

QUESTIONS ON PARASHAT YITRO

Q-1. (a) How do we know that *Yitro* (1) arrived at *Bnei Yisrael's* camp before *Matan Torah* (4 proofs)? or (2) after *Matan Torah* (4 proofs)? (3) converted from idolater to believer in *Hashem*? **(b)** (1) About which 2 events did *Yitro* hear, about what *Hashem* had done for *Bnei Yisrael*? (2) Why did *Yitro* have to hear about both events before believing *Hashem* selected *Bnei Yisrael*? **(c)** (1) What are each of *Yitro's* 7 names, and what does it signify? (2) Why was a “vav” added to his name (2 views)? **(d)** (1) When did *Moshe* start judging the people? (2) Why did *Yitro* suggest that judges be (i) *anshei chayil* (well-off men)? (ii) *yirei Elokim* (fearing *Hashem*)? (iii) *anshei emet* (truthful men)? (iv) *sonai batza* (despising money)? (3) How do we know that when *beit din* announces its decision, the litigants must stand? (4) On what weekday may a civil suit be tried (i) by *Torah* law? (ii) *mi-derabanan*? (5) (i) On what weekday may a capital case not be tried? (ii) Why? (6) What 5 capital cases must be tried by the *beit din* of 71? (*Shemot* 18:1,5,13,21-22)

A-1. (a) (1) (i) *Matan Torah* is later in chapter 20; (ii) “*Yitro* heard” that *Bnei Yisrael* left *Mitzrayim* (18:1), but not about *Matan Torah*; (iii) *Yitro* arrived right after the *Amalek* war (17:8-16), before *Matan Torah*; (iv) *Yitro* said he now knew that *Hashem* is greater than the gods for taking them from *Mitzrayim* (8:11), not mentioning *Matan Torah*; (2) (i) *Yitro* went where “*Moshe* had been camped, *Har Elokim*” (18:5) – *Bnei Yisrael* camped there for a year after *Matan Torah*; (ii) *Moshe* said, “I make known *Hashem's* statutes and laws” (8:16), given at *Matan Torah*; (iii) *Moshe* sent off *Yitro* (18:27) in the 2nd year, after *Matan Torah*; (iv) *Devarim* 1:6-7 says *Moshe* took *Yitro's* advice to appoint judges – then *Bnei Yisrael* left *Sinai* (1:13-19), after *Matan Torah* (*Ramban*). (3) *Yitro's gematria* (616) equals both “*komer haya la'avoda zara*” (idolatrous priest) and “*haTorah*”, which he accepted (*Ba'al haTurim*). **(b)** (1) (i) The *Yam Suf* splitting; (ii) *Amalek's* defeat (*Rashi*). (2) The *Yam Suf* splitting could have been *Pharaoh's* punishment for defying *Hashem*, not for *Bnei Yisrael's* benefit – *Amalek's* defeat clearly was for their benefit (*Ohr haChaim*). **(c)** (1) (i) *Yeter* – his non-Jewish name; (ii) *Yitro* – his name when he converted – the “vav” was added to signify a *parasha* being added to the *Torah* in his name when he helped *Moshe* judge *Bnei Yisrael*; (iii) *Chovav* – for loving *Hashem*; (iv) *Chaveir* – as *Hashem's* “companion”; (v) *Reu'el* – for being *Hashem's* “friend”; (vi) *Putiel* – for rejecting *avoda zara*; (vii) *Keini* – for being zealous (*kana'i*) for *Hashem* and acquiring (*kana*) *Torah*; (2) (i) When *Efron* sold *Me'arat haMachpeila* to *Avraham*, the *Torah* lessened his name by removing the *vav* (*Bereishit* 23:16), for lying to *Avraham* about giving the cave as a gift – the missing *vav* added to *Yitro's* non-Jewish name compensated for the *vav* taken from *Efron* (*Mechilta*). (ii) The *vav* represents the 6 additional names that he had (*Ba'al haTurim*). **(d)** (1) After bringing down the 2nd *luchot* on *Yom Kippur* (*Rashi*). (2) They should (i) be wealthy, not needing to flatter others or play favorites (*Rashi*). (ii) be unafraid of other people (*ibn Ezra*). (iii) inspire confidence that their word is reliable (*Rashi*). (iv) promote fairness, since they spurn improperly obtained money (*Ramban*). (3) The *Torah* says (18:3), “And *Moshe* sat to judge the people, and the people stood (*Ramban* – *Hilchot Sanhedrin* 21:3). (4) (i) Any weekday; (ii) not on *erev Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*; (5) *erev Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*; (ii) one found guilty of a capital crime must be executed the following day, which cannot be *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov* (*Hilchot Sanhedrin* 11:2-3) (6) (i) a *sheivet* seduced to *avoda zara*; (ii) a false *navi*; (iii) a *Kohen Gadol's* capital crime; (iv) an *ir nidachat* (condemned city); (v) a *sotah* subjected to drinking the bitter waters (*Hilchot Sanhedrin* 5:1).

Q-2. (a) (1) Before *Matan Torah*, to which group of people did *Moshe* talk first? (2) Why (5 views)? **(b)** The *Torah* say, “*Moshe* ascended to *Elokim*, and *Hashem* called to him” – why the change in Name? **(c)** Why is *Matan Torah's* date not stated? (*Shemot* 19:1-3)

A-2. (a) (1) *Moshe* spoke first to the women, called “*Beit Ya'akov*”, then to the men, called *Bnei Yisrael* (*Rashi*). (2) (i) Since women are obligated in *mitzvot* before men at age 12, *Moshe* prepared them first to accept the *mitzvot*; (ii) since mothers at home primarily transmit *mitzvot* to children, they came first; (iii) when *Hashem* gave the 1st *mitzvah* to *Adam*, but not to *Chava*, she sinned – He let women know their observance is as important as men's; (iv) *Moshe* wanted the women to accept the *Torah* first so they could not claim that they accepted it only to satisfy their husbands and would receive the same punishment as men for *Torah* violations; (v) women were honored first since *Bnei Yisrael* were redeemed from *Mitzrayim* due to the righteous women's merit (*Shemot Raba*). **(b)** *Moshe* ascended so *Elokim* – Who rules with strict justice, would tell *Bnei Yisrael* the *Aseret haDibrot*, but He spoke to *Moshe* in a more intimate manner, as *Hashem* (*Ramban*). **(c)** It teaches that for *talmud Torah*, no date is more important than any other – we must study *Torah* eagerly each day as if it had been given that day (*Rashi*).

Q-3. (a) Why did *Hashem* term *Bnei Yisrael* a “*mamlechet kohanim*” (kingdom of priests) – all were not *kohanim* (3 reasons)? **(b)** Instead of saying that *Moshe* spoke to (*va-yedabeir el*) *Bnei Yisrael*, why does the *Torah* say, *Moshe* “put before” (*va-yasem lifneihem*) *Bnei Yisrael* what *Hashem* had said (2 views)? **(c)** (1) Since *Moshe* presented *Hashem's* words to the *zekeinim* (elders), why did the entire nation respond? (2) When *Bnei Yisrael* said, “We will do everything *Hashem* has spoken,” why did *Moshe* need to repeat this to *Hashem* (2 views)? (*Shemot* 19:6-8)

A-3. (a) (1) At *matan Torah*, all were on a high spiritual level, worthy of eating *korbanot* – after the *cheit ha'eigel*, this privilege was withdrawn, except from *Sheivet Levi*, who did not sin; (2) *Bnei Yisrael's* role should be like *kohanim*, aloof from other nations' repulsive practices (*Mechilta*). (3) A *kohen's* role is to teach *Hashem's* words to others – *Bnei Yisrael* all are destined to teach mankind to recognize and serve Him (*Sforno*). **(b)** “Putting before them” means he (1) taught them (*Sa'adia Gaon*). (2) gave *Bnei Yisrael* a choice of whether to act as *Hashem* commanded (*Ramban*). **(c)** (1) He placed it before the *zekeinim* at an assembly of all of *Bnei Yisrael*, so *Bnei Yisrael* would consult with them – instead, *Bnei Yisrael* responded, without consulting, that they will follow *Hashem* (*Ramban*). (2) (i) To teach that a messenger sent to get a response should give the response to the sender, even if the Sender already knows the answer (*Rashi*). (ii) to praise *Bnei Yisrael* for accepting everything (*Ohr haChaim*).

Q-4. (a) (1) Why is it wrong to call the *Aseret haDibrot*, “The Ten Commandments” (2 reasons)? (2) Why did *Chazal* remove the *Aseret haDibrot* from the daily *tefila*? (b) The *Aseret haDibrot* (1) has how many letters? (2) signifying what? (3) specifies how many of the 613 *mitzvot*? (4) which 3 positive *mitzvot*? (5) 11 negative *mitzvot*? (c) Who was the first pharmacist? (d) (1) How many of the *dibrot* did *Bnei Yisrael* hear directly from *Hashem* (2 views)? (2) Why are the first 2 *dibrot* in one *parasha* (paragraph), unlike the other 8 which are separate *parshiot* (2 reasons)? (*Shemot* 20:1-14)

A-4. (a) (1) There are 613 *mitzvot* (commandments), not 10 – the Decalogue categorizes all 613 into 10 categories of *mitzvot* (*Sa’adia Gaon*). (2) The early Christians claimed that *mitzvot* like *kashrut*, *mila* and *taharat ha-mishpacha* are unnecessary, and only the 10 “commandments” must be observed; reciting the *Aseret haDibrot* had been a prominent part of the daily *avoda* in the *Beit haMikdash* and in the *tefila* after the *Churban* – *Chazal* reduced the *Aseret haDibrot*’s prominence, so *Bnei Yisrael* would recognize that all 613 *mitzvot* are equally important (*Berachot* 12a). (b) (1) 620 letters; (2) the *Aseret haDibrot* are the essence of the *Torah*’s 613 *mitzvot* and 7 *mitzvot de-rabannan* (*Mechilta*). (3) 14; (4) To (i) believe *Hashem* exists, (ii) sanctify the *Shabbat*, (iii) honor one’s parents (*Sefer haChinuch* – *Mitzvot* 25,31,33). (5) Not to (iv) believe in any divinity but *Hashem*, (v) make a graven image, (vi) bow down in idol worship, (vii) worship an idol in any other customary way, (viii) swear in vain, (ix) work on *Shabbat*, (x) murder an innocent person, (xi) commit adultery, (xii) kidnap, (xiii) bear false witness, (xiv) covet other’s belongings (*Mitzvot* 26-30,32,34-38). (c) *Hashem*, Who gave *Moshe* 2 tablets (*M. Reinstein*). (d) (1) *Bnei Yisrael* heard (i) all the *Aseret haDibrot* from *Hashem* in one utterance (*Rashi*). (ii) the 1st and 2nd *dibrot* directly from *Hashem* and the other 8 from *Moshe* (*Makkot* 24a). (2) It indicates that (i) *Bnei Yisrael* heard only these 2 directly from *Hashem*; (ii) fulfilling each one depends on fulfilling the other (*Ohr Torah*).

Q-5. (a) (1) How does one fulfill the *mitzvah* of “*Anochi Hashem ...*” (I am *Hashem ...*)? (2) Why did *Hashem* address the *Dibrot* to *Bnei Yisrael* in the plural (e.g. *atem re’item* – you have seen – 19:4), but states each *Dibra* in the singular? (b) (1) What are 4 kinds of “vain oaths”? (2) Why will *Hashem* not forgive one swearing falsely? (c) What is added by saying that observing *Shabbat* is for “you and your son and your daughter” – by saying “you,” your children, in their own right, also are commanded? (d) Why does the *mitzvah* to honor one’s parents follow the previous 4 *dibrot*? (e) How does one violate “do not murder” without physically harming someone? (f) What are 4 negative results of committing adultery? (g) How do we know that “do not steal” refers to kidnapping? (h) Why does the *Torah* prohibit us from coveting other’s possessions (2 views)? (i) Why do the monetary laws in *Parashat Mishpatim* follow the *Aseret haDibrot*? (*Shemot* 20:7-14)

A-5. (a) (1) We must know and believe that there is *Hashem* from Whom everything comes about, and that we are obligated to serve Him; (2) it is a warning that each person will be punished for not following the *mitzvot* – one should not think that *Hashem* will judge according to the majority who follow the *mitzvot*, and not punish an individual who does not follow them (*Ramban*). (b) (1) Swearing (i) that something known is not so, e.g., a marble pillar is made of gold; (ii) something known is so, e.g., a stone is a stone; (iii) to violate a *mitzvah*; (iv) to do something that he cannot do, e.g., not to sleep for 3 days in a row (*Sefer haChinuch* – *Mitzvah* 30). (2) By swearing in *Hashem*’s name, one indicates that just as *Hashem* exists, one’s words are true, with one swearing falsely denying His existence, which is unforgiveable (*ibn Ezra*). (c) Parents must ensure that their minor children, not yet obligated to observe *mitzvot*, do not violate *Shabbat* (*Rashi*). (d) Just as one must honor his “Primary Father” – *Hashem* – he must honor his parents who are partners in his creation (*Ramban*). (e) By bearing false witness, gossiping or giving harmful advice (*ibn Ezra*). (f) (1) Children will be unable to fulfill the *mitzvah* to honor their father, if they do not know who he is; (2) a person may commit incest with a sibling or other relative, since he will not be sure who they are; (3) it is *gezeila* (robbing) a man’s relationship with his wife; (4) it leads to jealousy, which can result in murder (*Sefer haChinuch* – *Mitzvah* 35). (g) Just as the bans on murder and adultery are capital offences, stealing is a capital offence, i.e., kidnapping (*Rashi*). (h) (1) Coveting someone’s possession may cause us to stop at nothing to obtain it, including theft and murder (*Mitzvah* 38); (2) recognizing that a possession is not available to us since *Hashem* has granted it to another person demonstrates our faith in *Hashem* by not desiring it (*ibn Ezra*). (i) After *Hashem* lists a person’s obligations toward his fellow human beings, e.g., not to steal or testify falsely, He explains the details of fulfilling these obligations (*Ramban*).

Q-6. (a) After banning making idols in the *Aseret haDibrot* (20:3-5), why does the *Torah* repeat the ban to make silver and gold idols (6 views)? (b) Why did the *Torah* ban (1) using metal instruments to shape the *mizbei’ach*’s (altar’s) stones? (2) the *mizbei’ach*’s ramp from having steps – i.e., to prevent immodesty when separating one’s legs – since the *kohanim* wore pants to protect their modesty (2 views)? (*Shemot* 20:20-23)

A-6. (a) This verse bans (1) making images of angels or other heavenly beings; (2) making and worshipping an image of *Hashem*; (3) cursing *Hashem*, when something bad happens – we must praise Him both for the good and the bad (*Mechilta*). (4) appointing judges (“*elohim*”) who pay for their appointments with gold or silver (*Sanhedrin* 7b). (5) creating an intermediary between *Hashem* and man (*Sefer ha-Ikarim*). (6) making an image, not for worship – only as an ornament (*Sefer haChinuch* – *Mitzvah* 39). (b) (1) Since the *mizbei’ach*’s goal was to grant forgiveness of sins and blessings of peace, using metal, which is used to make destructive weapons, was improper in its construction (*Mitzvah* 40). (2) (i) While there would be no actual immodesty, the appearance of immodesty had to be avoided (*Rashi*). (ii) if we are concerned about “shaming” stones, we certainly must avoid shaming people (*Mitzvah* 41).

Q-7. In the *haftara*, when the angels proclaim, “*Hashem* is holy, holy, holy,” why do they say “*kadosh*” (holy) 3 times? (*Yeshayahu* 6:3)

A-7. They declare that *Hashem* is *kadosh* (a) in the high heavens above; (b) on the earth; and (c) forever and to all eternity (*Targum Yonatan*).