

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Esther BasTziyon *bas Melech a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Healthy Souls and Sick Souls

PARSHAS YISRO 5776

All it takes is one significant event to change a life.

Dayeinu!

This, explains the great *mussar* personality R’ Chatzkel Levenstein (*Ohr Yechezkel, Emunah, pp. 37-40*) is a primary lesson of this *parshah*. Yisro had occupied a position of prominence; but he abandoned it all – prestige, family, homeland – to accept the Jewish faith. What moved him to undertake this massive transformation?

Illustrating Hashem’s attribute of *middah k’neged middah* (“measure for measure”), the Mishnah in Avos relates the following (2:6):

אף הוא ראה גלגלת אחת שצפה על פני המים. אמר על דאטפת אטפוד וסוף מטיפיה? טופון.

“(Hillel) one time saw a skull floating on the water’s surface. He declared (as if addressing the drowned victim): ‘You have been drowned on account of your having (previously) drowned (someone else); and those who drowned you, eventually will be drowned as well.’”

It was this manifestation of Hashem’s justice that was sufficient to stir Yisro. As he proclaimed: **עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־גָדוֹל ה' מִכָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי בִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עָלֵיהֶם** – “Now I know that Hashem is the greatest from all the gods, **for (the Egyptians met their downfall) through the very strategy they employed against (Yisrael)**” (*Shemos 18:11*). In other words, Yisro witnessed the fulfillment of the aforementioned Mishnah on a communal scale. As Rashi explains: the Egyptian tormentors had drowned the Jewish babies; thus, their demise came about by drowning in the Yam Suf. With this single and singular observation, Yisro turned his life completely around.

And, in truth, this is how it should be. This point is brought forth further, explains R’ Chatzkel, through the somewhat novel interpretation offered by the Alter from Kelm of the familiar “Dayeinu” hymn in the Pesach Haggadah. This composition relates the numerous miracles and benefits accrued to Yisrael through the Exodus experience and onward. After listing each item, of course, we conclude by exclaiming, “*dayeinu* – it would have been enough for us.” If Hashem would have just taken us out of Mitzrayim, and we would not have witnessed the judgments that befell our enemies, “*dayeinu* – it would have been enough for us.” If He would have just eliminated their firstborn and not have also given us the bounty of Mitzrayim, “*dayeinu* – it would have been enough for us.” The question is – it would have been enough for *what*, exactly? The conventional understanding is that the reference is to our obligation to offer thanks: Even if Hashem would have only done “this,” *it would have been enough* of a reason to offer Him praise; now that He also did “that,” we are all the more beholden to Him!

But the Alter of Kelm offers a somewhat different rendering, understanding that the reference is to our cultivation of *emunah* (faith). Thus, the hymn declares: Even if Hashem would have done only *one* of these things for us – *dayeinu!* That itself would have been reason enough for anyone to develop strong belief in His existence and power. How much more so when He has done so much for us – in Mitzrayim and in our daily lives!

Immunity

The real question is why, of all inhabitants of the world, it was only one person – Yisro – who came forth. The whole world witnessed the same phenomenon and indeed, were duly affected. The *passuk* in *Az Yashir* (the Song at the Sea) attests to the fact that the surrounding nations were terrified in the wake of the events at the Yam Suf: וְשָׁמְעוּ עַמִּים יִרְגָזוּן... נִמְגְגוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּנְעָן – “The nations heard, and trembled... All the inhabitants of Cana’an melted” (*Shemos 15:14,15*). But it was only Yisro who made actual changes in his life as a result. Why was he different?

R’ Chatzkel explains that, in fact, it was not necessarily any outstanding quality of Yisro himself that was responsible. The truth is that anyone whose soul is even minimally attuned and functional should likewise be so affected by such an event. The fact that no one followed Yisro’s example indicates that their souls were simply not “healthy.” And sadly, the same is true for too many people even today.

Interestingly enough, R’ Chatzkel had some firsthand experience in this regard. He was present during the well-publicized incident in Europe in which a *dybbuk* (disembodied spirit) entered the body of a young girl. The Chafetz Chaim dispatched R’ Elchanan Wasserman to exorcise the spirit. R’ Elchanan commanded the spirit to leave in the name of the Chafetz Chaim. The girl fainted, the sound of a departing breath was heard, and the girl awoke in perfect health. The *dybbuk* had been chased away.

R’ Chatzkel was so excited by the event that he did not sleep the entire night. He was certain that as a result of witnessing such a wonder, the whole world would be completely transformed.

But what R’ Chatzkel discovered the next day came as a true disappointment. Of course, the event was the talk of the town... but that’s all it was. People were trading stories, embellishing some details (“the window smashed as the *dybbuk* departed”)... but the massive spiritual transformation he had been expecting never materialized. Even in the face of such an open display of Torah’s power, people remained entrenched in their habits (*B’mechitzasam, vol. III, p. 147*).

Thus R’ Chatzkel would exhort his listeners to perfect their characters and refine their souls. What Yisro demonstrates is that anyone who makes even a single, significant observation of Hashem’s power – of which numerous examples abound on a daily basis – should be automatically influenced to rectify his behavior in meaningful ways. If this does not happen, it is simply (and sadly) a sign that his soul is not “well”; otherwise, he would be much more receptive to the unlimited displays of Hashem’s Presence in the world.