

# ALSHICH

## INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר שמות

פרשת יתרו

SERIES 1: ISSUE 17

## YISRO HEARS HASHEM'S MESSAGE AND JOINS THE JEWISH PEOPLE

### Chapter 18

1) *Yisro, the priest of Midian, Moshe's father-in-law, heard everything God (Elokim) had done for Moshe and Yisrael, His people – that Hashem (יהוה) had brought the Jewish people out of Egypt.*

א) וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ כִּי־הוֹצִיא ה' אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם.

2) *Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, took Tzipporah, Moshe's wife, after [Moshe] had sent her away.*

ב) וַיִּקַּח יִתְרוֹ חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה אֶת־צִפּוֹרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אַחֵר שְׁלוּחָהּ.

### Consider the following questions:

1. The *Mechilta* on this passage tells us that Moshe's father-in-law had other names and that he was not given the name Yisro until after he converted. If so, how can the Torah say (verse 1) that *Yisro ... heard*, when at this point he had just joined the Jewish people in the desert and had yet to convert?
2. Having used the elevated name of Yisro, how could the Torah then go to the other extreme and call him *the priest of Midian*, which was a role that involved worshipping *avodah zarah*?
3. Why does it need to describe him again as *Moshe's father-in law*? We knew this already.
4. In verse 1, Yisro is described both as the priest of Midian and as Moshe's father-in-law, while in the verse 2 he is described only as Moshe's father-in-law. Why is this?

Through the opening words of the *parashah*, the Torah is teaching us that the way a person can follow the path of Hashem and attain the highest levels of perfection is by listening deeply to the messages God sends – His words, reprimands, and life-lessons. If he does this, he is able to raise himself to higher and higher spiritual levels. This is what the Torah means when it says, *Yisro ... heard*: by paying attention to God's message [starting from the remarkable events of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*], he drew closer to Hashem step by step, until he reached such a level of perfection that he became *Yisro*, even though he had not formally received this name yet. **[This answers Question 1.]**

The Torah is also teaching us the great benefit of being close to a *tzaddik*. Countless people heard about the splitting of *Yam Suf*. For example, in Yericho, Rachav told the spies that Yehoshua sent (*Yehoshua 2:10*), "We have heard how Hashem made the waters of the Yam Suf run dry

before you.” In fact, *Shemos Rabbah* 21:6 tells us that the whole world became aware of the Splitting of the Sea, since all the water sources in the world split as well. If so, how is it that those gentiles who were not dedicated to idolatry failed to internalize the message of *Yam Suf* and convert, yet Yisro – a priest of *avodah zarah* – did hear the message? This was only because Yisro was attached to a *tzaddik*, Moshe Rabbeinu. The opening verse of our *parashah* should thus be understood as follows: *Yisro* listened so attentively to Hashem’s message that he ultimately merited the name *Yisro*; even though he had been *the priest of Midian*, a cleric of *avodah zarah*, he heard the message more than other non-Jews who were less devoted to idols because he was *Moshe’s father-in-law*. By connecting himself to Moshe, he became attached to Hashem – because the connection to Moshe led him to listen deeply to *everything God had done for Moshe and Yisrael, His people*. **[This answers Questions 2 and 3.]**

We can also interpret the first verse in a slightly different way. It was possible to suspect that *Yisro’s* concern had originally been only to return his daughter and her children to Moshe, but he decided to convert when he saw the Jewish people in all their grandeur, surrounded by the Clouds of Glory and accompanied by the miraculous well of water, with his son-in-law as their king. By telling us, *Yisro, the priest of Midian ... heard everything God had done for Moshe and Yisrael*, the Torah is saying that at the time he heard about the miracles of the Exodus, there were two aspects to his personality: he was *Yisro*, the potential Jew and, simultaneously, he was *the priest of Midian*. These two aspects were in conflict within him (as they indeed are in the heart of any gentile who appreciates the awesome and wondrous deeds of Hashem and desires to tear himself away from the vanities of his world to serve God as a Jew). But in the next verse it just says that *Yisro, Moshe’s father-in-law, took Tzipporah*, without mentioning that he was the priest of Midian. This is because by the time he decided to bring Moshe’s wife and children back to Moshe, he had already overcome this struggle and merited to be simply *Yisro*, that person on the path to becoming a perfect Jew, as explained above. He had overcome the part of himself that had been the priest of Midian. **[This answers Question 4.]**

### THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKadosh” (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

These sheets, distributed in memory of Yental *bas* Yitzchok, have been drawn from either the Alshich on Avos or Alshich on the Torah, published by Feldheim. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich’s true greatness.

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