

Ilan *Ilan Chayyim ben Rivka v'Tim*
Ezra *Ezra ben Yehoshu'a Asher v'Temima Fayga*
Leah *Leah Gavriella bat Aharon v'Yehudit*
Parashat Yitro
January 24, 2019

SUMMARY

ILAN: This week's Torah reading is *Parashat Yitro*, and we will be reading from *Sefer Shemot*, the Book of Exodus, Chapter 18, Verses 1-3. Soon after the Israelites went out from Egypt, Yitro--Moshe's father-in-law--visited Moshe, Moshe's wife Tziporah, and their two sons. Yitro sees Moshe at work and is concerned that Moshe spends all day leading the people in matters of politics and justice without relying on anyone else for help. Moshe follows Yitro's advice and appoints judges to help him lead the people.

LEAH: The Israelites went out to the wilderness of Sinai in the third month after leaving Egypt, and they set up camp in front of Mount Sinai. God tells Moshe that the Israelites will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. After sharing this promise with the Israelites they respond, "All that God has spoken we will do." After three days of getting ready the Israelites meet God at Mount Sinai surrounded by thunder and lightning. They are so overwhelmed that they ask Moshe to stand between them and God. Moshe is called to go up to Mount Sinai.

EZRA: The Israelites hear God speak the *aseret hadibrot*, "The Ten Sayings"--often called the Ten Commandments. Then they ask that only Moshe speaks to them, not God, because they do not feel safe hearing God's voice.

QUESTIONS

1) Ilan: In this week's *parasha* we read about the Israelites receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Specifically we read that, "All the people saw the thunder, the flashing torches, and the sound of the shofar and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they shook and stood away at a distance." Why do you think that what they saw and heard would make them want to stand back? <<Ilan picks 3>>

Leah: It's not everyday that you see sounds. It could feel scary and weird. They might feel like they're in a different universe.

Ezra: When the Torah says that they saw the sounds I think it means that they felt the power of the sound of shofar and the thunder and a deep connection with God. It scared them and they didn't feel ready for it yet, so they stood far off.

2) Leah: What do you think it might mean that the Israelites saw the sounds of the shofar and thunder? <<Ezra picks 3>>

Ezra: I think it could mean that they saw clouds and lightning and the things that go along with thunder.

Leah: There is so much important stuff happening and it's new. They might not have a great way to describe it. They might be overwhelmed and so the Torah talks about seeing the sounds as a way of describing this feeling.

Ilan: Maybe it's like on a hot day when we see the heat over a car hood or over a hot street. Or maybe this might just be what the experience of God is like--it involves all senses happening at the same time.

3) Ezra: The Torah then tells us that the Israelites speak to Moshe saying, “You speak to us, and we will understand, but please do not let God speak to us, so we don’t die.” Why do you think they might want Moshe to speak with them instead of God? Don’t they know that God wants to help them? <<Leah picks 3>>

Ilan: They believe that Moshe has a lot of power after seeing him bring the plagues, lead them out of Egypt, and split the Sea of Reeds, but at Sinai God shows them *too much* power and it’s weird to them. They don’t know where it’s all coming from, so they ask for Moshe to talk with them instead.

Leah: When they see God’s power at Sinai, maybe they’re scared that God is powerful like Pharaoh was and will hurt them. Also maybe they trust Moshe, but they don’t *fully* trust Moshe. If they *fully* trusted Moshe then they would just listen to God like he tells them to.

Ezra: When I go to an orthodontist appointment and the orthodontist makes changes to my mouth, the orthodontist knows what’s happening better than my parents, but I would rather have my parents explain things to me. My parents can explain things better to me because they can explain what’s happening in a way that they know I will understand. Maybe the Israelites want Moshe to talk with them instead of God because they trust Moshe to explain things in a way that they will understand.

Why would they ask Moshe to stand between them and God?

Chizkuni

דבר אתה עמנו ונשמעה, “(obey)” You speak with us and we will listen

.They said this as they were afraid of the thunder and lightning

Chizkiah ben Manoach lived in the thirteenth century, probably in France.

Seforno(15th-16th century Italian commentator): The Israelites' trembling was inspired by the fright they experienced at hearing G'd's voice.

Why do you think the Israelites don't feel safe hearing God's voice, and would rather would rather hear Moshe?

No gods of silver or gold:

Rashi's grandson, medieval French commentator, Rashbam taught that, "This was because there are people who would mistakenly believe that there is something real about such 'gods.'"