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***In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag***  
**Questions for self-study - by Menachem Leibtag**  
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**PARSHAT YITRO**

**PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'**

**LOTS OF NAMES, or LOTS OF RELATIVES?**

1. When one reads the beginning of Parshat Yitro, there seems to be no doubt that Yitro is Moshe Rabeinu's father in law, as he is consistently referred to as "cho'ten Moshe".

However, when one reads the story of how Moshe first met his wife (see Shmot 2:15-22, read carefully), it seems as though Moshe's father in law's name was Reuel. Before you see how the commentators solve this problem, review the following other sources that discuss Yitro's family, noting the phrases "kohen Midyan" as well as "choten Moshe", and see if you can figure out the 'family tree' - assuming that each name refers to a separate person:

See Shmot 3:1, noting how Moshe is taking care of Yitro's sheep. In your opinion, approximately how many years have passed between Shmot 2:15 and 3:1? How does your answer to this question affect how you understand the identity of "kohen Midyan"?

See also Shmot 4:18. According to this pasuk, why is it almost certain that "Yeter" is the same person as "Yitro"? Note how both Rashi & Ibn Ezra solve this problem, but each in a very different manner.

2. After reviewing Shmot chapter 18, see also Bamidbar 10:29-32. Does it seem as though "Chovav" is the same person as Yitro? In your opinion, does "choten Moshe" in this pasuk describe Chovav or Reuel? According to this pasuk, does Chovav have the title of "kohen Midyan". If Chovav is not Yitro, can you explain why he doesn't have this title, and why he has been with Bnei Yisrael for at least some time in the desert?

Then, see Sefer Shoftim 4:11. Based on this pasuk, does it seem as though Chovav accepted Moshe's offer in Bamidbar 10:31-32? If Chovav was the "kohen" of Midyan, would it make sense that he would have accepted this offer?

3. If one assumes that the phrase "choten" implies specifically a 'father in law' - explain why Chovav and Yitro must be the same person. Similarly, explain why Reuel must either be Yitro himself, or Yitro's father (and hence 'father' in Shmot 2:18 - could imply grandfather as well).

What is problematic about all of these explanations?

If one assumes that the Hebrew word "choten" can refer to any relative through marriage, including a 'brother-in-law'; how can this solve all of the problems mentioned above regarding the specific identity of Reuel, Yitro, and Chovav?

See Breishit 19:12-14, Melachim Aleph 3:1, and especially Melachim Bet 8:27. Can these sources support an understanding that the word "choten" can refer to any relationship through marriage? See also the phrase "chotno avi ha'haarah" in Shoftim 19:4. In your opinion, does this define "choten" as a father in law, or does it specify what type of "choten" he was - i.e. 'father in law', in contrast to 'brother in law' (otherwise, the phrase would be redundant).

4. With this background, see (and enjoy) the commentary of Ibn Ezra on Shmot 2: 18, 3:1, 4:18 and Bamidbar 10:29 !

See also Rashi on 4:18 and Bamidbar 10:29; and Ramban on Shmot 2:16, noting how he solves all of the above problems by claiming that Reuel is the grandfather, while "kohen Midyan"

consistently refers to Yitro, and Chovav is Yitro's new name after he becomes Jewish!

**THE TEN 'COMMANDMENTS'**

1. For some reason, what we call in Hebrew 'aseret ha-dibrot', we refer to in English as 'the ten **commandments**'. Is this translation correct? Explain why (yes or no)?

How many 'dibrot' are there in the 'Ten Commandments'?

Accordingly, how would you translate 'dibrot'- as:

statements?

commandments?

parshiot?

Explain each possibility.

Are there ten according to each?

What is the difference between 'mitzvot' & 'dibrot'?

2. What are the first TWO 'dibrot'? [In other words, what precisely is the first one, and what is the second one?] Relate your answer to the question above.

How does your answer relate to the division of the 'dibrot' into 'parshiot'?

Are the first two 'dibrot' included in the first 'parshia'? From a grammar perspective, what else is special about the first two 'dibrot' (i.e. the first 'parshia')?

Now, see Ibn Ezra on 20:2. See also Rambam Sefer ha-Mitzvot Asei #1, and Hasagot ha-Ramban Lo Ta'aseh #5. How do these opinions relate to the above questions?

3. Note in your Chumash that there are two versions for how to read the 'dibrot' - 'ta'am elyon' and 'ta'am tachton'.

Note how each method divides the psukim in a very different manner! See if you can determine the underlying logic of each division and how it relates to the above questions.

4. How do we know that there were TEN 'dibrot'?

Does it say anywhere in Chumash that there were TEN?

[In case you give up, see Shmot 34:28 & Devarim 4:11-13.]

Relate this as well to your answer to the above questions.]

5. You probably also remember that God gave the 'dibrot' to Moshe Rabeinu written on TWO 'luchot' [tablets]. Can you recall how we know that there were indeed TWO 'luchot'?

[When you give up, try Shmot 31:18 and 32:15; compare with Shmot 24:12 and 25:21!]

In your opinion, what does this mean?

[i.e. two copies, or half written on each?]

If 'half & half', how would they be divided, and would this relate to their content?

[If 'two copies'; why would one set not have been sufficient?]

See the concluding paragraph of Ramban's commentary on the 'dibrot' (on 20:12-13) where he discusses this topic.

6. In your opinion, are the mitzvot of the DIBROT 'qualitatively' different than the remaining mitzvot of the Torah?

If yes, what is special about them?

If not, why were these specific mitzvot given at Ma'amad Har Sinai, in contrast to all the other mitzvot that were given at a different setting?

[See an amazing Rashbam on 20:15-16 / "daber ata imanu..."]

See also Ramban on 20:6 - from "et Hashem Elokecha" in regard to the difference between the first two dibrot and the final eight.

7. In your opinion, do any of the 'Ten Commandments' apply to gentiles as well? If so, which laws apply only to Am Yisrael, and which laws apply to all mankind? Can you explain why?

Relate your answer to Shmot 19:5-6!

See also Rashbam on Breishit 26:5 - "chukotei v'toratei".

8. Review 20:14-19. In your opinion, had Bnei Yisrael not become fearful during Ma'amad Har Sinai, when they requested that Moshe receive them instead (see 20:15-18 and/or Devarim 5:20-28), would Bnei Yisrael have received more than ten (or two) commandments directly from God at Ma'amad Har Sinai? If so, how many more mitzvot? [All 613, or only a certain group?]

9. How does the first mitzva that Bnei Yisrael receive **after** the **dibrot** - "lo ta'asun iti elohei kesef..." (see 20:19-20) relate to their request to hear the remaining mitzvot via Moshe and not directly from God? How is this mitzva different than the commandment not to worship 'avoda zara' in the second **dibur**?

Can you explain how this relates to the next mitzva: "mizbeiach adama ta'aseh li" (20:21-22) as well?

## **PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur)**

### **\* MA'AMAD HAR SINAI \***

Ma'amad Har Sinai was one of the most important events (if not the most important) in our history. Therefore, our shiurim will deal with this topic in detail. The following questions will treat Shmot chapter 19 as the beginning of a new 'unit' that will continue until the end of Parshat Mishpatim. This unit of Ma'amad Har Sinai includes chapter 19 - the story that leads up to the 'dibrot'; chapter 20 - the dibrot followed by a short story; chapters 21 thru 23 - a unit of misc. laws; & chapters 24 - the concluding story.

The following questions will help you appreciate the content of these chapters (19->24) and understand why there is such a major controversy among the commentators concerning when these events took place.

### **FINDING 'PARAGRAPHS' & 'UNITS'**

As you will soon realize on your own, it is very difficult to follow the progression of topic in chapter 19. To help you study that chapter (and the rest of this unit), we suggest that you use the following methodology:

As you study each chapter in this unit, attempt to divide each chapter into paragraphs. In other words, as you read a group of psukim, attempt to identify when a certain 'sub-topic' is complete, and then group together all of those psukim that deal with that sub-topic. [In general, there should usually be between three and eight psukim in each paragraph, but there can be exceptions.]

Try to give a short title for each paragraph. Then, try to understand the logic of the flow of topic from one paragraph to the next. After analyzing several chapters in this manner, attempt to turn your paragraph topics into an outline. [Technically speaking, you could follow this methodology to compose an outline for the entire book - which would help you identify its primary topics, units, and theme - but for now, we'll focus on chapters 19 thru 24.]

Let's start with chapter 19, and following this methodology. After identifying its paragraphs, construct an outline that divides this chapter into its most basic topics. Try to give a precise title for each section, and explain the logic behind its flow of topic. Most probably, you'll notice several psukim that are very difficult to understand. When you encounter such a pasuk, be sure to see if (and how) Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam & Ramban (etc.) deal with those questions that bothered you.

When you finish your outline (or if you give up) see if your outline matches our outline below (note the titles that we have given to each section). See if you agree with those titles, and then answer the questions that follow:

### **A. 19:1-8 / The 'PROPOSAL'**

1. Note how 19:1-2 'sets the stage', while the actual topic of this paragraph begins to unfold in 19:3. As you read these psukim, note how Moshe's job is to act as God's 'messenger' to offer a

certain 'proposal' to Am Yisrael. Try to explain what this 'proposal' [or 'deal'] is all about, and its purpose.

Be sure that you understand the 'two sides' of this proposal as detailed in 19:5-6. Are there 'conditions', 'rewards' and/or 'consequences'? If so, explain what they are and why.

Be sure you understand why the 'divrei Hashem' detailed in 19:4-6 should be considered a 'proposition' and not as a 'commandment' (or information)!

2. Note the word 'brit' in 19:5. In your opinion, does it refer to something 'old' or something 'new'? According to each possibility, what 'brit' is being referred to? How does this 'brit' relate to the proposal? [See Ramban on this pasuk, noting the different possibilities that he raises!]

3. Explain the phrases 'mamlechet kohanim' & 'goy kadosh' (in 19:6)? In your opinion, do they describe two different concepts or the same concept? If possible, relate your answer to the theme of 'bechira' in Sefer Breishit, and its purpose. Relate to Breishit 12:1-3 and 18:18-19.

4. Based on the simple 'pschat' of 19:3-6, what would have happened had Bnei Yisrael answered 'no' to this proposal? [You are probably familiar with a Midrash that entertains this possibility. Explain how this "pschat" explains this drash.]

Once Bnei Yisrael do answer 'yes' to this proposal (see 19:7-8), what should happen next? In other words, how will Bnei Yisrael find out the more specific details of this 'brit'? Relate your answer to what does happen in chapters 19 & 20.

### **B. 19:9-15 / PREPARATION for Matan Torah**

1. Carefully read 19:9, try to translate this pasuk (and to understand what the words mean). How does the first half of this pasuk relate to the 'proposition' discussed in 19:4-6, and agreed upon in 19:7-8. Once Bnei Yisrael accepted this proposal, what would you expect to happen next?

Does this pasuk include any type of a 'plan' for how Matan Torah will take place? If so, explain what this plan is, and the relationship between Moshe and the rest of the nation.

How did you understand the phrase 'so that they will believe in you [Moshe] forever'? Is there a mitzvah to believe in Moshe? If not, what does this pasuk imply?

2. Review now the final phrase of 19:9: "and Moshe told the people's answer to God". How does this final phrase relate to the first half of the pasuk? What is the obvious problem with this part of the pasuk? Or in other words, what 'answer' of the people is this pasuk talking about?

See Rashi on 19:9 - "et divrei ha-am...". How does Rashi answer this obvious question? [Note that Rashi is quoting the Mechilta.] How do the other commentators answer this question?

Review 19:10-11. How do these psukim relate to 19:9? Does 19:11 provide support to Rashi's explanation of 'divrei ha-am' in 19:9? [Could you say that it is the 'source' for this interpretation?]

Does 19:11 include a 'plan' as well for Ma'amad Har Sinai? Is it the same or different as the plan in 19:9? Relate the apparent contradiction between 19:9 & 19:11 to explain Rashi's interpretation of what the "divrei Hashem" were in 19:9.

3. Note the three-day **preparation** described in 19:11. In your opinion, why was this necessary?

Attempt to relate this to Rashi's peirush to 19:9.

List the different types of preparation that are described in 19:10-15. What is the purpose of each?

4. When you study 19:13, pay careful attention to the phrase "bi-meshoch ha-yovel heima ya'alu ba-har...". In your opinion, is this long blow of the shofar supposed to be a sign that Matan Torah is

OVER, or that it is about to BEGIN? [Relate to 19:19! / see also Devarim 5:4-5 and Yehoshua 6:4-6.]

### C. 19:16-19 / the 'HITGALUT' [REVELATION]

1. Based on 19:10-15, where should the people have been on the third day in the morning - at Har Sinai, or in the camp?

Relate this to what transpires in 19:16-17!

Why does Moshe have to 'take them out' from the camp and bring them to Har Sinai? Would they not have come on their own?

2. Based on 19:18-19, according to which 'plan' (discussed above re: 19:9-11) does Matan Torah take place? [i.e. do the people 'hear' or 'see' God directly, or does Moshe act as God's intermediary?

Where is Moshe supposed to be during Matan Torah, on the mountain, or with the people? [Why is it difficult to answer this question?]

3. Review 19:19 and the phrase: "Moshe yedaber, ve-haElokim ya'anenu be-kol", in its context.

Who is Moshe speaking to - to the people, or to God?

According to either possibility, what was Moshe 'saying'?

[See Parshanut section for complete discussion.]

[Note how Rashi (on 19:19) answers this question. Did you ever realize before that this pasuk may be describing what transpires during the **dibrot**?]

Where are Bnei Yisrael standing at this time?

4. Review Devarim 5:1-6, especially 5:4-5 (in regard to the two plans). Relate those psukim to the questions above!

### D. 19:20-25 / LIMITATION

1. First of all, be sure that you can explain why these psukim form a distinct unit? What happens in these psukim, and when does this all take place?

How do these psukim relate to the psukim that precede them? [According to those commentators who explain that 19:19 describes the dibrot, when did psukim 19:20-25 take place?]

2. Note the use of 'rosh ha-har' (the **top** of the mountain) in these psukim, as opposed to the use of only "Har Sinai" up until this point. What is the significance of this? Has something changed? [Be sure to explain 19:24.]

3. Why does God (at this time) repeat his warning 'not to approach the mountain'? Does Moshe himself understand why?

Relate this warning to the two different 'plans' for how the 'dibrot' would be transmitted (19:9 & 11/ as discussed above)

4. Who are the 'kohanim' described in 19:21-24? How are they 'different' than the rest of the nation, and where are they standing? Then review Shmot 24:1-11, noting especially 24:1 & 24:9-11. [Can 19:22 be understood without 24:1?]

5. Review 19:25, noting the final phrase 'va-yomer aleihem'. What specifically does Moshe 'say to them' when he came down from the mountain: the 'dibrot' or the 'mitzvot hagbala' in 19:21-22? See the commentators! [What did you think that this phrase meant the first time you read this pasuk!]

### E. 20:1-14 / The DIBROT

1. Note the difference in 'person' between the first two dibrot and the last eight. What famous Midrash regarding **how** the dibrot were given relates to this 'change in person'?

Can there be any other explanation?

[See Ramban on 20:6, in the middle of his peirush.]

2. Relate this change in 'person' to the two 'plans' discussed in the questions above. Which 'plan' for the manner of transmission of the 'dibrot' is reflected (respectively) by the 'first person' and 'third person' tense in these two sections of the dibrot?

Relate this once again to Devarim 5:4-5, noting how (and why) these psukim precede the dibrot in Sefer Devarim. Note as well how that story continues in 5:20-30!

### F. 20:15-18 / TREPIDATION

1. Read these psukim carefully, and attempt to relate their content to our discussion above of the two possible 'plans' for Matan Torah; i.e. Plan A (19:9) and Plan B (19:11).

Even though this story is recorded after the dibrot, in your opinion is it possible to explain that this story took place at an earlier time? If so, when: i.e. before or during the dibrot?

To answer this question, carefully compare the details of this story (19:20-25) to the details in 19:16-19. Similarly, attempt to relate this story to the 'change in person' found between the first two dibrot and the last eight. [See Ramban & Chizkuni on 20:15.]

2. In 20:15 we are told how Bnei Yisrael are so fearful that they 'stand at a distance'. Then, in 20:16 Moshe urges them 'not to fear'. Finally, at the end of the story, we are told how Bnei Yisrael 'stand at a distance' while Moshe enters the cloud (20:17-18). In your opinion, did Bnei Yisrael listen to Moshe's encouragement or not? [In other words, was Moshe encouraging them to stand even closer, or was he insisting that they not move farther away?]

See how the various commentators dealt with this question.

3. Next, read [what appears to be] the parallel account of this story in Devarim 5:20-30. In your opinion, is this account an expanded version the same story as described in Shmot 20:15-18, or is it a different story.

If these stories are the same, how did you reconcile the apparent discrepancies?

If Shmot 20:15-18 describes a different event, then which event took place first (and when)?

If indeed the events in Shmot 20:15-18 took place earlier (i.e. either 'before' or 'during' Matan Torah), attempt to explain why the Torah may have recorded it here instead?

See Ramban on 20:15 (in some Chumashim it's 20:14), where he first quotes Ibn Ezra's interpretation, and then rejects it. [Ibn Ezra claims that these events took place AFTER Matan Torah, while Ramban claims that they took place BEFORE Matan Torah (& Chizkuni quotes Chazal's opinion that they happened DURING Matan Torah!). Relate this controversy to your answers to the above question.

4. Read Shmot 20:19 ["ko tomar..."], and then quickly scan the psukim that follow. In your opinion, is this a continuation from 20:18? If yes, how do these mitzvot relate to 20:15-18. If not, **when** was this commandment (in 20:19) given to Moshe?

[Note Rashi on 31:18 - 'ledaber ito', and Ramban on 24:1.]

### G. The MITZVOT & THE MISHPATIM (20:19->21:1 & onward)

1. Note how all of the mitzvot that follow God's command to Moshe of "ko tomar..." (that he must tell to Bnei Yisrael / see 20:19) form a distinct unit of mitzvot. Quickly scan this unit of mitzvot, noting how they continue all the way until the end of chapter 23.

This unit will be discussed in greater detail in our questions on Parshat Mishpatim; however, for the purpose of our shiur on Parshat Yitro, answer the following:

Based on 20:19, when, where, and to whom are these mitzvot being given?

Why didn't the people hear these mitzvot directly from God, (like the dibrot)? When did they hear them from Moshe?

Relate your answer to 24:3 (in its context).

[In your opinion, why are specifically these mitzvot given at this time? In other words, how are these mitzvot distinct from the remaining mitzvot that will be given later on in the Torah? In your answer, relate to 24:3-7!]

#### H. THE BRIT AT HAR SINAI (24:1-11)

1. Review 24:1-11, and try to determine when these events took place. [Be sure that you understand how 24:1-2 is distinct.]

Even though these psukim are in Parshat Mishpatim, many commentators claim that this event took place **before** Matan Torah. [See Rashi 24:1.]

Compare these psukim to chapter 19 and see if you can find any similarities. Do any of these psukim help explain any of the difficulties that you encountered when you studied chapter 19?

[Note that anyone who claims that Bnei Yisrael proclaimed 'na'aseh ve-nishma' **before** Matan Torah must understand that this covenant took place at the same time as chapter 19. Note machloket Rashi / Ramban on 24:1!]

2. According to Rashi's opinion, where in chapter 19 do the events in chapter 24:1-10 take place? How does this affect how Rashi explains 'divrei Hashem' & the 'mishpatim' in 24:3-4?

How does this explain who the 'kohanim' are in 19:21-24, and how does it explain the need for the warning in 19:20-25?

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#### PART III - PARSHANUT TWO GROUPS OR JUST 'STYLE'

1. Review 19:3, noting how God instructs Moshe to relay his 'proposal' to both 'beit Yaakov' and 'bnei Yisrael'?

What is the obvious difficulty in this pasuk?

Are these two different groups, or two names for the same group? According to each possibility, explain **who** each group is and why the respective verb ['tomar' & 'tageid'] is used.

Then, see how Rashi understands these two groups, and the use of the respective verbs. [You probably have heard of a famous name for a girl's school based on this Rashi!]

Next, see Ibn Ezra [first the 'aroch']. Note how he answers the above questions, and how his answer is quite different than Rashi's. Note also how explains the respective use of the verbs.

Then see Ibn Ezra 'ha-katzar', noting how he first quotes Rashi, and one other opinion, and then 'smashes' them!

Note the psukim in Tehillim that he quotes to prove his point! Notice also how this commentary reflects Ibn Ezra's approach to 'pshat'.

Finally, see Chizkuni. Note how his peirush is quite different, and how he relates the two verbs to 19:4-6, i.e. one relating to a command, and the other to telling over a story. [Note how he uses the meaning of the verb to explain the noun!]

#### WHO'S SPEAKING TO WHOM?

1. Review 19:19 once again, and the phrase: "Moshe yedaber, ve-haElokim ya'anenu be-kol", in its context. Who is Moshe speaking to: to the people or to God, and what is Moshe 'saying'?

First, see how Rashbam and Ibn Ezra answer this question.

Then, see Chizkuni. In what manner is Chizkuni similar, and how is it different, than Rashbam? [Note how 'creative' Chizkuni's peirush is!]

Then, see Rashi's interpretation. How and why is his approach different than Rashbam, Chizkuni, and Ibn Ezra? Based on Part II above, what leads Rashi to his conclusion that this pasuk describes the last eight dibrot (given by God via Moshe to Bnei Yisrael)?

Finally, see Ramban, noting how he first quotes Rashi, and then disagrees. Again, based on the questions in Part II above, what leads Ramban to his conclusion. Explain how his peirush to 19:19 may be based on his understanding of 19:20-25.

2. See Rambam's explanation of Ma'amad Har Sinai in Moreh Nevuchim: Section II/ chapter 33! [See also the end of chapter 32 where he introduces chapter 33.]

Relate this to the above questions on Shmot chapter 19.

#### WHEN DID YITRO COME?

1. A 'machloket' [controversy] exists concerning when Yitro actually came to Har Sinai, BEFORE or AFTER Matan Torah.

Before seeing the commentators inside, as you study chapter 18 attempt to identify which psukim support the view that this event happened at a later time.

2. Next, review the story about Yitro at the end of Bamidbar chapter 10, as well as the story of how Moshe appointed judges when Bnei Yisrael prepared to leave Har Sinai, as recorded in Devarim 1:6-13. Do these appear to be the same story as recorded in Shmot chapter 18, or different events?

3. Then, see Ibn Ezra and Ramban (on 18:1), noting how they explain when Yitro came. How does each commentator relate to the psukim that you had noted in your original analysis?

Now, see Rashi on 18:13 - "vayehi mi-macharat". How does this interpretation form a compromise between these two opinions? Would you consider this the 'best' solution?

If so - why yes; & if not - why not?

How does Ibn Ezra explain why this story is written out of chronological order?

How does Rashi explain why part of this story is written out of chronological order?

What underlying assumptions form the basis for this three way 'machloket'?