

“WHY DID GD CHOOSE US?”

This coming Tuesday, the 23rd of Shevat, is the Yahrtzeit of my father in-law, Mordechai ben Shlomo, A’H, Max Lewko. He was a man of many virtues; including, Righteousness, Compassion, Truthfulness, and above all, a man who always strived for Peace. May his memory be a blessing for all of us.

Last week, the parasha began with our leaving Mitzrayim [Egypt] but the highlight of that parasha was the miraculous splitting of the sea and the song of Moshe together with the people. The naming to that Shabbat was not from the beginning of the parasha but rather from the main theme, therefore called, “Shabbat Shira.” The highlight of this weeks parasha, is the Revelation at Mt. Sinai-and receiving the Ten Commandments. Yet, we name it Parashat Yitro, from the beginning of the parasha and not Parashat Kabbalat HaTorah. Why?

Yitro, the father in-law of Moshe Rabbeinu, introduced a “novel plan”, of establishing a hierarchical court system. Undoubtedly, this was a valuable innovation. However, the Or HaChayim [R’ Chaim ben Moshe Attar, 1743] writes that Yitro’s idea was not novel at all. The idea of the efficiency of a division of labor and the practicality of implementing a hierarchical court system is something that we would have figured out on our own, without Yitro. However, HaShem wanted to send us a message to our people of that generation and of all future generations that Chachma [wisdom] DOES exist among the nations of the world and that there are many wise gentiles in the world. Chazal state, “If you are told that there is wisdom within the gentiles, -believe him” [Eicha Rabba 2:17]. The lesson is that we Jews should NOT think that HaShem chose us because we are the wisest of all nations. We are NOT the only nation to whom HaShem chose to give the Torah because we have a higher IQ than non-Jews. The reason why the incident with Yitro is the introduction to Kabbalat HaTorah, according to Or HaChayim, is to teach this lesson.

Why indeed then were we chosen? We were chosen because of HaShem’s love for our forefathers. It was because of the merit of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Surely, they may have been wise, but that is not what the Ribbono Shel-Olam valued in them. He valued the Chesed [kindness] of Avraham, the Gevurah [spiritual strength] of Yitzchak, and the attribute of Emet [truth] in Yaakov. And above all, Gd valued their commitment to pass on these valued attributes to their descendents. That is why ‘He Chose us from all the nations’.

Our chosen-ness has nothing to do with brains. It has to do with Midot, [character traits]. At the end of the day, this is what we are all about. The central challenge to us is working on our personal Midot. The Vilna Gaon said, the reason we are here in this world is to improve a Midah which we have thus far not perfected. Therefore, we must always work on this, for if we do not improve our Midot while we are here, what is the purpose of life? We must instill this concept in our children and grandchildren that bringing home a Report Card with all “A’s” on academic subjects will bring them a reward, but getting all “A’s” on the Midot side will bring even a greater reward.

Shabbat Shalom, From Deerfield Beach, Rabbi Aharon Ziegler