

Parshat Beshalach

Man's Ability to Effect the World through Unity

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The Midrash tells us that the reason Yitro came to join Bnei Yisrael in the desert was that he heard of the splitting of the sea, and of the war with Amalek. As logical as this seems, because they were great miracles, the Midrash must have specified these to teach us that Yitro saw something in them that convinced him that Judaism was correct. It would be interesting to explore exactly what truths he saw, for now, at least, in the war with Amalek, at the end of this week's Parsha.

We know that when Shaul killed Amalek, he left over Agag, their king. Shmuel came after the battle was over, and reprimanded Shaul for not having killed Agag, and then killed Agag himself. But before he dies, Agag walks to Shmuel "*ma'adanot*." (Shmuel I 15:32) This is translated both as "in **levity**" and "in **chains**." Perhaps they are one and the same – the fact that Agag was in chains made him feel free. The approach that Amalek took to life was that everything was predetermined; nothing was left up to man to create, to change – "in chains." This, however, is the biggest freedom, for it takes away all accountability from humans for anything they do – "in levity."

When Yechezkel had his vision of the throne of Hashem, he saw an image of a man sitting on it (1:26). This is because Bnei Yisrael have the opposite worldview. Hashem has given man the power to change and effect the future, and thus we, in a certain sense, are sitting on the Throne from which the world is controlled. So the great truth that Yitro saw in Judaism is the ability of man to effect the world, above the ability of the world to effect man.

If we analyze the Parsha of the war of Amalek, we notice a very interesting undertone. Rashi explains the expression, "choose for us **men**" (Shemot 17:9) as referring to people with various kinds of attributes – strength, G-d fearing, versed in magic, etc. Additionally, from Rashi's explanation of the reason Moshe lifted his hands, it seems that some of Bnei Yisrael were not actively immersed in the battle, but rather were praying. The collaboration of so many approaches to this struggle is very telling. (In fact, according to one Rashi, Moshe was even punished for sending Yehoshua instead of taking active leadership in the war.) Perhaps the fact that such a strong message of collaboration is rampant throughout the very event that convinced Yitro of man's power in the world – comes to teach us something. Perhaps what we are learning is that Bnei Yisrael's fullest power comes from their unity. When Bnei Yisrael act with **achdut**, they have tremendous strength, and can completely prove man's significance to effect the world.