

Parashat Yitro

Exodus 18:1–20:23

FEBRUARY 14, 2020



SUMMARY

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.

The Israelites went out to the wilderness of Sinai in the third month after leaving Egypt, and they set up camp in front of Mt. Sinai. G'd 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 G'd has spoken we will do." After three days of getting ready the Israelites meet G'd at Mt. Sinai, surrounded by thunder and lightning. They are so overwhelmed that they ask *Moshe* to stand between them and G'd. *Moshe* is called to go up to Mt. Sinai.

The Israelites hear G'd speak the *aseret hadibrot*, "The Ten Sayings"--often called the Ten Commandments. Then they ask that only *Moshe* speaks to them, not G'd, because they do not feel safe hearing G'd's voice. After each terrible plague sent to the Egyptian nation--seven of which are described in *Parashat Va'era--Par'oh* refuses to free the Israelites.

From Our Commentators:

Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 19:2

ויחנו במדבר. נתנה תורה דימוס פרהסיא במקום הפקר, שאלו נתנה בארץ ישראל, היו אומרים לאומות העולם אין להם חלק בה

"and they encamped in the wilderness":

(Ex. 19:2) The *Torah* was given openly, in a public place. For if it were given in the Land of Israel, [the Israelites] would have said to the nations of the world: You have no portion in it.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1) When the Israelites stood at Mt. Sinai to receive the *Torah*, they saw sounds, and flaming torches, and the *shofar* sound, and the smoking mountain. What sounds do you imagine they might have seen?
- 2) What do you imagine these sounds might have looked like?
- 3) Don't you think that seeing sounds would be confusing? Why would G'd choose to do these things and create this kind of a mood when G'd gives the Israelites *Torah*?