

CHIZUK *and* IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

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Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh*

Yitro '18 edited

Yitro was an open-minded individual. In his quenchless search after spiritual truth he was willing to sample all varieties of religion. Yitro studied most every form of idolatry extant in his time and was not satisfied. When he heard what HaShem had done for His people, he was instantly won over and dramatically declared (Sh'mot 18:11) ATA YADATI! "Now I know that Hashem is the greatest of all deities, for the Egyptians, in their plot to execute Yisrael, so were they punished".

Rashi explains that the Egyptians had received their just deserts - they who had plotted to drown the Jews, were drowned themselves.

In the words of the S'forno: "G-d saved His people in the same way that the Egyptians had plotted against the Jewish People." S'forno mentions Makat B'chorot as an additional example of this principle of MIDA K'NEGED MIDA, noting that the

first-born of the Egyptians were killed - since we find that the Jewish People who were victimized are referred to as B'ni B'chori Yisrael - "My firstborn Yisrael" (Sh'mot 22,23).

Onkelos explains Yitro's claim in a similar vein, with a subtle but important difference. According to Onkelos, the Egyptians were punished in a manner that was commensurate to "that which they had thought" of doing to us. As the Gri"z (Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik zt"l) points out, Onkelos's wording: DI'CHASHIVU suggests that the Egyptians were held accountable not only for their deeds, but also for that which they had planned to do - including plans which were never implemented. The Gri"z compared this to the answer Rav Itzaleh Veloziner once gave to a question posed to him by a member of the Czarist government. The government official wanted to understand the meaning of the verse in T'hilim 117:1. The pasuk says: "Glorify Hashem all peoples, praise Him all nations. For His kindness to us is overwhelming." The minister was puzzled by the seeming disconnect between the two parts of this verse: Why should the nations be expected to praise Hashem for the kindness shewn to the Jewish People? Rav Itzaleh replied as follows: "We Jews do not

know what goes on in the inner sanctum of the ministries in Petersburg. We are not aware of all the plots hatched against the Jewish People. Only you, in the government, know the full extent of the kindness and Chesed bestowed upon the Jewish People as you witness how your plans are foiled time and time again. Therefore, when the time eventually comes, and the gentiles will honestly repent their anti-semitic past, they will be in a position to praise and glorify the Almighty for His kindness to the Jewish people, above and beyond our own ability to do so" (R'shumot Talmidim p. 248).

This idea, that nations of the world will be held accountable for their nefarious plots targeting the Jewish nation, behooves us to take note of, and appreciate, the opposite as well. Just as we are to remember those who afflicted us and were responsible for our suffering, so too must we recognize those who were instrumental in bringing about our rebuilding and return.

If the nations are castigated for working against the Jewish People then, ipso facto, they must be praised when they assist the Jewish People to realize their dreams vis a vis Eretz Yisrael.

In 2017 we celebrated the Centennial

of the Balfour Declaration. Many Jewish individuals toiled mightily to secure its passage, (especially Dr. Chaim Weizmann, future president of Medinat Yisrael), yet, we must not forget the many Christian Zionists in the British government who were ultimately responsible for its passage. They, too, prayed for a return of the Jewish People to Zion. (Someone recently described how Christian ministers in 18th century England propagated the belief in the viability of a return of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael long before the advent of the Chovevei Zion movement).

So, too, today. The recent American pronouncement that Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish State, was strongly influenced by the fervent Zionist convictions of the American evangelical movement. In his passionate talk to the Knesset, the then Vice President Pence was clearly expressing his own personal beliefs. Listen to his words:

"We stand with Israel because your cause is our cause, your values are our values, and your fight is our fight. We stand with Israel because we believe in right over wrong, in good over evil, and in liberty over tyranny... Jerusalem is Israel's capital... In the weeks ahead, our administration will advance its plan to open the United

States Embassy in Jerusalem... before the end of next year."

From Balfour to Pence!

Balfour introduced the concept of the Jewish Homeland. The current American administration is helping us reinforce the idea of Jerusalem as the historic capital of the Jewish People.

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Yet today as we ponder this past Shabbat and think of the threat to the Synagogue in Texas and its members, we realize that that the pendulum has switched direction and the US today is seeing the greatest number of anti-semitic acts in a long time. Is it not time to reconsider where we are and where we are headed?

Returning to Yitro, we must take note of the parasha's description of the process Yitro underwent. Yitro's true greatness lies in the fact that once he becomes convinced, his convictions are translated into immediate action: VAYISHMA YITRO... VAYAVO YITRO - Yitro heard - he reached his conclusions - and he promptly acted upon them setting out into the desert to come join the encampment at Sinai.

There are many Religious Zionists out

there who have "Heard" - they have clearly identified the pattern before their eyes; They have no doubt in their heart regarding the direction history is leading us - they find it difficult however to connect their own personal VAYISHMA with the next stage of VAYAVO - to them we say - BO'U HABAYTA! - it is time to take the plunge and come home!

*Ed. note: Not a plunge but a giant step up!*