



YITRO

THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING

Appreciating the Underlying Oneness in Everything—including You

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Yitro

Moses's father-in-law, Jethro, hears of the great miracles that G d performed for the people of Israel and comes from Midian to the Israelite camp, bringing with him Moses's wife and two sons. Jethro advises Moses to appoint a hierarchy of magistrates and judges to assist him in the task of governing and administering justice to the people.

The Children of Israel camp opposite Mount Sinai, where they are told that G d has chosen them to be His "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation." The people respond by proclaiming, "All that G d

has spoken, we shall do."

On the sixth day of the third month (Sivan), seven weeks after the Exodus, the entire nation of Israel assembles at the foot of Mount Sinai. G d descends on the mountain amid thunder, lightning, billows of smoke, and the blast of the shofar and summons Moses to ascend.

G d proclaims the Ten Commandments, commanding the people of Israel to believe in G d, not to worship idols or take G d's name in vain, to keep the Shabbat, to honor their parents, not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, and not to bear false

witness or covet another's property. The people cry out to Moses that the Revelation is too intense for them to bear, begging him to receive the Torah from G d and convey it to them.

TEXT 1A

Exodus 19:2

וַיֵּסְעוּ מֵרֶפְדִּים, וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבָּר, וַיִּחַן
שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הָהָר:

They journeyed from Rephidim, and they arrived in the desert of Sinai, and they encamped in the desert, and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain.

TEXT 1B

Rashi, ad loc.

"וַיִּחַן יִשְׂרָאֵל." כָּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב אֶחָד, אֲבָל יִשְׂאָר
כָּל הַחַנּוּיּוֹת בְּמַרְעָמוֹת וּבְמַחֲלָקֹת.

“And Israel encamped there.” The verse uses the singular form, denoting that they encamped there as one man with one heart. By contrast, all the other encampments were divided with complaints and with strife.

TEXT 2A

Talmud, Berachot 58a

תנו רבנן: הרואה אוכלוסי ישראל אומר: ברוך חכם
הרזים.

שאין דעתם דומה זה לזה ואין פרצופיהן דומים זה
לזה.

The sages taught: One who sees multitudes of Israel recites, “Blessed are you G-d . . . Who knows all secrets.”

[Why is this?] G-d sees a whole nation whose minds are unlike each other and whose faces are unlike each other.

TEXT 2B

Talmud, Sanhedrin 38a

תנו רבנן: להגיד גדולתו של מלך מלכי המלכים
הקדוש ברוך הוא, שאדם טובע כמה מטבעות בחותם
אחד וכולן דומין זה לזה, אבל הקדוש ברוך הוא טובע
כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון ואין אחד מהן דומה
לחבירו, שנאמר: "תתהפך כחומר חותם ויתיצבו כמו
לבוש" (איוב לח, יד).

The sages taught: The fact that Adam, the first man, was created alone serves to declare the greatness of the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He. For a person stamps several coins with one seal, and they are all similar to each other. But the Holy One, blessed be He, stamps all people with the seal of Adam the first man, and not one of them is similar to another. As it is stated, "It is changed like clay under the seal and they stand as a garment" (Job 38:14).

QUESTION

If people really are so different, why were the Jewish people expected to be “as one” before receiving the Torah? Come to think of it, how was it even possible?

TEXT 3

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
21, pp. 103–104*

שטעלט זיך די שאלה: די הכנה נפשית און דער רצון
און הכנה צו מתן תורה איז דאך בא יעדן אידן געווען
לפי מדריגתו ומצבו הרוחני — אנדערש ווי ביים
צווייטן אידן . . . לפי זה, האט דאך אויך דא געדארפט
שטיין "ויחנו שם ישראל (נגד ההר)" — בלשון
רבים?

The question is: Every Jew underwent an internal process to prepare themselves to receive the Torah. Naturally, each person underwent this process according to their individual nature, unique from anyone else. . . . Accordingly, shouldn't the verse have stated, "And they encamped at the foot of the mountain" in the plural form?

TEXT 4A

Exodus 14:10

וּפָרַעְהָהּ הִקְרִיב, וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲגִהוּ
מִצָּרִים נֹסַע אַחֲרֵיהֶם. וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד, וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶל ה':

Pharaoh drew near, and the Children of Israel
lifted up their eyes, and behold! The
Egyptians were advancing after them. They
were very frightened, and the Children of
Israel cried out to G-d.

TEXT 4B

Rashi, ad loc.

"נוסע אחריהם". בלב אחד כאיש אחד.

“The Egyptians were advancing after them.”
The Hebrew word “נסע — traveling” is written in the singular to teach us that the Egyptians chased the Jews with one heart, like one person.

For any typical person, including Egyptians, the “heart,” the cause, comes first, and the “one person” unity comes afterward. The Jewish people are unique in that what comes first is the “one person” reality, and only after that comes a shared “heart.”



TEXT 5

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 21, p. 104*

דאס איז אויך דער שינוי והפרש צווישן דעם "בלב
אחד כאיש אחד" בא די מצרים און דעם "כאיש אחד
בלב אחד" פון אידן:

בא מצרים איז זייער ווערן "כאיש אחד" געקומען אלס
מסובב פון דעם "בלב אחד" אין דעם "נוסע אחריהם",
נאך אידן, אבער זיי אליין אלס "מצרים" זיינען ניט
געווען אלע ווי איינס . . . מה שאין כן בפרשתנו איז
ביי אידן די אחדות ("כאיש אחד") געווען מצד דעם
גופא וואס זיי זיינען אידן — "כאיש אחד".

This is the difference between the “one heart as one people” of the Egyptians and the “as one people with one heart” of the Jews.

For the Egyptians, the fact that they came together as “one person” was a symptom of their “shared heart” in the cause of chasing after the Jews. But as an Egyptian people, they were not “as one” at all. . . . By contrast, in our *parshah*, when speaking about the Jewish people, the unity of “like one person” is a result of the very fact that we are Jews, “one person.”

As much as we humans try to rationalize and predict how the natural world works, we can't really figure out any unifying idea to make it all make sense. The conclusion we're inevitably forced to face is that the universe is inherently fragmented.



TEXT 6

*Rabbi Avraham
Borenstein of Sochatchov,
cited in Maayanah Shel
Torah [Rabbi Alexander
Zusia Friedman, 1937],
Exodus 14:10*

ומה שכתב רש"י "בלב אחד כאיש אחד", ואילו אצל
בני ישראל נאמר להיפך, "כאיש אחד בלב אחד",
משום שבני ישראל הם בעצם כאיש אחד בשורשם,
וחסר רק שיהיה להם גם רצון אחד ולב אחד.

ולעומת זה אומות העולם הן מפוצלות משורשן, רק לב
אחד ורצון אחד להשיג דבר מסוים עשוי לעשותן
כאיש אחד.

With regard to the Egyptians, Rashi writes
“with one heart as one person,” whereas with
regard to the Jewish people, Rashi phrases it
in the opposite way, “As one person with one
heart.”

Why?

Because the Jewish people are inherently one
people at their source; the only thing missing
is for them to actualize that in their hearts
and desires. By contrast, the nations of the
world are inherently fragmented, and it is
only a mutual goal or desire to achieve
something that can bring them together as
one.

TEXT 7

In Esther Salaman, “A Talk with Einstein,” the listener (British broadcasting corporation), Vol. 54 (1955)

I want to know how G-d created this world. I'm not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know His thoughts; the rest are just details.

TEXT 8

Corey S. Powell, “Relativity versus Quantum Mechanics: The Battle for the Universe,” The Guardian, Wednesday, 4 November, 2015

It is the biggest of problems, it is the smallest of problems. At present physicists have two separate rulebooks explaining how nature works. There is general relativity, which beautifully accounts for gravity and all of the things it dominates: orbiting planets, colliding galaxies; the dynamics of the expanding universe as a whole. That’s big. Then there is quantum mechanics, which handles the other three forces—electromagnetism and the two nuclear forces. Quantum theory is extremely adept at describing what happens when a uranium atom decays, or when individual particles of light hit a solar cell. That’s small.

Now for the problem: Relativity and quantum mechanics are fundamentally different theories that have different formulations. It is not just a matter of scientific terminology; it is a clash of genuinely incompatible descriptions of reality.

The conflict between the two halves of physics has been brewing for more than a century—sparked by a pair of 1905 papers by Einstein.

TEXT 9

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, Tanya, Likutei
Amarim, ch. 33*

תחתונים, שֶׁהֵם בְּחִינַת עֲשִׂיָּה גִשְׁמִית מִמַּשׁ. וְזֶהוּ
שֶׁכָּתוּב "בְּעֲשָׂיו" לְשׁוֹן רַבִּים, שֶׁהוּא עוֹלָם הַזֶּה הַגִּשְׁמִי
הַמָּלֵא קַלְפוֹת וְסִטְרָא אַחְרָא, שֶׁנִּקְרָא רִשּׁוֹת הָרַבִּים
וְטוֹרֵי דְכְּרוּדָא.

This physical universe is the lowest of all of creation, about which it is stated, “G-d’s creations” (Psalms 149:2) in the plural form, for this physical world is full of negative forces that are called the “public domain” and the “mountains of division.”

Chasidut explains that true *achdut*, true unity, can only come from G-d. There are small manifestations of that *achdut* in this world, but the world on its own is inherently fragmented. That's why we just can't seem to make sense of it yet.



TEXT 10

*Rabbi Menachem Mendel
of Lubavitch, Derech
Mitzvotcha, Achdut
Hashem, p. 60b*

והנה הבנת ענין זה ומה שכיוונו בזה עמוק עמוק הוא,
ויש בו כמה פנים ופנים לפנים, וכל חד מבין לפום
שיעורא דיליה . . .

רק שמתחלה צריך לבאר הפנים הנגלים בזה, והוא,
שכוונת הזהר על פי פשוט וכן הוא כוונת הרמב"ם,
שהגם שכבר ידענו שה' יתברך אחד בעצמותו פשוט
בתכלית הפשיטות ממצוה שנתבאר בהאמנת אלוקות,
באה המצות היחוד לידע שאין עוד אלוקה חס ושלום,
ואין לשום אחד מהנמצאים שום שלטון חס ושלום
זולתו, כי כולם פועלים ברצונו ובמצותו, ובכח שהוא
יתברך מאיר ושופע להם.

נמצא שהוא אלוקה אחד ואין עוד.

Understanding the idea of G-d's unity and what exactly the *Zohar* and other books mean when they speak of such matters is very deep, and there are many different ways of understanding it—each person according to their understanding . . .

But first, let's explain the concept on the most basic level in Halachah. The *Zohar* references this basic understanding, as does Maimonides, and it goes like this: There is already another mitzvah to believe in G-d, which includes the belief that G-d is completely without form. But this mitzvah of unity adds to that, enjoining us to believe that there is no other god, and nothing in creation has any agency aside from G-d. Everything exists and functions as a product of G-d's will and instruction, which is credited to the fact that G-d energizes and animates it.

It turns out that there is nothing else other than G-d.

TEXT 11

Rashi, Genesis 1:1

בשביל התורה שנקראת "ראשית דרכו" (משלי ח,
כב), ובשביל ישראל שנקראו "ראשית תבואתו"
(ירמיה ב, ג).

G-d created the world for the sake of the Torah, which is called "the beginning of His way" (Proverbs 8:22), and for the sake of Israel, who are called "the first of His grain" (Jeremiah 2:3).

TEXT 12

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 21, pp. 106–107*

דער ענין האחדות אין וועלט איז פארבונדן מיט דעם גילוי פון
בוראו האחד — ה' אחד, וואס איז העכער פון וועלט . . .

דער גילוי פון ה' אחד אין וועלט טוט זיך אויף דורך צוויי זאכן
וועלכע זיינען העכער פון וועלט — תורה און ישראל, און
וואס צוליב זיי איז באשאפן געווארן די וועלט . . .

די אחדות איז געקומען מצד די אידן גופא — מצד בחינת
יחידה פון דער אידישער נשמה, וואס איז העכער פאר טעם
ודעת (וואס דעותיהן אין שוות) . . . האט דאס געוירקט און
גע'פועלט' דעם "ויחן שם ישראל — כאיש אחד".

און דאס גופא, וואס זיי זיינען געשטאנען "כאיש אחד", מצד
דעם גילוי פון נקודת היהדות, האט ביי זיי דערוועקט דעם
רצון ותשוקה צו קבלת התורה — "בלב אחד" . . .

אבער . . . ביי ניט-אידן איז ניט שייך דער אופן פון התאחדות
אמיתית מצד עצמם ("כאיש אחד") און ס'איז ניט מער ווי א
תוצאה ומסובב פון דער שנאה "בלב אחד". מה שאין כן ביי
אידן, וואס נקודת היהדות איז זייער אמת'ע מציאות, ווערט
דורכדעם אויפגעטאן א התאחדות גמורה — "כאיש אחד".

The idea of unity in this world is connected with the
manifestation of the One, Unified G-d Who
transcends this world. . . .

That G-d's unity manifests in this world is credited
to two things that, in reality, transcend this world—
the Torah and the Jewish people, for whom the
world was created.

The unity of the Jewish people came about as a
direct result of the very nature of the Jew, from the
essence of their Jewish soul that transcends reason
(where differences occur). . . . This was able to
influence and effect that "the Jewish people camped
there as one person."

And then, the very fact that they had stood "as one
people" (due to the interconnected part of their soul)
thereafter awakened the desire and passion to
receive the Torah—"with one heart." . . .

However, with non-Jews, this type of intrinsic unity
is impossible (the "one person"), rather it can only be
the symptom of a shared hatred, as "one heart." But
for a Jew, whose core Jewish soul is their true
identity, true unity is possible, "as one person."

TEXT 13

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Torat
Menachem 5727:2
(49), pp. 177–178*

כיצד ניתן לאחד יהודים, שלא יהיה ביניהם פירוד הלבבות וריחוק, ועל אחת כמה וכמה שלא תהיה מלחמה איש ברעהו ושנאת איש באחיו — הנה כל העצות שמחפשים בשביל זה, כל התכניות, המפלגות והרעיונות ("אלע פראגראמען, פארטייען און אידיאלן") וכו' וכו', אין ביכלתן לבטל את השינוי שישנו ממדינה למדינה, ושינוי הדעות שבין נפש לנפש? . . .

הדבר היחידי שמאחד את בני ישראל, ללא חילוקי זמן ומקום, הוא — "נגד ההר", היינו, כשמרגישים שעומדים אצל הר סיני ומקבלים את התורה, שאז בטלים כל המחיצות, כל הטענות וכל המחלוקות, ונעשה "ויחן" לשון יחיד . . .

וטעם הדבר — לפי שאין אחדות בעולם מלבד בענין שגלוק מאחדות הפשוטה, שזהו הקדוש ברוך הוא, אשר, "אנא נפשי כתבית יהבית", שהכניס ומסר את עצמו לבני ישראל על ידי תורתו ומצוותיה, עליהם נאמר "וחי בהם", היינו, שבזה חי יהודי ("דערמיט לעבט א איד").

How is it possible to unite Jews, to prevent discord, distance, and, of course, to prevent any animosity and fights? All the solutions pursued thus far, all the plans, the parties, the big ideas—none of them are able to dissolve the differences that exist between cultures, countries, and people!

The only thing that can unite the Jewish people regardless of time and space is “opposite the mountain,” namely the feeling that we’re standing at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. At that point, the walls come down, all disagreement and litigation dissolve, and we become as one. The reason for this is that unity only flows from something that extends from the unity of G-d Himself. G-d invested Himself into the holy Torah and its mitzvot, thereby investing Himself into the Jewish nation. This is what a Jew lives with.

One answer is that the Jewish people cannot be torn apart. We are bound up with the unity of G-d Himself, inherently and intrinsically attached to one another with a bond that doesn't have to make any sense.



We can always reflect on our Jewish unity, on the common bond that connects us as one family with one soul. When we're stuck somewhere and a fellow Jew instantly attaches to us, we can feel the "*Hakhel* moment" right there.



KEY POINTS

1. The Jewish people achieved complete unity as they prepared to receive the Torah, so much so that they were as “one people with one heart.”
2. The Egyptians, too, were of “one heart” as they chased the Jewish people at the sea.
3. Our world is inherently fragmented and divided. True unity and oneness are impossible without G-d.
4. Indeed, modern scientists have desperately tried to figure out the underlying theory behind everything in this universe. So far, they have been unsuccessful.

