

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 20 Shevat, 5786, corresponding to February 7, 2026.

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 288 Hz) (p. 445 S) (p. 276 Hi) (p. 394 AS)

YITRO יתרו

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis]

1. According to our Sages, Yitro came to meet Bnei Yisrael for two reasons. Firstly to convert to Judaism, and secondly, to escort Tziporah and her sons to be together again with Moshe. When Moshe led the Jewish nation out of Egypt, he was totally absorbed by the huge task of being the leader of a nation of some 2.5 million people. He didn't think of his small family that he had sent back to Midian when he arrived in Egypt over a year ago. (Oznaim LaTorah). The Talmud (Yoma) states that in order for the High Priest to represent the nation on Yom Kippur, he must be married. Similarly, for Moshe to be a monarch of this new nation, he must be married. His family is the critical anchor to his life. Kol HaKavod to Yitro for pointing this out to his son-in-law. The king needs his helpmate in order to function properly. Without them, he will become worn out very soon.

2. After seeing the judicial system that existed, Yitro saw that it was immensely difficult for one man to rule a large nation in the area of social law. He suggested to Moshe that he appoint many, many more judges to help out. After receiving the approval of the Almighty, the plan was implemented. When computed, the result was a huge number of judging. Not all of them did the actual judging. Many were assisting in conducting the business of judging and policing the business at hand. I wonder though, how many cases there were. Nobody was working or earning a living at that point of time. Without running a business, the economy of the nation was really on hold. Everyone had gold, silver, cattle, and sheep, but no need to buy or sell anything. Realizing that we are a contentious people still should not have caused so many cases to be heard!

3. There is a Rashi quoting a Midrash which states that in the desert, Jews would wake up each morning to find their clothing cleaned and pressed. So why does Hashem tell Bnei Yisrael to wash their clothes. (19:10). Maybe that's why the Yalkut Shimoni (279) writes that when the Torah states "wash their clothing," it means that they should go and immerse themselves in the Mikveh. The Malbim (and the Oznaim LaTorah) write that originally Man was created as just a soul. The body was created as the clothing to the soul. Hence it would make sense that when the Torah says to wash their clothing, it could mean the original clothing to the soul, namely the body because it is the clothing of the soul.

4. The Ibn Ezra is very wordy in his commentary on the Ten Commandments, and has some interesting comments. He writes that the Torah has a pattern. It starts with a commandment directed at the brain and heart (Believe in Hashem and No Idols), then moves to one directed at one's speech (Don't take Hashem's name in vain). Then Hashem directs itself to one's actions (Shabbat and Honoring parents.). The final 5 commandments reverses the order. Action (Don't Murder...) followed by speech ((Don't swear falsely), ending with thought (Don't desire). The Torah directs itself to the entire human being, by going Thought, Speech, Action, Action, Speech, and Thought. The idea is that we have to control ourselves fully and dedicate our entire being to the service of the Almighty.

5. The Abravanel writes that there are really more than Ten Commandments in this list. He counted at least fourteen. His premise is validated since there are four commandments within the second commandment concerning Idolatry. He states that there are Ten subjects of Mitzvot listed here. And that every one of the 613 Torah Mitzvot can be classified under one of these categories. Saadya Gaon states the same idea centuries before the Abravanel, which means that this is a common thought among commentators. [RED's note: Originally, our Sages inserted the Ten Commandments into our daily morning prayers, placing them right before the Shema. Then when the early Christian sect stated that only these Ten are important; and the others are not important, our Sages pulled the Ten Commandments out of the morning prayers. It comes to my mind that this idea could have motivated the Abravanel to state what he did. The Ten Commandments represent all 613 Mitzvot!]

6. "I am the Lord, your God, who took you out of Egypt..." (20:2). Why not "who created the Heaven and Earth"? By stating the latter clause, people could conclude that Hashem was directing these Mitzvot to the entire world. Hashem said what He did in order to make it clear that these Mitzvot are meant only for Jews. Non-Jews are obligated to do only the Seven Mitzvot of Bnei Noach and no more. A non-Jew is permitted to observe some other Mitzvot, except the Mitzvah of Shabbat and Brit Milah. Those two Mitzvot are designated by the Torah's use of the word OT, meaning that these two Mitzvot define a meaningful, loving relationship between Hashem and Am Yisrael. With the Exodus from Egypt, we were no longer slaves to Pharaoh, but we did become servants of Hashem.

7. Why does Hashem's name appear only in the first half of the Ten Commandments and does not appear in the last five Commandments of the Ten? The Chizkuni offers answers, the second one is that these first five are Mitzvot between Man and Hashem. Hence since any violation of these five are against Hashem, His name appears. The last

five are between Man and Man. Beyond Chizkuni's comments are a different message. Man should have reached the ability to establish these last five without Hashem's directives. He should not have been needed to command them. We could have concluded to legislate them on our own. The Chayei Adam mentions that all Mitzvot between Man and Man are actually more important because they also came from Hashem. Therefore in reality, all Mitzvot, including between Man and Man are also between Man and Hashem since they also came from Hashem!

8. MIDRASH. The Mechilta compares the Tenth Commandment of Don't desire something that doesn't belong to you to the Fifth Commandment of Honoring your parents. A desirous person will have children who will dishonor him. Selfishness can lead a person to overstep his bounds of proper conduct. He will put his selfish desires above all other considerations.

QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT YITRO 5786

I. From the Text

1. Whom was Yitro escorting to join Bnei Yisrael? (18:2,3)
2. The Torah never states specifically that Yitro converted. What verse in this Parshah do we see that Yitro was attracted to Judaism? (18:11)
3. What advice did Yitro give Moshe to assist in the judicial system for the nation? (18:19...)
4. What reward does the Torah say Hashem will grant you for fulfilling the Mitzvah of Honoring your parents? (20:12)
5. Why were Bnei Yisrael terrified after the Revelation of Hashem? (20:15-17)

II. From Rashi

6. What did Yitro hear regarding Bnei Yisrael? (18:1)
7. Aharon and all the Elders came to eat with Moshe's father-in-law. Where was Moshe? (18:12)
8. Hashem said that Bnei Yisrael would become a "treasure" to Him. How are we a treasure?(19:5)
9. How do we remember the Shabbat during the week? ((20:8)
10. Why does Rashi define Do Not Steal as a prohibition against kidnapping and not material objects? (20:13)

III. From the Rabbis

11. According to the Ramban, Yitro eventually returned to join Bnei Yisrael with his family. Where did he settle in Eretz Yisrael?
12. On the Mitzvah to remember the Shabbat, Rashi quotes Shammai the Elder who stated that if you see a nice food during the week, you should buy it for Shabbat. Is that the Halachah? (Ramban)

13. How can Hashem command not to desire something? (Ibn Ezra)

IV. Midrash.

14. How is the prohibition against stealing connected to the prohibition against swearing falsely? (Mechilta)

V. Haftorah. Isaiah

15. In the Haftorah, Hashem shows Isaiah a vision of the Merkavah (Holy Chariot). Where in Navi (the Books of the Prophets) do we see a more detailed vision of this Chariot?

VI. Relationships

16.
 - a) Moshe - Gershon
 - b) Moshe - Gershom
 - c) Miriam - Yefuneh
 - d) Yaakov - Merari
 - e) Yavan (Greece) - Mitzrayim (Egypt)

ANSWERS FOR PARSHAT YITRO 5786

1. Moshe's wife Tzipporah and their two sons, Gershom and Eliezer.
2. "Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods..."
3. To appoint assistants to help judge and enforce the laws and decisions.
4. Longevity in Eretz Yisrael.
5. Bnei Yisrael were afraid of getting too close to Hashem lest they die for being so close.
6. The Splitting of the Sea and the war against Amalek.
7. Moshe stood over the guests and served them.
8. Hashem will love Bnei Yisrael more than any other nation in the world.
9. If you see a nice object during the week, buy it for Shabbat.
10. Because Do Not Steal should be like Do Not Murder and Do Not Commit Adultery; they should all be capital offenses. (The prohibition against stealing an object is stated in Leviticus 19:11.)
11. Near Yericho
12. No, it is not the Halachah, but it is a good idea.
13. It is possible through education.
14. If you steal, you will swear falsely to cover up your sin.
15. In the first chapter of Ezekiel, which is the Haftorah for the first day of Shavuot.
16.
 - a) Uncle Gershon
 - b) Father Moshe
 - c) Father-in-law Yefuneh
 - d) Grandfather Yaakov (Merari is a son of Levi)
 - e) First Cousins (Yavan is a son of Yefet; Mitzrayim is a son of Cham)