



# Shine a Light

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**As we lead up to the *parsha* of *matan Torah* there couldn't be a greater contrast between the end of last week's *sedra* and the beginning of this week's. Last week we encountered our national nemesis Amalek for the first time and this week we meet the first ever convert to join the *Bnei Yisrael*, after whom the *parsha* is named.**

Both of them heard about *yetzias mitzrayim* but they responded in different ways. Amalek sought to rid the world of the Jewish problem, but Yisro decided to join the *Bnei Yisrael* and become a part of the *mamleches kohanim ve goy kadosh*. What is interesting to note is that once he had become a part of the nation he does not remain a passive bystander. He sees a problem and suggests a practical solution. Moshe Rabbeinu, overwhelmed with the responsibilities of leading millions of people is unable to cope with the workload. This is all the more fascinating given the fact that the Torah had not even been given yet, so the scope of Moshe's Rabbinical duties were essentially limited to the Seven Noachide laws, *Hilchos Shabbos* and *milah*. Nonetheless, the scope of these duties meant that Moshe was busy from morning until evening with streams of people seeking his counsel.

Upon making his revolutionary suggestion of delegation of responsibilities, Yisro uses an unusual term, *vehizharta eshem* (Shemos 18:20). This double term is not used anywhere else in the Torah and it carries with it a special meaning. Rav Hirsh explains that the root *והר* can mean to warn and also to shine brightly. In this case it therefore

denotes shedding light on something for someone, which otherwise he would not have seen or noticed. The double term here refers to causing light to fall on an object and to cause that object to cause the rays to reach the eyes of men.

In our *pasuk* the term *vehizharta* means to cause the statutes and teachings to shine clearly and brightly before their eyes. Yisro tells Moshe to make the statues so important in people's eyes that they guard themselves against transgressing against them. It is Moshe's responsibility to inform them of the importance of the *mitzvos* and to then implement a system that will enable proper observance.

Perhaps one reason why the *parsha* of *matan Torah* is named after Yisro is because this idea is of paramount importance with regard to *kabalas hatorah* and passing on the *mesorah* to the next generation.

The Pieczna Rebbe zt"l Hy"d writes in the introduction to his classic work, *chovos hatalmidim* that the goal of *chinuch* is not simply to create compliant, obedient students. Rather, 'The most important thing is for the student to understand that he himself is his own most basic and important educator.' He continues

to explain that it is the responsibility of the educator to instil in the student the duty that he carries, to raise and educate himself as a Jew. The role of the parent and teacher is to teach the student how to come to his own realisation of the truth of Torah and how to live with the *dvar Hashem*. When the student comes to this realisation, not only does he 'own' his *yiddishkeit*, but he also greatly appreciates the help that he receives from his elders.

Perhaps this idea is also hinted to in the *pesukim* after the great events of *maamad har Sinai*. After Hashem has revealed Himself to the entire nation, He tells Moshe to "So shall you say to the children of Israel, You have seen that from the heavens I have spoken with you." (Shemos 20:19). Moshe is effectively telling the *Bnei Yisrael*, 'Don't believe me because I say so, believe me because you saw it.'

Yisro and Amalek both hear about the same events. Yisro, the truth seeker is open minded enough to cast away his preconceived notions and embrace the truth, making it his own and even enhancing the way that *Klal Yisrael* functions. Amalek, by way of contrast, prefers to sow the seeds of doubt, by doing everything possible to obscure the truth and those who stand for it.

Perhaps the fact that the *parsha* of *matan Torah* is named after Yisro is to teach us that *kabalas hatorah* is a process that requires our own input, rather than something that we can expect to happen automatically.

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