



# The Teacher's Balance .....

Rav Aharon Herskovitz | Rav Shaliach

The first three aliyot in this week's parsha tell the story of Yitro's arrival in the camp of Bnei Yisrael, as well as his departure back to his homeland. The story is a combination of the effect Yitro has on the way the camp is run, through his advice to Moshe regarding the division of labour in judging and teaching Bnei Yisrael (18:13-26), as well as the effect of joining Bnei Yisrael has on Yitro (18:1-12). Any "outsider" joining a group is able to both influence and be influenced by the group, as long as both are open to such interaction.

I'd like to focus on one point that arises regarding how joining up with Bnei Yisrael affects Yitro. The Ramban points out (18:13) that over the course of the first two aliyot, Hashem is referred to by two different names: the name of אֱלֹהִים and the name of ה'. Elsewhere, the Ramban and others discuss the two aspects of these different names. אֱלֹהִים is a name relating to strength, and as such can sometimes be used to describe "powers" that are not God. One of the more well-known examples is at the end of Parshat Bereishit (6:2), when reference is made to בני האלוהים, who covet the בנות האדם, daughters of mankind: Rashi, quoting the midrash, explains that the reference is to the children of the powerful people, the judges of that generation.

For this reason, when אֱלֹהִים is used to describe God, it is often used in a more "general" sense, referring to God as the most powerful, without relating specifically to His nature.

This is as opposed to the name Hashem, which relates to "My true nature, for which My Name is Hashem" (Rashi, Shemot 6:3), and "through which all that exists has been created" (Ibn Ezra, ibid).

Yitro, as a spiritual giant in the non-Israelite world, is very aware of אֱלֹהִים, of God in the general sense, of the most Powerful. Only after Moshe tells him of the great miracles Hashem did is Yitro able to say (18:11) "Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods (אלוהים)..." In other words, the story of the Exodus is, for Yitro as well as for us, a theological lesson regarding the nature of Hashem and how He works in this world.

Despite this realisation, the Ramban points out that Yitro has not fully assimilated this new understanding, and for this reason, in the very next verse we are told (18:12) "And Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe took a burnt offering and sacrifices to אֱלֹהִים..." Despite the fact that usually the name ה' is used when discussing sacrifices throughout the Sefer Vayikra, Yitro's sacrifice is still brought using the more general name of אֱלֹהִים.

But that's not all. In the second stage of Yitro's story, regarding his advice to Moshe concerning his leadership style and system of judgment, the name אֱלֹהִים appears seven times, with no reference to ה'. And this is not just Yitro referring to God as אֱלֹהִים, it is Moshe as well: for example (18:16) "...and I teach them the laws of אֱלֹהִים and His Torah". We can understand Yitro's continued use of אֱלֹהִים, but why does Moshe use this name as well? As we saw, part of the process of the Exodus was making the name ה' be known! Why describe God using a more general name?

I believe that part of the reason Moshe uses this name to describe Hashem is his recognition that Yitro is still on his journey of recognising and learning about Hashem, Torah, and what it means to be a part of Bnei Yisrael. Although, according to Chazal (Zohar VaYikra 9:1), Yitro's sacrificial feast is an event dedicated to welcoming him into

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Bnei Yisrael, he is not expected yet to fully understand and relate to Hashem in the same way that everyone else does. He has only learned the name of Hashem one day ago! It is understandable that his frame of reference is still the more general אלוקים. When Moshe responds to Yitro's questions regarding the way he interacts with the nation, Moshe as well uses the name of אלוקים, because he realises that in order to help Yitro on his spiritual, religious and national journey, he must be able to speak his language. Although later on in the Torah, when Moshe reengages with his father-in-law (BaMidbar 10:29-32), he is able to refer to "Hashem" three times, secure in the knowledge that Yitro can relate to God in this way ("We are travelling to the place Hashem has said...and we will give you benefit for Hashem has spoken of the good

He shall do for Yisrael...and the good Hashem will do with us we shall do with you as well"), he realises that now is too early. To help Yitro, he must first understand him and speak his language.

Educators (be they parents, teachers, madrichim and more) must learn from Moshe's message: on the one hand being able to teach in an un-distilled, accurate way (18:8 "And Moshe told his father-in-law all that Hashem had done to Pharaoh and Egypt..."), while still understanding the need to be able to speak the language of those with whom they are engaging (18:16 "...and I teach them the laws of אלוקים and His Torah.").

Shabbat Shalom!

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## Dvar Halacha: Weekly Question .....

Have a question? Please email [rav@bauk.org](mailto:rav@bauk.org) or call Rav Aharon at 07976642135.

QUESTION: I REMEMBER LEARNING THAT ONE IS SUPPOSED TO REFUSE TO BE A CHAZZAN THE FIRST FEW TIMES THEY ARE ASKED. DOESN'T THAT MAKE LIFE VERY DIFFICULT FOR GABBAIM?

ANSWER: The Shulchan Aruch (OC 53:16) does indeed pasken that one who is not a set chazzan is supposed to refuse a bit before agreeing to be chazzan, as a sign of humility. However, it is important to note that this halacha is limited and should not be applied as broadly as it sometimes is. For example, there is no need to refuse to act as chazzan for Pesukei DiZimra or reading the megillah (א"א מבוטשאטש שם סט"ז), nor if one feels that there isn't a more fitting person who should be chazzan. Additionally, in a case where

there is no one in charge of appointing a chazzan, and the beginning of prayer is being delayed due to a lack of initiative, one can go and be chazzan in order to prevent burdening the tzibbur (ש"ת תשובות והנהגות ח"א סי' קיב).

Lastly, the פסקי תשובות points out that in our day there is not as much of an aspect of authority and honour attached to being a chazzan (during the week or Shabbat mincha), and for that reason there is no reason to refuse even initially. Additionally, he writes that if a person sees that no one is willing to be chazzan there is even a mitzvah to initiate, as it is an act of chessed with the congregation to have the prayer go on and not be delayed. I would add that it is especially an act of chessed and hakarat hatov for hard-working gabbaim, who often have to encourage and cajole others more than should be necessary.

# Community Updates

FINCHLEY BNEI AKIVA and LEEDS BNEI AKIVA's Ha'irgun was this past Shabbat. Huge congratulations to them on two fantastic Shabbatot!

KOBI WIENER, ROSH LEEDS wrote: Yorkshire's largest Sviva showed its mighty ruach once again with a stormingly successful Shabbat Irgun. 65 people filled BHH Shul with singing, dancing and delicious food munching for our family Friday night. Bnei Akvia Madrichim led a tuneful tefilla in shul the next day followed by another ruach filled meal, peula (with lots of sweets), Mifkad, Seuda Shlishit and Havdalla. The weekend was ended off with a scavenger hunt and pizza making in the Hillel House.



*Pictured: Finchley Bnei Akiva Havdalah*

Behatzlacha and Ye'asher Koach to EDGWARE BNEI AKIVA who have their Shabbat Ha'irgun this week.

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