

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : יתרו

1. The reports of the miraculous redemption by HaShem of His People from Egypt were heard by all the inhabitants of the Mediterranean lands — and far beyond, too. Yisro, the well-known chieftain in Midyon, who was the father-in-law of Mosheh our Teacher, also heard these reports. He had heard, too, the reports of the fitting punishment that HaShem had inflicted upon the Egyptians and their king for their defiance of HaShem and His command to them to let us go free. It was through these events that Yisro, being a genuine seeker of truth and a man of high intellectual integrity, recognized the greatness of HaShem as the One and Only true G-d and had renounced all forms of idolatry and other worship as false.

Nearly a year before, when his son-in-law Mosheh had told him that he was returning to Egypt from Midyon at the command of HaShem so as to lead out the Jewish People from Egypt, Mosheh had told Yisro that the purpose of the imminent Redemption from Egypt was that the Children of Israel were to receive the Torah from HaShem and thus become His People. Yisro now sends a message to Mosheh and informs him that he is coming out to the wilderness to join the Jewish People as a convert. Mosheh (with Aharon and the Elders of the people) comes out to welcome him and Mosheh tells his father-in-law in greater detail of all the great and wonderful events that had happened to them.

2. During the time that we are encamped in the Wilderness and preparing ourselves to receive the Torah, Yisro watches with great interest all the goings-on in the camp. He sees too how overworked his son-in-law is and how the people have to wait so long for his personal attention to their needs and problems. With an eye to the future, Yisro reasons that even if the Jewish Nation can function in this way here in the Wilderness, nevertheless when the people eventually take possession of the land of Kenaan and settle there, it will not be possible for Mosheh to govern the people in the same way. In their own Land, they will be spread over the whole country and not any more in such a relatively compact area. Yisro therefore advises Mosheh to delegate his authority to others to share the burdens of office with him, both here, in the Wilderness, and, later, in the Promised Land. HaShem tells Mosheh to carry out the plan that Yisro put forward, and as a result, in addition to the seventy Elders whom Mosheh had already ordained to assist him and Aharon (chosen from the Jewish foremen who had suffered so much for their brethren from the whips of the cruel taskmasters when we were slaves in Egypt) many other worthy people are now appointed to positions of authority.
3. While we were in Egypt, we too knew that the purpose of our slavery and the promised Redemption was that we were to receive the Torah of HaShem on our way to Eretz Yisroel. Thus, on Rosh Chodesh Sivvan, in the year 2448 after Creation, we arrive at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamp at the foot of Mount Sinai. Mosheh our Teacher ascends the mountain and HaShem tells Mosheh to prepare us for the Receiving of the Torah. Mosheh tells us of HaShem's wish that we be to Him "a kingdom of princes and a holy nation" and he reports back to HaShem our desire to receive the Torah from

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : יתרו

HaShem Himself, with our declaration that “we will obey and we will listen” to everything that HaShem commands. Mosheh, carrying out the instructions of HaShem, then erects a fence around this mountain which is to serve as a stage for this momentous occasion when the Glory of HaShem is to descend upon the world like never before.

4. Three days later, on the appointed morning, Mosheh leads us out of our camp towards the mountain, now shrouded in thick smoke and roaring with fire to the very heavens. The unnatural sound of the Shofar is heard over the noise of crashing thunder and the whole mountain trembles as the greatest manifestation of HaShem’s Presence is revealed before us. Mosheh our Teacher is sent down by HaShem to warn us once again not to approach the mountain. Then suddenly all is absolutely quiet.
5. Then, in the most awesome sound ever experienced by mortals, the Voice of HaShem is heard to reverberate from the heavens as HaShem, the Master of the Universe, proclaims his Almightyness to us, His People, whom He has taken out from Land of Egypt and the House of Bondage, to be His servants. In this First of the Ten Commandments, HaShem makes known to us His Unique and Absolute Oneness. In the Second Commandment, He warns that no other power is to be revered by us, nor any symbol of such power, whether real or imagined.
6. (After hearing directly from HaShem Himself the first two of the Ten Commandments, our leaders urgently beseeched Mosheh our Teacher to beg HaShem to desist from Himself continuing the Decalogue, for we were afraid for our very lives. In response, HaShem grants Mosheh our Teacher the strength and power to tell us the other Commandments and we listen as he speaks the others which follow:)
7. The Third Commandment: No one may take the Name of HaShem in vain, nor to swear by the Name of HaShem falsely or to no useful purpose.
8. The Fourth Commandment: The Jewish People is to remember the Shabbos Day to keep it holy: no manner of Melachah (creative work) is to be done by any of us on Shabbos. In this way we, the People of HaShem, are to testify that in the Six Days of Creation HaShem called the whole of Creation into existence, and on the seventh day He rested and ceased to create anything new, and declared the seventh day to be holy and He sanctified it. As HaShem’s People, we too are to desist from our mundane, weekday activities on this special day, to observe the Shabbos of HaShem as He has commanded. In this way, our lives shall be enhanced with the holiness and spirituality of Shabbos.
9. The Fifth Commandment: We are commanded to honour our parents and our elders, those that transmit to each generation the teachings of HaShem that we can function as His People, so that our days shall be prolonged in happiness and goodness.
10. The Sixth Commandment: We are commanded not to commit murder nor any other kind of unlawful killing, nor to associate ourselves with murderers or with those that would use cruelty or violence against others.
11. The Seventh Commandment: We are commanded not to commit adultery and to keep away from all kinds of immorality.

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : יִתְרוֹ

12. The Eighth Commandment: We are commanded not to kidnap nor hold to ransom, and to keep away from all kinds of robbery and theft.
13. The Ninth Commandment: We are commanded not to bear false witness against our fellow man, for whatever purpose, and not to allow the course of justice to be perverted in any way.
14. The Tenth Commandment: We are commanded to curb our desires for that which is not rightfully ours, for it is unworthy ambition and greed that lead a person to do evil.
15. These Ten Commandments form the very foundation of the Law of Israel: they incorporate the whole of the Torah of HaShem and they serve as the basis upon which a righteous and just society can be built. The Torah which we received at Sinai is our Constitution as the People of HaShem — it was at Sinai that we became a People.
16. After these Ten Commandments are announced to us, Mosheh our Teacher explains to us that one of the reasons why HaShem chose to give us His Torah in such a spectacularly awesome way is so that we shall for all time retain in our national memory this day when we became the People of HaShem. We shall always remember how we experienced — like no-one else before or since — the inexpressible greatness of HaShem, so that we shall always revere and fear Him.
17. HaShem tells us that although we are not to make replicas of the great luminaries in the sky, nor of the angels, that minister to HaShem (not even to serve as a focal point in our worship of HaShem Himself) we are to erect an altar upon which we are to bring Korbonos to HaShem, and Mosheh tells us of some of the laws of this Mitzvah.
18. Mosheh then walks up the mountain once again. Through a path which opens up for him through the thick smoke and cloud, he ascends the mountain to learn from HaShem all the other laws of the Torah which he will then teach us when he returns after forty days. In the meantime, we are in the charge of Aharon and the Elders, and anxiously await the return of Mosheh. Only Yehoshua bin Nune — the faithful minister to Mosheh our Teacher — waits at the foot of the mountain outside the camp, all alone, till he returns.

For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra יִתְרוֹ please go to HAFTORAHS.