

## יתרו

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### WHY YISRO CONVERTED

וישמע יתרו כהן מדין חתן משה את כל אשר עשה אלקים  
למשה ולישראל עמו...

“When Yisro, the priest of Midian, Moshe’s father-in-law, heard all that Hashem had done for Moshe, and for Yisrael His people... (*Shemos* 18:1).

The Torah indicates that Yisro heard tell of the many miracles that Hashem had performed on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*; this motivated Yisro to approach *Klal Yisrael* as a potential convert. Rashi (ibid.) asks which were the miracles that so impressed Yisro and suggests that they were *Kerias Yam Suf* (the splitting of the sea) and *Milchemes Amaleik* (the war with Amaleik). The *Gemara* (*Zevachim* 116•) opines that Yisro might also have heard about *Kabalas Hatorah* (the accepting of the Torah), but there is controversy as to whether it actually took place prior to, or after, Yisro’s visit.

*Kerias Yam Suf* is generally accepted as the defining miracle of *Yetzias Mitzraim* (the exodus from Egypt). So it is no wonder that Rashi lists this as one of the *nisim* (miracles) that Yisro heard about. There were indeed other great miracles which *Klal Yisrael* experienced at that time, such as the *man*, the *be’er*, the Clouds of Glory, etc. *Milchemes Amaleik* does not seem to be of the same caliber as the other *nisim*. Yisro could have easily attributed *Klal Yisrael’s* victory over Amaleik to *Klal Yisrael’s* superior armed forces, brilliant military strategy, or perhaps more advanced weaponry. What is so significant about *Milchemes Amaleik* that leads Rashi to suggest it as one of the two major *nisim*?

The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh Shemos* 18:1; *Gevuros Hashem* 42) suggests that *Chazal* present two dramatically opposed global *nisim* as the ones which converted Yisro. *Kerias Yam Suf* was not a parochial *neis*, one which dealt with only a local fraction of creation, but invoked vast and sweeping ramifications. The sea represents a foundation of the planet and is the fountainhead of all waters. Similarly and yet contrarily, *Milchemes Amaleik* was highlighted by the standing still of the sun, which resulted in a disruption in the arrangement of the heavens. Hence, *Kerias Yam Suf* represented a major change in the sphere of lower existence, while *Milchemes Amaleik* represented a disarray in the upper sphere of existence. Yisro recognized in these two acts the all-powerful Master of the heavens and the earth. Therefore, these are the specific two *nisim* itemized by Rashi.

There is yet another approach to understanding the selection of these two particular *nisim*. For this, we must travel back to the earlier era of Avraham *Avinu*. A certain *Chori* princess, Timna, wanted to join with the fledgling nation being founded by Avraham. She was attracted to the teaching of the *Kanfei Hashechinah* (the wings of the Al-mighty), which were being espoused by Avraham (Rashi *Bereishis* 36:12). After all, Avraham was accepting tens of thousands of converts (Rambam, *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 1:3) why should he not accept her? However, Avraham rejected her, as did Yitzchak and Yaakov. She offered to become a mere concubine in their homes, for she said it is preferable to be a maidservant to this nation rather than a princess to any other nation. They still refused her (*Sanhedrin* 99:).

There are several reasons offered as to why she was unwelcome. She was born of an illicit affair between Elifaz and the wife of Seir, and was therefore illegitimate. And an illegitimate person is precluded from joining with the assembly of Hashem (Rif *ibid.*). Another reason suggested by the *Torah Temimah* (*Bereishis* 36:12[2]) is that she insisted on maintaining the authority of her office as princess upon joining *Klal Yisrael*. The Rambam (*Issurei Biah* 13:14) rules that a *geir* must fully submit himself or herself to

*Klal Yisrael* upon *geirus*. Any hint of maintaining previous status is unacceptable (*Yevamos* 24:).

The *Avos* felt that she presented a danger to the budding religion, for she could introduce alien ideas. A burgeoning nation must be composed of individuals with similar principles and attitudes in order for it to flourish. A convert who joins but maintains ties to her past and wants to maintain her previous station, represents a threat to the maturation of a young *Klal Yisrael*. Hence, Timna was rejected.

She desperately wanted to join on her own terms, so she broached the idea of becoming a concubine to Elifaz, the son of Eisav. She did not know any better; the great-grandson of Avraham *Avinu* was still of the “house of Avraham” (or so she thought). The union of Elifaz and Timna produced Amaleik — the perennial adversary and nemesis of *Klal Yisrael*.

Hashem ordained that an Amaleik must appear on this earth, for his existence in *Olam Hazeih* is essential for the ultimate perfection of *Klal Yisrael* (see page 433). However, the fact that he was born from Timna is Hashem’s retribution against the *Avos*. Hashem determined that they had no right to reject Timna (*Sanhedrin* 99:). True, they had what sounded like legitimate objections to her application. True, she might have been a possible threat to the fledgling nation. True, all converts had to be indoctrinated with a singular ideal vis-a-vis the relationship between man and G-d. Nevertheless, in Hashem’s eyes the *Avos* did not have a compelling enough reason for Timna’s rejection. They were required to accept her, and perhaps work a little harder to bring her into the fold. Long term generational objections cannot be allowed to enter into the picture. Therefore, Hashem’s vengeful lesson to the *Avos* was that the eternal enemy of *Klal Yisrael* rose from the womb of Timna.

Now back to Yisro. Yisro desired to convert, but he feared rejection by Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Now that he heard about the episode involving *Milchemes Amaleik*, and he discerned that this was Hashem’s revenge against the rejection of a potential *geir*, he no longer hesitated. He was now certain that his application would be accepted by Moshe. *Kerias Yam Suf* was, in effect, the great *neis*

that shook Yisro's world. *Milchemes Amaleik* was, in effect, simply "good news" to Yisro; it was the guarantee that he would be accepted into the fold of the *Kanfei Hashechinah*.

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