

January 18, 2014

D'RASH - YITRO

Finally . . . the moment we have all been waiting for has come. We have already read about the journey of the children of Israel to the land of Egypt in order to escape the famine and how they were later put into bondage as slaves. We have read about the Egyptian prince, Moses, who fled from the wrath of Pharaoh only to return to redeem his people. We have read about the ten plagues and the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea. Finally, at long last, we have arrived at Mt. Sinai. Try to imagine, if you can, what it must have been like. Scripture tells us that there was thunder and lightning, a thick cloud covered the mountain top, and there was a very loud blast from a shofar - possibly even louder than Dennis can produce. For the first and only time, HaShem revealed Himself to the entire nation of Israel and gave us the Ten Commandments.

I am sure that nobody there knew what to expect exactly, but they must have been anxious knowing that something big was just around the corner. At last - the first commandment - "Hi there! Uh...I'm God. And I - ah - I just brought you out of Egypt and thought, well, maybe you could be my people and I could be your God." OK, so those weren't the exact words found in Scripture, but even the words that are found in the Torah sound more like an introduction than a commandment. After all, the other commandments tell us what we should or should not do. We are told to remember the Shabbat, honor our father and mother, do not steal, and do not murder.

And why does God refer to Himself as "the God Who brought you out of Egypt" and not "the God who created the world?" Surely creating the world was a bigger deal than freeing a few slaves. He started out with nothing and made the world. He even provided us with crab grass, poison ivy, jelly fish, spiders, hippopotamuses and all of the rest. By telling us that He is the One who brought us out of Egypt, perhaps He wanted us to know that He is interested in us and is looking out for us. Maybe He wants us to know that He is involved in our world, right here, right now. When He took the slaves out of Egypt, each one experienced the event on a personal level. Perhaps the meaning of the first commandment is that we should experience God on a personal level also, and that we are obligated to know that HaShem is part of our lives; not just when we come to synagogue on Shabbat, but even when we stop by Dunkin Donuts or Wal\*mart. He is part of our lives 24 - 7. Just knowing that God is present at all times will help to define how we live our lives. So, take a moment to reflect upon God's presence in your life.

Hebrew Exodus 20:1-3

English Exodus 20:1-6

Haftarah Isaiah 6:1-4

B'rit Chadashah Matthew 5:17-20