

My Torah for Parshat Yitro focuses on the unity of the people at the moment they were to receive the Torah, and my T'fillah commentary explores the command of remembrance in the Shabbat Morning Kiddush.

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Sam Blustin

## Torah From The Holy Land Parshat Yitro

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### Torah: One Love, One Heart

*“In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai. They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the Wilderness; and Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain” (Ex 19:1-2).*

The big moment is arriving! Three months into their journey, the Israelites finally reach the foot of Mt. Sinai, and begin their preparations to receive the Torah. In the first verse, they are referred to as the “Children of Israel”, in the plural, but in the second verse, they are referred to in the singular, only as Israel. Why is this? Rashi comments that at the foot of the mountain, the people were “as one person and with one mind”. While the rest of the time, the people complained and quarreled with each other, in this moment, they united as one people.

Based upon this, Rav Sholom Brodt teaches that total ahavat Yisrael, love of Israel, is a pre-condition for receiving the Torah. This means that to fully receive the Torah that Hashem is giving us, both then and now, we must truly love every member of Israel.

When I was studying at the Conservative Yeshiva two years ago, I had the custom of busking on Ben Yehuda on Friday mornings, and the money I would earn I would give to tzedakah. More than once, I would be approached by a woman who lived in an apartment above the street, who would proceed to yell at me for playing music and disturbing her quiet. No matter what I explained, that I was there for tzedakah, that I would only be there for a short period, nothing worked, and she would inevitably threaten to call the police, despite the fact that it’s completely legal during the day. Often, I would push back for a few minutes, and then move further down the street.

One day, we were engaged in the same song and dance, but while we were talking and I was getting my things together, a man came up asking for money. I had only been going a few minutes and had only made a few shekel, so I gave him what was in my case. The woman was astounded. "He's an Arab! Why are you giving him money?," She protested. "Why should I not give to him?," I responded. "The Rabbis say that 'Kol Yisrael aravim zeh lazeh, all Israel is responsible for one another,' not all *Jews* are responsible for one another. Jew, Muslim, it doesn't matter. He's Israeli!" I responded. And as I continued packing up, she said "It's okay. You can stay here." She walked away, and I didn't see her again that year.

While the saying originally is in reference to supporting all Jews, through my own midrash, interpretation, of the text, I was able to extend love beyond my own circle, to all of 'the people of Israel'. I realized in that moment that the power of loving one's neighbor can overcome even the toughest and most stubborn of people. May we be blessed in the coming week with an open heart, in order that we may all receive the sweet blessing of the Torah.

## **T'fillah: Shabbat Morning Kiddush - Zachor et HaShabbat l'Kadsho**

*"Zachor et haShabbat l'kadsho"* - "Remember the Sabbath to make it Holy" (Ex. 20:8)

In his *Guide for the Perplexed* (Vol. II, Chapter 31), the Rambam explains that the commandment to remember the Sabbath commemorates the Sabbath of creation and the holiness that the Sabbath brings into the world. We do this through the recitation of the kiddush over a cup of wine. On Friday night, we say that kiddush is "zecher l'ma'aseh bereshit," a reminder of what was made during creation. And if we look at creation, the Torah says that "Elohim blessed the seventh day and sanctified it..." (Bereshit 2:3). Here, our Creator directly sanctified the seventh day. However, in Shabbat morning kiddush, we recite that it is *we* who sanctify Shabbat by remembering it! How can it be?

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his book *The Sabbath*, says that

"The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world."

When the Creator created the world, it created, as Heschel claims, a majestic palace in time. However, most of the week, we inhabit a world of space and productivity,

always running from one thing to another to get things done. The blessing of Shabbat is that we can step away from the treadmill and inhabit space with others, appreciating the holiness inherent in the world. This mindset, however, requires a shift in consciousness. We must consciously enter into the realm of space, and we do this by sanctifying the day ourselves, through kiddush. As we go into Shabbat, may the Holy Blessing One bless us with an awareness of the Divine in the world and with a Shabbat filled with mystery and awe.

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