash their hands, the lender approached the Rabbi and said, "Rabbi I have known you for 30 years. I have never heard you speak with such inspiration and meaning. There was not one heart that your words didn't pierce. Your talk will make a revolution in town. It won't be the same!" The Rabbi excited and impressed, wanting to see how the lender will change his ways, replied. "Thank you, what kind of revolution will my words make?" The lender replied, "a few months ago I increased the interest payable to 1.5% a month and everyone knocked on my door

complaining of hard times. All the merchants over there called me a murderer, selfish person. I am so happy that everyone was here today and heard what you had to say. I mean what do they care if I increased the interest by 0.5% a month, no one will be leaving this world with money in their hand anyway!" The Rabbi sighed. The lender heard, but he didn't listen! How many times do we hear the voice of G-d yet not listen to the voice of G-d. Some people have selective hearing. Shamu Amim -The nations of the world heard what happened to the Jews, yet only Yitro heard and acted. Perhaps the most famous verse in the entire Torah is Shema Yisrael, "Listen Israel". We should know and understand that G-d created and takes an active part in this world. He is constantly sending us messages, whether it's through the noise and commotion of this world, or even through the silence and beauty of His creations. So as you sit down to rest next time contemplate - with a ratio of 2 to 1 of our hearing apparatus (ears) to our talking gear (mouth), it suggests we should listen twice as much as we speak. By listening to actions that we don't have control of, we're dropping into the world and out of ourselves for a moment. And this does a person good. Let's listen and act!



**RABBI DANNY FISHER**  
Director - TAL Boys After School Programs

**PARSHAT YITRO**

In this week Sedra we find a remarkable incident takes place. Yisro the father in-law of Moshe Rabbeinu, who until now had been a head priest in the land of Midyan, leaves everything behind and becomes a convert joining the Bnei Yisroel. The Possuk tells us "וישמע יתרו" that יתרו heard, and he then joined the Jewish people. רש"י asks a profound question, what did יתרו hear, what was it that could convince him to leave his land and his people and join the בני. He answers that יתרו heard the

incredible stories about the splitting of the ים סוף and the successful battle against עמלק. These events were so unnatural and magnificent that יתרו decided he would join the בני to be a part of this incredible nation. Rav Moshe Sternbuch explains that from the continuation of the פסוק, it seems to be clear that יתרו heard about מצרים bringing the בני out of מצרים. As it says 'כי הוציא ה' את ישראל ממצרים'. If this is the case why didn't יתרו come straight away? What was he waiting for? Did he not consider joining earlier, upon hearing about the ten makos and mitzrayims utter destruction at the hand of ה' ? After all that we as the greatest miracle of them all! Rav Moshe continues and says it

seems that יתרו didn't intend to join the בני on their journey through the מדבר, rather he wanted to come only once they had reached ארץ ישראל. The thought of travelling through the מדבר with the בני was a concern for יתרו. However once he saw the נסים that ה' performed in the מדבר and the acts of חסד that had occurred for the בני, he didn't want to delay even one second! He picked up and ran to join!! We learn an important lesson from here, when inspiration hits, act on it. Straight. Away! Do something, put an action into place, take on something, and in that way the inspiration is concretised and utilised! Have a wonderful Shabbos!



## RABBI BENJI STONE, TAL Chavruta Program

*Tehillim for Our Times; Chapter 17: תפלה לְדוֹד שְׁמֵעָה יְהוָה יִצְדַק הַקְּשִׁיבָה רִנְתִּי הַאֲזִינָה תִפְלִיחַ בְּלֹא שִׁפְתַי מִרְמָה*

### YOUR SOUL - A PICTURE OF HASHEM (PART 1)

King David is being accused and slandered by his enemies. He turns to Hashem to stake his claim for divine assistance.

*"Hear righteousness, Hashem; pay attention to my cry; give ear to my prayer ....."* (Tehillim 17:1)

His defence is divided into three sections

1. Declaring his own righteousness ("Hear righteousness, Hashem")
2. Setting out the poor character of his enemies ("Pay attention to my cry")
3. Praying for physical and spiritual success. ("Give ear to my prayer")

What is the difference between the three expressions "Hear", "Pay attention" and "Give ear"?

Throughout Tenach, each of these stages usually progresses to the next. When being spoken to, a person would first "give ear" to what is being said and then they would "pay attention". Finally they would "hear" the content of what they were told. In this case King David clearly places the greatest

importance on the declaration of his own merits ("Hear righteousness"), followed next by the shortcomings of his foes ("Pay attention" to my cry). Apparently he places the least emphasis on his prayers for his success ("Give ear to my prayer").

#### 1. Declaration of Righteousness

*"You have tested my heart, examined me at night and found no blemish; a thought that would not cross my mouth"* (ibid. 3).

King David's detractors say that he is worthy of punishment but he declares that even at night, a time where all is quiet, he does not even think of carrying out any act which would be forbidden to perpetrate.

It goes without saying that he would not actually perform a forbidden act.

#### 2. Poor Character of the Enemy

As committed Jews we face so much criticism from all sides. Occasionally we are criticized on the basis that our actions are morally wrong. Recent examples of this are where the IDF caused unavoidable civilian casualties when trying to uproot an established militia who used those civilians as human shields. Allowing such a militia to survive would mean many more lives lost in the long term but the nations of the world do not accept this, claiming that the IDF was

committing "genocide". Another example is the internal campaign against full-time Torah learners in Israel. How can they sit and learn whilst their brethren place themselves in danger on the front line? On the other hand the Torah affords the greatest protection for the country and any campaign against Torah surely places the whole mission of the Jewish people in jeopardy.

Notwithstanding the valid explanations, these kinds of accusations are particularly challenging seeing as they go to the root of who we are. Israel as the bastion of democracy and morality in the Middle East. Torah learners as the shield bearers of committed Jewish practice. Dealing with such accusations requires great strength and resolve.

*"Show Your wondrous kindness, He who redeems from those who rise up with Your right hand"* (ibid; 7).

In this verse King David similarly deals with enemies who claim that they attack him in Hashem's name. They declare that their behaviour stems from righteousness and that they will receive help from Hashem in their quest to vanquish him. Since this tactic directly and painfully challenges King David's identity as a pious Jew, worthy of protection, he pleads for Hashem's wondrous kindness in the difficult task of showing the arguments of his enemies to be false.



## HALACHOT BY RABBI ELI MANSOUR

### Only Adult Males Count Toward a Minyan (Part 1)

The Gemara (Berachot 48a) brings the view of Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi that an Ebed – a non-Jewish servant, who is obligated in some Misvot – may be counted as the tenth man for a Minyan. The Mordechi (Rav Mordechai Ben Hillel, Germany, 13th century) cites Rabbenu Simha as concluding on the basis of Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi's ruling that a woman may be counted toward a Minyan. Since non-Jewish servants are obligated in the same Misvot that women are, it follows that if a servant can be counted, then a woman may be counted, as well. The Bet Yosef observes that this also seems to have been the position of Rabbenu Tam (France, 1100-1171). However, Rabbenu Tam did not act upon this position, and this practice never became accepted.

At first glance, we might have assumed that

this position would affect the status of an Androginus (hermaphrodite, somebody with both male and female biological features) with respect to a Minyan. In general, the Halachic status of such a person is a Safek – one of uncertainty, and it is unknown whether to treat this individual as a male or female. Seemingly, when an Androginus is needed for a Minyan, we should apply the rule of "Sefek Sefeka," which allows acting leniently when two uncertainties are at stake. There is one question whether this person should be treated as a man or a woman, and even if an Androginus is regarded as a woman, perhaps Halacha follows the view of Rabbenu Tam that a woman may be counted as a Minyan.

However, Hacham Ovadia Yosef ruled that Rabbenu Tam's position does not even come under consideration, and therefore we cannot apply the rule of "Sefek Sefeka" in

this case. Hence, an Androginus is not counted toward a Minyan.

Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi is cited also as allowing counting a minor – a boy under the age of Bar-Misva – toward a Minyan. The Gemara (Berachot 47b) brings Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi's ruling that an infant cannot be counted as the third person for a Zimun, but he can be counted as the tenth person for a Minyan. Tosafot cite Rabbenu Tam as accepting this position, and ruling that a child – even an infant – can count as the tenth person for a Minyan. (This is the basis for the Bet Yosef's aforementioned theory that Rabbenu Tam likely allowed counting a woman for a Minyan, as well, as he accepted Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi's ruling.) Later Rishonim explain Rabbenu Tam's surprising ruling based on the verse from which the Sages derived the concept of

a Minyan: "Ve'nikdashti Be'toch Beneh Yisrael" – "I shall be sanctified in the midst of the Children of Israel" (Vayikra 22:32). Even infants are considered part of Beneh Yisrael, and thus they qualify to create the conditions in which these special portions of the Tefila may be recited.

The Sefer Ha'manhig (Rabbi Abraham Ben Nathan, d. 1215) brings Rabbenu Tam's ruling without making any further comments, strongly implying that he accepted this lenient position. By contrast, numerous Rishonim write that Rabbenu Tam never apply this ruling as a practical matter, and

never actually permitted counting minors toward a Minyan. (This is why the Bet Yosef, as cited earlier, writes that Rabbenu Tam did not allow counting a woman toward a Minyan.)

**Continued next week..**



## WEEKLY PARSHA OVERVIEW

### Parshat Yitro

Hearing of the miracles G-d performed for Bnei Yisrael, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. Bnei Yisrael arrive at Mt. Sinai where G-d offers them the Torah. After they

accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain, and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, G-d's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments:

1. Believe in G-d
2. Don't worship other "gods"
3. Don't use G-d's name in vain
4. Observe Shabbat
5. Honor your parents
6. Don't murder

7. Don't commit adultery
8. Don't kidnap
9. Don't testify falsely
10. Don't covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them. G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

**Rabbi Sinclair,**  
*Seasonsofthemoon.com*



1. Yitro had 7 names. Why was one of his names Yeter ?
2. News of which two events motivated Yitro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yitro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yitro, and not with Moshe when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yitro came to the desert — don't we already know that the Bnei Yisrael were in the desert?



1. 18:1 - Because he caused a parsha to be added to the Torah. Yeter means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over bringing more Jews to Egypt?" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
6. 18:5 - To show Yitro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place; yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.

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