



An Intimate Meeting¹

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The Torah describes a moving encounter between Yitro and Moshe, in which Moshe shares his journey and experiences. A close reading of the details reveals that the Torah offers us a model for meaningful human connection—a way of meeting another person with openness, allowing space both to show and to be seen, to listen deeply and to receive with empathy.

Step 1: Hearing

שמות יח:א-ג,ה

¹וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹקִים לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ כִּי הוֹצִיָּא ה' אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם: ²וַיָּקָם יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֶת צִפּוֹרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ מִנְּשֵׁי מִצְרַיִם: ³וְאֶת שְׁנֵי בָנָיו... ⁵וַיָּבֹא יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֶל הַמִּדְבָּר אֲשֶׁר הוּא חֹנֶה שָׁם הָרַר הָאֱלֹקִים:

Shemot 18:1-3,5

¹Yitro priest of Midian, Moshe's father-in-law, **heard** all that God had done for Moshe and for Israel, God's people, how God had brought Israel out from Egypt. ²So Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, **took** Tzipporah, Moshe's wife, after she had been sent home, ³and her two sons.... ⁵And Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, **came**, along with Moshe's sons and wife, to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God.

¹ Thank you to Motty Fogel and the Hadar staff for their editing contributions.



The *parashah* opens with three verbs—all centered on Yitro: “he heard,” “he took,” and “he came.” Yitro hears what has happened to Israel, his listening is shaped by relationship: he listens as “Moshe’s father-in-law.” That is the lens through which he receives and processes what he hears.

Yitro responds to what he hears in two significant ways. First, “he came”—he arrives, he takes the initiative. He doesn’t wait for an invitation from Moshe; he simply comes. In addition, he “took”—he acts from connection, from what he hears as a social being, as Moshe’s father-in-law, and he is moved to an action that enhances and renews connection. “Yitro... took Tziporah, **Moshe’s wife...** and her two sons... and he came.”

Step 2: A kiss

⁶וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אֲנִי חֹתֶנְךָ יִתְרוֹ בָּא אֵלֶיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּשְׁנֵי בְנֵיהָ עִמָּהּ: ⁷וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לִקְרַאת חֹתֶנּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ וַיִּשָּׂק לוֹ וַיִּשְׁאַל וַיֹּאמֶר לְרַעְיוֹנוֹ לְשָׁלוֹם וַיִּבְאוּ הָאֵהָלָה: ⁸וַיִּסְפֹּר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתֶנּוּ אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' לְפָרְעֹה וּלְמִצְרַיִם עַל אוֹדֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מָצְאָתֶם בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיְצִלֵם ה':

⁶He sent word to Moshe, “I, your father-in-law Yitro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons.” ⁷Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other’s welfare, and they went into the tent. ⁸Moshe then recounted to his father-in-law everything that God had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how God had delivered them.

The verses tell us that Yitro prepares Moshe for his arrival. He doesn’t surprise him: “He sent word to Moshe.” In response, Moshe doesn’t remain passive; he takes a step of his own: “Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law.” The verse continues: “He bowed low and kissed him”—not merely an act of approach, but of closeness, honor, and physical connection: “He



kissed him.” The Mekhilta points out, “I don’t know who bowed to whom, or who kissed whom” (Masekhta de-Amalek 3). Although the Mekhilta eventually offers an answer, by noticing the ambiguity it leaves a powerful impression: this is a moment of mutuality. Each figure may be the subject or the object of the gesture, and perhaps it was done by both towards each other.

This entire sequence of actions leads to a moment of mutuality: “each asked after the other’s welfare.” Even though Yitro is the visitor, even though Moshe had just experienced dramatic events, and even though the encounter seems, at first, to be motivated unilaterally (with Yitro reaching out to Moshe), their meeting begins with reciprocity, with mutual concern and connection. This mutuality sets the tone for their retreat into a private space (“they went into the tent”), where Moshe opens up: “Moshe then recounted to his father-in-law everything.”

This brief passage seems to contain two verses that appear redundant, which has created a continuous puzzle for interpreters. Verse 1 tells us: “Yitro priest of Midian, Moshe’s father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moshe and for Israel, God’s people, how God had brought Israel out from Egypt.” Yet verse 8 later repeats: “Moshe then recounted to his father-in-law everything that God had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how God had delivered them.” If Yitro had already heard everything, what exactly is the purpose and content of Moshe’s telling of the story?

The Or ha-Hayyim² offers several possibilities for understanding what Moshe added or changed in his recounting to Yitro. Although the Torah states that “Yitro heard all that God had done for Moshe and for Israel,” the Or ha-Hayyim suggests that Moshe may have offered new information or clarified concerns Yitro had. He writes: “הַגִּם שְׂאֵמֶר הַכְּתוּב וְיִשְׁמַע וְגוֹ' אֶת כָּל”

² R. Hayyim ibn Attar (North Africa, 18th c.).



אוֹ אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁלֹא הִצְדִּיק הַפְּלֹאוֹת לְצֵד הַגְּזֵמַת הָעֲנִיָּיִם - Even though the text already said that Yitro heard all that had happened—perhaps there were details his ears had not yet heard.”³ In other words, Moshe may have filled in gaps—adding information that had not yet reached Yitro.

The Or ha-Hayyim offers another possibility: “אוֹ אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁלֹא הִצְדִּיק הַפְּלֹאוֹת לְצֵד הַגְּזֵמַת הָעֲנִיָּיִם - It’s possible he had not believed the wonders, because the accounts he had heard seemed exaggerated.” Moshe, then, might have confirmed stories that previously sounded too fantastical to believe.

A third interpretation: “וְסִפֵּר לוֹ מִנְּשֵׂה עֲנִין שֶׁלֹא הָיָה יָכוֹל לְדַעַת מִזִּלְתּוֹ - Moshe told him things that no one else could have known.” This suggests that Moshe shared his own perspective—events that he alone experienced or witnessed.

Finally, the Or ha-Hayyim raises a particularly moving possibility: “אוֹ שֶׁהָגַם שִׁקְדָּם לוֹ מִהִידִיעוֹת - Although Yitro had heard the reports, he still feared that the bonds of Egyptian slavery had not yet been broken.” Yitro may have continued to worry about Moshe’s fate, fearing that the oppression had not truly ended. The personal meeting between the two, then, was not just informative—it was a source of comfort and reassurance that the slavery was indeed in their past.

Regardless, it is clear that what unfolds in the tent is an intimate moment—a space in which Moshe can share personal experiences and hardships. These include not only miraculous events but also moments of difficulty and exhaustion, as the Midrash Sekhel Tov⁴ explains: “‘And all the hardships’—this refers to toil and weariness.” This moment of storytelling

³ Similarly, the Ha’amek Davar, written by R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv of Volozhin) in the 19th century, explains: “Even though [Yitro] had already heard what God had done for Moshe and for Israel His people, nevertheless [Moshe] informed him of new things that he had not known.”

⁴ A collection by R. Menahem ben Shlomo from 12th century Italy.

becomes not only a recounting of trials but also a gesture of reassurance and emotional connection.

Step 3: Joy and Unity

⁹וַיִּיחַד יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֲצִילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ ה' אֲשֶׁר הֲצִיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פַּרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר הֲצִיל אֶת הָעָם מִתַּחַת יַד מִצְרַיִם: ¹¹עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי גָדוֹל ה' מִכָּל הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי בִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם: ¹²וַיָּקַח יִתְרוֹ חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה עֹלָה וּזְבָחִים לָאֱלֹקִים וַיָּבֵא אֶהָרֹן וְכָל זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֶאֱכֹל לֶחֶם עִם חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים:

⁹And Yitro **rejoiced** over all the kindness that God had shown Israel when delivering them from the Egyptians. ¹⁰“Blessed be God,” Yitro **said**, “Who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and Who delivered the people from under the hand of Egypt. ¹¹Now I know that God is greater than all gods, yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people].” ¹²And Yitro, Moshe’s father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aharon came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moshe’s father-in-law.

The act of sharing (“Moshe then recounted to his father-in-law everything”) is met with a response: “And Yitro rejoiced (*vayihad*).” Yitro as a listener has an emotional experience that leads him to rejoice.⁵ Yitro hears, and he is glad and moved. That is how connected he is to Moshe. Rabbeinu Behaye suggests that *vayihad* may come from the word *ehad* meaning “one.” Yitro’s reaction is not only one of joy, but of deepened unity with Moshe. The personal storytelling fosters emotional intimacy and strengthens their bond.

Yitro has an additional response: giving thanks to God, thanks not for his own deliverance, but for someone else’s: “Moshe: Blessed be God... Who delivered you.... Now I know that God is

⁵ See Rabbeinu Behaye ben Asher’s comments on this verse (Spain, 13th-14th c.).

greater than all gods.... Moshe's father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God."

Step 4: Showing up

¹³וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַיָּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה לְשִׁפְטֹת אֶת הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה מִן הַבֹּקֶר עַד הָעֶרֶב: ¹⁴וַיֵּרָא חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה לָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר מָה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה לָעָם מִדּוּעַ אַתָּה יוֹשֵׁב לְבִדְדָךְ וְכָל הָעָם נֹצֵב עֲלֶיךָ מִן בֹּקֶר עַד עֶרֶב: ¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתְנוֹ כִּי יָבֹא אֵלַי הָעָם לְדָרֹשׁ אֵלָיִם:

¹³Next day, Moshe sat as magistrate among the people, while the people stood about Moshe from morning until evening. ¹⁴But when Moshe's father-in-law **saw** how much he had to do for the people, he **said**, "What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?"

¹⁵Moshe replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God.

After the moving and emotionally charged encounter between Moshe and Yitro, Yitro doesn't simply leave. He stays—and continues to truly see Moshe, this time in his daily life: "Moshe's father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people." Yitro sees not only Moshe in his leadership role but also personally, breaking down in loneliness. It seems that the intimacy forged between them allows Yitro to really see Moshe, and ask: "What is this that you are doing?"—to gently challenge what he perceives as a point of weakness and suggest criticism: "Why do you act alone?" After Moshe shares openly, Yitro turns to him out of intimacy, connection, and emotion, which enables Moshe to imagine a different reality and to build, following Yitro's suggestion, a legal system where other leaders are also active.

Yitro models an approach of listening and showing up—actions that seem to be driven by a deep sense of connection. This becomes the backdrop for his encounter with Moshe. The first step in their meeting is mutual, setting the stage for intimacy. That intimacy leads to an emotional, unifying response—one that strengthens the ability to truly see the other, even to the point where vulnerabilities are revealed, creating space for honest critique and thoughtful counsel.

May this roadmap guide us as well: like Yitro, may we learn to listen beyond the rumours—to hear what we didn't know, to notice the details we've missed, that will bring to great and deep connections, that enable and even welcome criticism and advice. May this roadmap guide us as well to share also what is new from a deeply personal and unique perspective—and to remain open to receiving feedback and wisdom in return.

