

It's Like Marble Cake

Parshat Yitro's 75 p'sukim divide among its 3 p'rakim - Sh'mot 18 (27 p'sukim), 19 (25 p'sukim), 20 (23 p'sukim).

Let's pull perek 18 out of the Torah for a moment (don't worry; we'll put it back and hopefully, with greater appreciation).

Parshat B'shalach began with Bnei Yisrael leaving Mitzrayim and successfully crossing the Sea, with the pursuing Egyptians no longer in pursuit. They traveled from Yam Suf to Mara, where the bitter waters were miraculously turned sweet and drinkable. In Mara, the people had a solid introduction to the Torah they would be receiving a little more than a month later. From there, they went to Eilim. From there, they went to Midbar Sin, a.k.a. Alush, where they first received the manna and where they spent their first Shabbat. From Alush, they went to R'fidim, where they were attacked by and successfully weakened and repelled Amalek.

That's how B'shalach ends. The Torah continues (remember, we've removed perek 18) with Parshat... it might have been named Sh'lishi, with Bnei Yisrael having traveled from R'fidim and

arriving in Midbar Sinai. Then comes the prelude to Matan Torah and then the awesome Sinai experience.

Nothing seems to be missing. Events in R'fidim at the end of B'shalach to traveling from R'fidim to Sinai in our newly (and very temporarily) renamed Parshat Sh'lishi.

Okay. Now let's put perek 18 back. Yitro, a midyanite priest and father-in-law of Moshe, hears all that has happened to Bnei Yisrael and comes with Tzipora, Gershom and Eliezer to join up with Moshe and his people.

What did Yitro hear and when did he come? If he heard about the Splitting of the Sea and of the battle against Amalek (which Rashi and other commentaries say), then his coming would be chronologically correct, albeit a puzzling interruption in the sequence of the events from R'fidim to Sinai. If he also heard about Matan Torah, then this first part of Sh'mot 18 happened after Matan Torah, and it is definitely an interruption at this point in the Torah.

Again: the first part of perek 18 might have happened before Matan Torah or after it. The second part seems to be definitely after. Rashi says it was relatively way after - specifically, the day after the first Yom Kippur, four months after Matan Torah.

So we are dealing with EIN SEDER MUKDAM UMUCHAR BATORAH, the

Torah is not necessarily in chronological order.

So, what is Yitro's story doing before the episode of Matan Torah?

No doubt, there are a number of suggested reasons. Here's one.

Two to three million people were present at Har Sinai when G-d gave us the Torah. They were totally unified at that point - K'ISH ECHAD B'LEIV ECHAD- like one person with one heart. Jewish unity is very good for us as a Nation. But it has one possible missing feature. People tend to lose their personal identity in a mass of people. Especially when they are single-minded.

Comes Yitro and teaches us something very important. He was a single person. He was alone. And he made his personal journey which ended with his coming to Bnei Yisrael and joining them.

Each of us is a part of Klal Yisrael. Am Yisrael. And that is very good. But our acceptance of the Torah and our commitment to G-d and His Torah has to be both as part of the group and as an individual Jew. That's (perhaps) why the sedra begins with perek 18 and why the sedra of Matan Torah is named Yitro.

And here is something else. The story of Matan Torah, Revelation at Sinai, does not end with Parshat Yitro. Bnei

Yisrael hasn't even proclaimed the famous NAASEH V'NISHMA yet. To find those inspiring and amazing words, we need to go to the end of next week's sedra of Mishpatim. The end of the sedra. After over 50 mitzvot related to the proper functioning of Jewish society have been presented.

The bulk of Mishpatim can be seen as a continuation of the part of Yitro's story about suggesting to Moshe how the people should be judged on a day-to-day basis.

Its sort of like marble cake. Make the batter for the chocolate part of the cake, then the batter for the white part. Don't mix them together, rather put them side by side and swirl gently so they intertwine. Then bake...

The Yitro episode and all the Mishpatim are separate from the whole experience of Maamad Har Sinai and Matan Torah.

But not really separate. It is so significant how they are intertwined. And we must understand the multiple messages in the way they are presented to us in the Torah.

May we each be ZOCHEH to a continual renewal and upgrading of acceptance of Torah and Mitzvot, day after day, year after year, AD BI'AT HAGO'EL... and beyond. **PTDT**