



YITRO

Out of Three, One

Unity and Love Within—Not Above—Division

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.



What does it mean to “love every Jew as you love yourself”? Is that even possible?

TEXT 1

Exodus 19:2

וַיִּסְעוּ מִרֶפְיָדִים, וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְּבַר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ
בַּמְדְּבָר, וַיַּחֲנוּ שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגְדַת הַהָר.

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

TEXT 2

Rashi, ad loc.

"וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל". כָּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב
אֶחָד, אֲבָל שָׂאֵר כָּל הַחֲנִיּוֹת בְּתַרְעוּמוֹת
וּבִמְחֻלָּקוֹת.

“And Israel camped there”: as one person with one heart. However, all the other encampments were accompanied by complaints and arguments.

TEXT 3

*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of
Chanukah 4:14*

גְּדוֹל הַשְּׁלוֹם, שְׁכָל הַתּוֹרָה נִתְּנָה לַעֲשׂוֹת
שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: (מִשְׁלֵי ג, יז) "דְּרָכֶיהָ
דְּרָכֵי נֹעַם וְכָל נִתְיַבְתֶּיהָ שְׁלוֹם".

Peace is great, for the entire Torah was given to bring about peace within the world, as the verse states, “Its ways are pleasant and all its paths are peace” (Proverbs 3:17).

QUESTION

Why does the verse use the singular term “Israel camped” to describe the entire nation?

RASHI'S ANSWER

When the Jews camped at Sinai, they were in a state of unity, “as one person with one heart,” in anticipation of receiving the Torah. As the verse in Proverbs states about the Torah, “All its ways are peace.”

TEXT 4

Midrash Tehilim 12:7

לא ניתנו דברי תורה חתוכין, אלא כל דבר ודבר שהיה הקדוש ברוך הוא אומר למשה - היה אומר מ"ט פנים טהור ומ"ט פנים טמא.

אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם! עד מתי נעמוד על בירורה של הלכה? אמר לו: "אחרי רבים להטות". רבו המטמאין – טמא, רבו המטהרין – טהור.

The words of Torah were not stated definitively. Rather, for every law that G-d taught Moses, He presented forty-nine paths in which the ruling is “it is pure,” and forty-nine paths in which the ruling is “it is impure.”

Moses said to G-d, “Master of the universe! How will we ever render a definitive ruling?” G-d said to him, “Follow the majority’ (Exodus 23:2). If the majority rules that it is impure, rule that it is impure. If the majority rules that it is pure, rule that it is pure.”

TEXT 5

Exodus 19:1

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְיֵצֵאת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ
מִדְבַר סִינַי.

In the third month of the Children of Israel's departure from Egypt, on this day, they arrived in the desert of Sinai.

TEXT 6

Talmud, Shabbat 88a

בְּרִידָה בְּחֶמְנָא דִּיהַב אֲוֹרֵיָאן תְּלִיתָאִי,
לְעַם תְּלִיתָאִי, עַל יְדֵי תְּלִיתָאִי, בְּיוֹם
תְּלִיתָאִי, בְּיָרְחָא תְּלִיתָאִי.

Blessed is the Merciful One, Who gave a threefold Torah to a threefold nation, by means of a thirdborn, on the third day, in the third month.

QUESTIONS

How can the Torah be the harbinger of peace when it is the most argument filled document known to reality and we resort to the majority rule in order to come to any definitive conclusion?

The Talmud associates the Giving of the Torah with the number three. If the Torah is the epitome unity, shouldn't it be associated with the number one?

TEXT 7

*Sifra, Baraita DeRabbi
Yishma'el*

בשלוש עשרה מידות התורה נדרשת . . .

יג. וכן שני כתובין המכחישין זה את זה, עד שיבוא
הכתוב השלישי ויכריע ביניהן.

The Torah is expounded by means of
thirteen rules. . . .

13. When two verses contradict each other,
the meaning can be determined by a third
verse that reconciles them.



The Categories of Unity

- “One” is a simple unity, preceding any division or strife, and barring all other existence.
- “Three” is the unity that arises from the unification of two entities into a single, more sophisticated entity.

TEXT 8

Exodus 19:20

וַיֵּרֶד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי אֶל
רֹאשׁ הַהָר.

G-d descended upon Mount Sinai, to the peak of the mountain.

TEXT 9

Exodus 20:19

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה, כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל, אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם כִּי מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם
דִּבַּרְתִּי עִמָּכֶם.

G-d said to Moses, “So shall you say to the Children of Israel: ‘You have seen that from the heavens I have spoken with you.’”

TEXT 10A

Deuteronomy 4:36

מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם הִשְׁמִיעַךָ אֶת קוֹלוֹ
לְיִסְרוֹךָ, וְעַל הָאָרֶץ הִרְאֶךָ אֶת אֲשׁוֹ
הַגְּדוֹלָהּ.

From the heavens He let you hear
His voice to instruct you, and
upon the earth He showed you His
great fire.

TEXT 10B

Rashi, Exodus 20:19

כְּבוֹדוֹ בַּשָּׁמַיִם, וְאִשּׁוֹ וְגִבּוֹרָתוֹ
עַל הָאָרֶץ.

His glory was in Heaven; His
fire and His power were on
the earth.

TEXT 11

Talmud, Rosh Hashanah
25a

שָׁלַח לוֹ רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל: גּוֹזְרֵנִי עָלַיךָ שֶׁתֵּבֵא אֶצְלִי בְּמִקְלֶךָ וּבְמַעֲוֹתֶיךָ בְּיוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים
שֶׁחֵל לְהִיּוֹת בְּחֻשְׁבוֹנֶךָ . . .

נָטַל מִקְלוֹ וּמַעֲוֹתָיו בְּיָדוֹ, וְהֵלֵךְ לְיַבְנָה אֶצֶל רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל בְּיוֹם שֶׁחֵל יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים
לְהִיּוֹת בְּחֻשְׁבוֹנוֹ. עָמַד רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל וַיִּנְשָׁקוּ עַל רֹאשׁוֹ. אָמַר לוֹ: בּוֹא בְּשָׁלוֹם רַבִּי
וְתִלְמִידִי! רַבִּי - בְּחֻשְׁכָּה, וְתִלְמִידִי - שֶׁקִּבַּלְתָּ אֶת דְּבָרֵי.

Rabban Gamliel sent a message to Rabbi Yehoshua: “I decree against you that you must appear before me with your staff and with your money on the day on which Yom Kippur occurs according to your calculation.” . . .

Rabbi Yehoshua took his staff and his money in his hand, and went to Yavneh to Rabban Gamliel on the day on which Yom Kippur occurred according to his own calculation. Upon seeing him, Rabban Gamliel stood up and kissed him on his head. He said to him, “Come in peace, my teacher and my student! You are my teacher in wisdom, and you are my student, as you accepted my statement.”

A final Halachic ruling is a thing of unity, not a power play comprised of winners and losers.



ANSWER

A Halachic ruling in Torah is a product of “three unity.” Even when one opinion is rejected in the final ruling, the truth of Torah is always a unanimous decision.

This is why the Torah is associated with the number “three,” and why the Torah was given in the third month, specifically.

TEXT 12

Exodus 12:41

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת
שָׁנָה, וַיְהִי בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יָצְאוּ כָּל
צְבָאוֹת ה' מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

It came to pass at the end of 430 years, and it came to pass on that very day, that all the legions of G-d went out of the land of Egypt.

TEXT 13

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 21, p. 118*

און דערנאך קומט חודש סיון — חודש השלישי — דער חודש
פון מתן תורה, וואס תורה פאראייניקט אלע אידן אין אן אופן פון
"לב אחד", אז ניט קוקנדיק אויף די חילוקי דעות פון אידן ואפילו
תרעומות ומחלוקות, מאכט תורה "שלום" צווישן די אלע דעות
החולקות, ביז עס ווערט "הושוו לב אחד" — א שלום אמיתי.

Following Nisan and Iyar comes the month of Sivan—the third month, the month of the Giving of the Torah. Torah unifies all Jews in a manner of “one heart,” namely: notwithstanding the different temperaments of different Jews, which can at times even lead to “complaints and arguments,” the Torah creates peace among these different temperaments, to the point of being “unified with one heart”—a true peace.



Sivan, the third month of the year, builds on the great revelation experienced collectively during Nissan and the individual self-reflection of Iyar.

It celebrates the unique contributions each individual provides to the Jewish nation's overall unity.

TEXT 14

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, Tanya, Likutei
Amarim, ch. 32*

הָרִי זֶה דֶּרֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְקִלָּה לָבֹא לְיַדֵּי קַיּוּם מִצְוֹת "וְאַהֲבָה לְרֵעִךָ
כָּמוֹךָ" לְכֹל נֶפֶשׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל — לְמַגְדוֹל וְעַד קָטָן. בְּשִׁגְמֵי שְׂכוּלָן
מִתְאַיְמוֹת, וְאַב אֶחָד לְכוּלָּנָה, וְלָכֵן נִקְרְאוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל "אַחִים"
מִמֶּשׁ מִצַּד שׁוֹרֵשׁ נֶפְשָׁם בְּה' אֶחָד, רַק שְׁהַגּוּפִים מְחוּלָּקִים.

There is a direct and easy path toward fulfilling the mitzvah, “Love your fellow as yourself” with regard to every Jew, great or small . . . , for in reality we are all equal, and we all have one Father. Therefore, all Jewish people are called “siblings” in the full sense of the word, for we all share a common root in the One G-d; only our bodies are distinct from each other.



True ahavas Yisrael is attainable by appreciating the quality of the soul over the body, but is best realized by souls *in* bodies.

KEY POINTS

1. The Torah is billed as a “Torah of peace whose ways are peaceful.”
2. The Jewish people were in a peaceful state of unity when receiving the Torah.
3. There are two types of unity, represented by the numbers one and three. The former is singular: exclusivity that bars all other existence; the latter is a composite unity that transforms dissent into a cohesive unit.
4. A Halachic ruling issued by a majority is considered to be the unanimous decision, notwithstanding any dissenting opinions during the proceedings.
5. While looking past the body to our common soul is an effective way to love another Jew, a greater path is to look at the soul as it is in the body and realize unity even in that place.

