

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Yisro 5785

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Who was Yisro and what is with his name?

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן חֵתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ כִּי-
הוֹצִיא ה' אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

“And Yisro, priest of Midyan, father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that the Lord did for Moshe and for Yisroel, his people; because Hashem took out Yisroel from Egypt.” (Shmos 18:1).

The Torah refers to Yisro fourteen times, in this parsha, and twelve of them it calls him Moshe’s father-in-law. When Bnei Yisroel are going to travel away from Har Sinai, the pasuk says, “And Moshe said to Chovav son of Reuel, the Midianite, father-in-law of Moshe, ‘We are about to travel to the place that Hashem will give us...’” (Bamidbar 10:29). Who was Moshe talking to? Was it his father-in-law or the son of his father-in-law? Also, that narrative does not say whether or not that person left or stayed. Also, why does the Torah constantly refer to Yisro as Moshe’s father-in-law?

Yisro is first called Reuel, when Moshe helps his daughters out by the well. “And they came to Reuel, their father.” (Shmos 2:18). We know this is Yisro because the Torah says, “And Moshe consented to remain and settled with the man, and he gave Tzipora, his daughter, to Moshe.” (Ibid 2:21). That man, Reuel was Moshe’s father-in-law. And since Moshe is not recorded having any other wife, his is Moshe’s only father-in-law. However, Reuel’s name quickly changes.

“And Moshe was a shepherd to the flock of his father-in-law, Yisro, the priest of Midyan.” (Ibid 3:1). This is not the first time the Torah calls him the priest of Midyan. “And the priest of Midyan had seven daughters...” (Ibid 2:15). They came to draw water and Moshe saved them. Thus, Reuel changed his name to Yeser when he became the priest of Midyan. “And Moshe went and then he returned to Yeser, his father-in-law...and Yisro said to Moshe...” (Ibid 4:18). Within the same pasuk his name changes. This is based on the passage of time. Moshe married Reuel’s daughter, then he spoke to Hashem on Har Sinai and returned to the priest, Yeser, and when he left to help Bnei Yisroel, his father-in-law was Yisro.

Who is Chovav? According to Misrash, Chovav is Yisro because of the pasuk, “the Kenites, from the sons of Chovav, father-in-law of Moshe.” (Shoftim 4:11). (Sifrei Bamidbar 78). It says that Reuel was Yisro’s father and his daughters called their grandfather, father, which is not uncommon in the Torah. However, the Navi also calls Yisro, Keini. (Shoftim 1:16). Therefore, the pasuk in Bamidbar is, “Moshe said to Chovav.” The pasuk explains that he is “son of Reuel, Moshe’s father-in-law.” It is odd linguistics to say Moshe spoke to X who was Moshe’s father-in-law. It would say, he spoke to X who was his father-in-law. Thus, he spoke to X who was the son of Moshe’s father-in-law,

makes linguistic sense. He spoke to Chovav, his brother-in-law. The pasuk in Shoftim reads: "Chever the Kenite fell off from the Kenites, from the descendants of Chovav, Moshe's brother-in-law." The word "chosno" in Shoftim means brother-in-law as the Torah has no other word for that relationship. Further, since Keini is Yisro (Shoftim 1:16), the pasuk means Chever the Kenite fell off from Keini (Moshe's father-in-law), from the sons of Chovav – Moshe's brother-in-law. Further, the pasuk in Bamidbar calls Reuel the Midianite, while Chovav is called the Keini. Moshe's father-in-law was the Midianite. His brother-in-law the Kenite.

We learn from this that both Yisro and his son visited Moshe in the wilderness. They came before Bnei Yisroel reached Har Sinai and stayed while they camped there waiting for the Torah. "And Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, came, and his children, and his wife, to Moshe, to the wilderness." (Ibid 18:5). "His children" seemingly refers to Moshe's children. However, the pesukim before say that Yisro took Moshe's wife and *her* two children. The "his children" apparently means that Yisro came with: his son Chovav, and grandchildren, Gershom and Eliezer. Yisro then left before the Torah was given. "And Moshe sent his father-in-law, and he went his way to his land." (Shmos 18:27). Chovav, Moshe's brother-in-law, was still with Moshe in the wilderness after the year spent at Har Sinai and Bnei Yisroel was about to depart to go toward Eretz Canaan. Moshe asked Chovav to stay with Bnei Yisroel. Chovav declined and said he will go to his birthplace. (Bamidbar 10:30). Moshe asks him to stay and be there guide (ibid 10:31-32) and there is no response. Did he stay or did he go?

And Moshe sent his father-in-law. The Torah uses "es" meaning the proper noun. Who is included in his father-in-law? It means Chovav, too. "And he went for himself, to his land" refers to Moshe. What is the extra word "lo" for himself? Chovav must have departed despite the offer from Moshe. Thus, Moshe ended up sending his father-in-law and his brother-in-law—at two different times—and he went himself toward his promised land, Eretz Canaan.

It is also possible that Yisro is Esav's son Reuel. (Bereishis 36:10). He would be the son of Yishmael's daughter. Yishmael took a wife from Africa. (See ibid 21:21). The Torah calls Yisro's daughter a Kushit (African) (Bamidbar 12:1). While the Torah gives the sons of Reuel (ibid 36:13) it leaves out his daughters. Later it says he had seven daughters. (Shmos 2:16). Just as Yisro changed names, it is possible that Chovav was a changed name from either Nachas, Zerach, Sehmah, or Meezeh—the grandsons of Esav from Reuel. Further, Chovav could have been the husband of one of Moshe's sisters-in-law.

He is called Yisro because it means "scout." (Bamidbar 13:2). He scouted many religions and still took a look at Hashem after committing himself to be the priest of Midyan. He changed his name when he became the priest of Midyan and when he retired—the title went with the job. The Torah calls him father-in-law of Moshe so often to show the respect Moshe had for him and honor he gave Yisro, despite having been a priest. His name changed from Reuel to Yesser to Yisro based on his job, titles, and accolades. He was later known as Keni, too, based on where he moved to. But throughout, he was Moshe's father-in-law. He took Moshe in and Moshe gave him respect.