

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Parshas Yisro - Mishpotim

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Parshas Yisro is loaded with basic Torah fundamentals. The very encounter at Sinai, the Torah given to Israel, including the Ten Commandments, is related in detail in this Parsha. Yet the name of the Parsha is "Yisro". One reason may be the fact that Yisro was a convert to Yehadus, inspiring all Israel, in every generation, to approach Matan Torah, receiving the Torah, as newcomers, with new aspirations, fresh ambitions in apprehension and fulfillment.

As Rashi points out on the passage "In the third month... on this day they arrived at the wilderness of Sinai". "On this day" comes to teach us that Torah must be regarded with a freshness as if it were given this very day.

Another reason may be suggested for the choice of calling the Sidrah "Yisro". It is the fact that he strengthened Israel in their faith, saying "Now I know" about the greatness of Hashem "for the very instrument which they conspired to use against the Jewish people, was now used to punish them, measure for measure. The Egyptians had tried to drown all the male babies, their final punishment came through drowning in the sea (Sotah 11a, see Rashi).

The fact that the punishment was executed with the same method as the sinner committed the sin is testimony that the punishment was not haphazard, but the Hand of Hashem. This utterance by Yisro, thus, is paramount in faith in Hashem, the underlying foundation of all Torah.

The Mishna (Sotah ibid) elaborates on this basic concept, mentioning a long list of events based on the principle of measure for measure, regarding both punishment and reward. Following analysis of punitive items, the Mishna lists examples of rewarding measure for measure. One such example: Miriam was "waiting" watching her infant brother Moshe when he was placed in a basket at the bank of the river. This was a factor in saving his life. Decades later, when the Israelites journeyed in

the midbar, Miriam was once quarantined, the people honored her by "waiting" for her return before moving to the next encampment.

This concept of measure for measure, more profoundly, centers at the very heart of faith in the compassion of Hashem. The Creator of the world is reluctant to agonize the wrongdoer. "As I live, saith Hashem, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in the return of the wicked from his way, that he may live" (Yechezkel 33:11, quoted in Ne-ila of Yom Kippur). "Melech, the King Who wants life". Hashem wants His creation to survive and persist. However the transgression is naturally such that it brings about penalty. The iniquity is the vehicle of pain infliction. "Your evil shall castigate you, your waywardness shall chasten you" (Jeremiah 2:19).

This prophet, Jeremiah, repeats this basic principle of faith in his heartbreaking lamentations (Aicho 3:38): "It is not from the mouth of the most High that evil and good emanate". Rashi renders this statement as a question "Is it not...?" Following the preceding passage which ends with a question mark. However, Reb Yaakov of Lisa in Palgai Mayim understands the phrase as a statement, explaining that although everything emanates from Hashem, it is the nature of Hashem's creation that wickedness will result in suffering, and virtuousness will invoke blessing.

This essential principle, measure for measure, is found in Parshas Mishpotim as well.

[The two portions, Yisro and Mishpotim share in relating the historic background during the several days before the Torah was given. In Yisro, the Torah speaks mainly about the laws between man and Hashem, preceding with the historic background, whereas Parshas Mishpotim deals with the laws between man and man, and then follows with additional teachings regarding the days before giving the Torah. Commentators have regarded this unique order as indicative of the importance of the laws between man and man as equal to the laws between man and Hashem. And so after the completion of the laws of Mishpotim, the Torah shifts back to the historic days prior to coming to Sinai, which was dealt with in Parshas Yisro. It is thus of special interest

to find the principle of measure for measure in Parshas Mishpotim as well].

The Talmud teaches (Shabbos 88a) when the Israelites responded (to the offer of receiving the Torah) preceding Naaseh (we will upkeep the laws) to Nishma (we will hear), ministering angels came to each and every Jew and tied two crowns on each Jew, one corresponding to "we will do", and one corresponding to "we will hear".

Since Hashem deals with humans measure for measure, it should be pondered "wherein does the gift of crowns betoken the concept of measure for measure. One may suggest it is in the unique characteristic of royalty, that it is inherited by children, "So that he (the king) will prolong years over his kingdom, he and his sons amid Israel" (Devorim 17:20). The Midrash teaches that when the Torah was about to be given to Israel Hashem asked for a guarantee that they will upkeep it with dedication. When they responded, "Our children will be the guarantee", Hashem accepted the guarantee (Tanchuma Vayigash 2).

This guarantee earned them the crowns which stands for royalty, measure for measure. When the Torah was accepted for all generations as an "inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Devorim 33:4) which follows from generation to generation, they were rewarded the crowns which betokens royalty, which is inherited generation to generation.

Additionally, the Talmud teaches: Eved melech k'melech (Shvuos 47b), a true servant of a king is also like a king. A servant (eved) stands ready to fulfill the requests of his master even if he does not understand the reason why he is sent on this mission. When the Israelites responded NAASE, we will do, fulfill Your commands, before NISHMA, study to understand the mitzvohs, (its logic and reasoning) they became truly Avdai Hashem, servants of Hashem. Eved Melech Melech. They serve Hashem as princes, deserving of the royal crowns.

