

Parshat Yitro - What's in a Name

Rabbi Mordecai Zeitz - Rabbi Mordecai Zeitz. The message in the naming of the parshiyot. You don't have to flaunt it to really have it.

Yitro 2006

Following Kriat Yom Suf, the crossing of the Reed Sea, the Israelites appear to be truly free. Their oppressors defeated, the road is now clear for their march to the Promised Land, Canaan; AKA Israel. But there is another required stop on the itinerary of Jewish destiny and that is a famous mountain retreat. The Jews find themselves at Sinai about to bear witness to MATAN TORAH-REVELATION-the receiving of the Torah. Can you top this?

Moshe is the leader, the intermediary, the ultimate teacher of the Torah and yet the honour of being forever identified with this portion is denied him. It's given to YITRO-a pagan priest who is drawn into the Mishpacha-but still someone who pales in the presence of a 'MOSHE' and his role in teaching the Torah and creating the dynamics of Jewish history.

I kind of feel sorry for Moshe. He is known as 'MOSHE RABAINU' not only for being the conduit through which we received the Torah but 'RABAINU', the one who taught us Torah. Could you imagine the nachas he might have had knowing that on the Shabbat of the reading of the Ten Commandments, in every Synagogue, every year, throughout the world, for generations, we would be reading the portion of MOSHE? But this was not to be. Today, the Shabbat containing MATAN TORAH-- is the portion of Yitro.

In thinking about portions and names, the fact is that a majority of our truly great and lasting leaders are not used as chapter headings. The portions bear such names as Noach, Korach, Balak and even Pinchas but names of the Matriarchs and Patriarchs of Israel, Aharon, Miriam or even Yosef are not honoured with portion names. Seems unfair but there might be a message in there.

It boils down to an important lesson lending insight into human choice and motivation. The world is dependant upon human action and their numerous contributions of energy and accomplishment. What is the motivation? Well, we know, all too well, that some act for the sake of recognition. The bottom line! How large a plaque or how many times will my name be mentioned on the `kavod' list?

The deed -good or bad- is the means of my leaving a mark on society or history. I desperately crave my moment in the spotlight and the preservation of that moment with my name is more significant than the deed itself. The Olympics is a perfect example. Athletes compete- many with no chance of winning-but it's a moment in the center stage-win or end up dead last. Just to be able to say: I was there! Anything--so as to be remembered. We know of all too many situations of people acting out because they crave some recognition. Kids do it all the time; Bigger kids often cause greater pain and suffering just because they want to let people know they exist.

Thankfully, there are those who do-whatever they do-- for the sake of doing. Their personal ego or even acknowledgement is not the issue. They neither want nor seek the recognition. They don't want a plaque or title because they realize what they are doing is part of their role in

history. They are here for that purpose-LEKACH NOTZARTA-for this singular act you were created. They are here to respond to this or that challenge and where possible to make a difference. No more; No less.

For the most part their names become synonymous with the deed and through talking about and being motivated by the deed, we are in fact, acknowledging, despite the anonymity, that very person. The deed is the person and that's the greatest kavod that can be bestowed upon the person--no plaques or titles needed.

When we study Torah-talk Torah-practice Torah; when we exemplify with our lifestyle the values of Torah-it is always in the presence of Moshe Rabainu. Moshe doesn't need a portion heading. The entire Torah for endless generations reverberate his name. Nothing Jewish happens without an acknowledgement of Moshe. You don't have to flaunt it to really have had it. YITRO found it, embraced it, thereby illustrating that Torah is within the reach of the ordinary person. The very title emphasizes that fact in preparation for Kabbalat Hatorah, our individual participation in the receiving of the Torah. Blessed are those who appreciate the great lessons of Parshat YITRO.

Many have suffered irreparable losses over the past few weeks. While gone physically, as long as we walk their walk, talk their talk and pursue their dreams, they maintain a wonderful and comforting presence in our lives. Moshe, in spirit and through our actions, is Chai VeKayam; May our actions always be more than mere words. May the lasting effects of our actions speak volumes about ourselves-- Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi@bethtikvah.qc.ca