

Beit Chachamin

PARSHAT YITRO

6TH FEBRUARY, 2026

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THE BIG RECAP [PARSHA SUMMARY]

1 – Yitro, Moses’s father-in-law, hears how God rescued Israel from Egypt and comes to the camp with Tziporah and Moses’s two sons. Moses goes out to greet him, bows, and brings him into his tent, where he recounts all that God has done. Yitro blesses God for saving Israel and declares that God is greater than all other gods. He brings offerings, and Aaron and the elders join him in a shared meal before God.

2 – The next day, Yitro sees Moses judging the people alone all day, as everyone lines up to bring him their cases. Yitro tells Moses that this system will wear him out. He advises Moses to represent the people before God, teach them God’s laws, and set clear paths for them to follow. He also suggests appointing capable, God-fearing, honest leaders to handle simpler cases while bringing the hardest matters to Moses.

3 – Moses listens to Yitro’s advice and implements it fully. He chooses capable men from all Israel and appoints them as heads over the people at different levels. They judge routine cases, and the difficult matters they bring to Moses. After this reorganization, Moses sends Yitro off, and Yitro returns to his own land.

4 – Three months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrive at Mount Sinai and camp opposite the mountain. Moses goes up to God, and God tells him to remind the people how He carried them “on eagles’ wings” and brought them to Himself. God offers a covenant: if Israel obeys His voice and keeps His covenant, they will be His treasured possession among all peoples, even though all the earth is His. He promises that they will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

5 – Moses gathers the elders and presents God’s words, and the people answer together, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” God tells Moses He will appear in a thick cloud so the people will hear Him speak and trust Moses forever. The people must sanctify themselves for two days, wash their clothes, and be ready on the third day when God will come down on Mount Sinai. Boundaries are set around the mountain; on the third day there is thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, shofar blasts, smoke, and trembling as the people stand at the foot of the mountain.

6 – God calls Moses up the mountain again and warns that no one else may break through or touch the mountain. Then God speaks the Ten Commandments: He identifies Himself as the God who brought Israel out of Egypt and commands that they have no other gods, make no idols, and not misuse God’s name. He commands remembering Shabbat and keeping it holy, and to honor one’s father and mother. He also forbids murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting anything that belongs to someone else.

7 – The people, fearing they will die due to the overwhelming scene, beg Moses to speak with them instead of God directly. Then Moses approaches the thick darkness where God is, and God reiterates that they must not make gods of silver or gold. God commands an altar of earth for offerings wherever He causes His name to be mentioned, promising that He will come to them there and bless them.

PARSHAT YITRO

Parshat Yitro follows the development of a sustainable legal system as it becomes a shared judiciary and collective covenant

EXODUS 18:13

וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרַת וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה לְשֹׁפֵט אֶת־הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה מִן־הַבֹּקֶר עַד־הָעֶרֶב:

Next day, Moses sat as magistrate among the people, while the people stood about Moses from morning until evening.

EXODUS 18:17-18

וַיֹּאמֶר חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵלָיו לֹא־טוֹב הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה:

בְּלֹ תִבֶּל גַּם־אַתָּה גַּם־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עִמָּךְ כִּי־כִבְדַּ מִמֶּךָ הַדְּבָר לֹא־תוּכַל עֲשׂוֹהוּ לְבַדְּךָ:

But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right; you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.

A centralized system where Moshe alone carries the burden of judging is not sustainable so a new system must be found in which individuals know the laws and Moshe is not the sole judge.

EXODUS 18:20

וְהִזְהַרְתָּ אֹתָהֶם אֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַתּוֹרוֹת וְהוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ יֵלְכוּ בָּהּ וְאֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּן:

and enjoin upon them (the people of Israel) the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the way they are to go and the practices they are to follow.

EXODUS 18:25-26

יִבְחַר מֹשֶׁה אֲנָשֵׁי־חַיִל מִכָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם רִאשִׁים עַל־הָעָם שְׂרֵי אֲלָפִים שְׂרֵי מֵאוֹת שְׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת:

וְשֹׁפְטוּ אֶת־הָעָם בְּכָל־עֵת אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַקָּשֶׁה יְבִיאֵן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְכָל־הַדְּבָר הַקָּטָן יִשְׁפֹּטוּ הֵם:

Moses chose those who were capable out of all Israel, and appointed them heads over the people—chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens; and they judged the people at all times: the difficult matters they would bring to Moses, and all the minor matters they would decide themselves.

These verses turn the legal framework into a true social contract, as the people answer together they bind themselves to the norms that will shape their society.

EXODUS 19:7-8

וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְרָא לְזִקְנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשֶׂם לִפְנֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ יְהוָה:

וַיַּעֲנוּ כָל־הָעָם יַחְדָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע מֹשֶׁה אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הָעָם אֶל־יְהוָה:

Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that GOD had commanded him.

All the people answered as one, saying, "All that GOD has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the people's words to GOD.

By ending with the Ten Commandments, the parsha shows the transformation of a system resting on the shoulders of one overburdened leader to a covenantal society where each person directly learns the core laws from the same ultimate source, God.