

Parshat Yitro-2014, 5774

What does it take to move us into action?

Occasionally, we hear of tragedies occurring, and at times we hear of great and happy events unfolding. Does it move us into doing something, does it change us, or do we just go on with our lives as if nothing happened?

Moshe saw an Egyptian beating a Jewish slave. Moshe just couldn't go back into his palace drink his cup of coffee as he usually would do at this time of day. No, Moshe saw a Jew was in distress so he was emotionally moved to take action. He killed the Mitzri knowing very well that this action would cost him his luxurious lifestyle of living in the palace and he would now become a fugitive, fleeing for his life.

Yitro heard the same things that other nations heard, he heard about K'riyat Yam Suf about the Mohn and about the miraculous Well of Water. "Sham'u Amim Yir'gazun" [All nations of world heard, they were all terror stricken] (Shemot 15:14) that the G-d of Israel performed many miracles and freed the entire nation from the mighty hands of Par'oh and the Egyptian people. Many heard, but only Yitro was moved. VaYishma Yitro (18:1) and Vayavoh Yitro, Yitro came (18:5). Yitro came, some say to convert to Judaism, but above all, to express his admiration to Moshe and to the G-d of Israel.

In 1967, the greatest miracle of our generation occurred The combined Arab armies of all surrounding nations attempted to utterly destroy us, but in just 6 days the "few defeated the many", and with the help of G-d, the mighty were destroyed by the nation of HaShem. How many "Yitro's" (non Jews) came forth to convert to Judaism? Not many. How many Jews were moved by this awesome event to making Aliyah? Unfortunately, not many! How many of our people became "Ba'alei Teshuvah? True, there were some from all the above, but unfortunately, not enough!

The message in our parasha is to arouse our emotions and give vent to our feelings when something unfortunate or something great occurs, outside of our ourselves or immediate surroundings that we should get up from our comfortable chair –and do something. It does not have to mean leaving the country, it could be simply writing a check to help a family that suffered. It could be merely writing a letter of protest or a letter of encouragement, or if need be, participating in a rally of support or a rally of protest. But most important, it should change us into being a better person, a more polite and kinder, more forgiving individual. Perhaps it can move us to pledge to come a few minutes earlier to shul or leave a few moments later, give a little extra tzeddaka, or simply smile and compliment more often. If doing so, then the event has moved us and served its purpose.

A true story I recall from a colleague, a principal of a Hebrew School. Shloimy, an 11 year old student was frequently sent to the principal's office for misbehavior. Both Shloimy and the principle were quite familiar with the routine. He would just be ignored while he sat quietly in the office for a few minutes. Then, the principal would talk to him about proper behavior, cooperation with the teacher, about his future and then sent back

to class. All this had little effect upon Shloimy and he would be seen in the office just a few days later.

One day while Shloimy is receiving his usual reprimand from the principal and returns to class he seems to be a different person. He behaves, does his school work, his homework and acts far more maturely than in the past. Everyone, including his peers, his teachers and even his parents were wondering what happened to cause this change in personality. They ask the principal, “what happened in the office that one day?” But the principal himself is surprised and unable to explain it. However, in the course of recalling what transpired that day, the principal relates, that while talking to Shloimy, the phone rang. The secretary informs the principal that a parent (not Shloimy’s) is on the phone wishing to speak to him immediately. The principal tells the secretary to inform the parent that he cannot talk right now because he has “an important person” in his office and he will get back to them as soon as possible. Shloimy is sent back to class, that’s it, nothing more occurred.

However, unbeknown to the principal, Shloimy heard something that changed his life. While walking back to class the three words that repeated in his mind is that the principle referred to him as “**an important person**”. He had never in his life been called that. He thought, that if the principal thought I was an important person, then perhaps I am, and if so, I should live up to my reputation. A simple praise brought Shloime to action.