



Likkutei Sichos

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Reaching Beyond

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1.

WHAT'S NEWS?

Our Sages¹ pose a question on the verse:² “Yisro... priest of Midian, heard...”: “What news did he hear that caused him to come?” In response, they offer several opinions: One opinion is that “he heard about the war with Amalek, and he came”; another opinion is that “he heard about the Giving of the Torah {*Matan Torah*}, and he came”; and a third opinion is that “he heard about the Splitting of the Sea, and he came.”

A well-known difficulty has been raised regarding this teaching: Why do our Sages ask, “**What** news did he hear” and then seek an answer to this question, when the Torah itself continues (that he heard about) “all that Hashem had done³ for Moshe and for Israel His people, that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt”⁴?

Additionally, the Sages’ answer — that Yisro heard about the “war with Amalek” or about “*Matan Torah*,” etc. — seems to contradict what the Torah says: Yisro heard “**all** that Hashem had done... that Hashem had taken Israel out...” {and not about individual events}.

An even greater difficulty is that Rashi — who primarily explains the plain meaning {*pshat*}⁵ of the verse: a) raises the same question in his commentary on this verse; and, b) in his answer, combines **two** (of the three) opinions: “The Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek.”

As such, we must say that the intention of the Sages and Rashi, with their question and answers, is to resolve a particular issue in understanding this verse needing clarification that is not understood from the subsequent

¹ *Mechilta* on *Shemos* 18:1; *Zevachim* 116a; *Jerusalem Talmud*, “*Megillah*,” ch. 1, par. 11.

² *Shemos* 18:1.

³ Rashi comments: “Regarding the descent of the manna, the well, and Amalek.”

⁴ Rashi comments: “This was the greatest of them all.”

⁵ {Rashi states in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Torah.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

words, “all that Hashem had done...” We must, then, clarify: What is unclear in the *pshat* of these verses?

We must also clarify: The name Yisro (one of his seven names)⁶ was added when he converted: “When he converted and fulfilled the *mitzvos*, a letter was added to his name.”⁷ So why does the Torah refer to him by this name (“**Yisro** heard”), if at the time, prior to converting, he was still the “priest of Midian” ?

2.

HALACHAH — HASHEM’S PERSONAL SPACE

To clarify these issues we need to preface by explaining remarks made by Rambam in his *Commentary on Mishnah*⁸ that are quite perplexing at first glance.

Rambam quotes the following teaching of our Sages:⁹ “(Since the day the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed) Hashem has nothing in His world other than the four cubits¹⁰ of *halachah*.” Rambam then says that understood superficially, this statement “can seem to be quite distant from the truth.” Is the ultimate purpose {of Creation} the “four cubits of *halachah*,” and everything else “discarded” (“thrown behind His back”)?

Rambam elucidates that the purpose of everything in the world is {for the sake of} man. In turn, man’s purpose is to grow and reach a state of perfection in “wisdom and action.” Meaning, a person should toil in his study of wisdom and understanding until achieving his ultimate goal: “Divine wisdom” — “envisioning for himself Hashem’s unity.” All other wisdoms only prepare for his eventual acquisition of Divine knowledge. And “action” means that he should not immerse himself in pleasure seeking

⁶ *Mechilta* and Rashi’s commentary on this verse; Rashi’s commentary on *Shemos* 4:18; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 27, par. 8; *Midrash Tanchuma*, “Yisro,” par. 4.

⁷ Rashi’s commentary on this verse. {His former name, “יִתְרוֹ” was changed to “יִתְרוֹ”}.

⁸ From his introduction to his *Commentary on Mishnah*, s.v. “*Acharei Chein*.”

⁹ *Berachos* 8a.

¹⁰ {A linear measure. Opinions regarding its modern equivalent range between 18 and 22.9 inches.}

— he should avoid evil and refine his character, etc., so that his conduct is proper and he does good.

Following this lengthy explanation, Rambam concludes that when we study and contemplate the teachings of our Sages regarding the above two areas — “wisdom and action” — we will ascertain the truth of the statement that “Hashem has nothing in His world other than the four cubits of *halachah*.”

We need to clarify:

a) How is this consummate idea of the “four cubits of *halachah*” actualized through these two areas of “wisdom and action”? The relationship between “*halachah*” and “action” is obvious, since the purpose of *halachah* is to know “what should be done” and “what should not be done.” And, “Torah study is great because it leads to action.”¹¹ But how does “wisdom” — the awareness of “Hashem’s unity” — relate to *halachah*?

b) Even if we were to discover that the word “*halachah*” could allude to, and be interpreted as, “wisdom,” we would still need clarification: The word “*halachah*” is mentioned many times throughout the *Talmud*, where it is defined literally as a law teaching us proper conduct according to Torah. This definition of “*halachah*” also has practical implications (for example, the ruling that¹² “a person should take leave of his fellow only after discussing a matter of *halachah*,”¹³ and other similar laws). As such, on what basis does this teaching of our Sages understand the word “*halachah*” differently than it is understood everywhere else?

¹¹ *Kiddushin* 40b.

¹² *Berachos* 31a.

¹³ {When parting ways, their final conversation should be in matters of *halachah*, so the correct definition of “*halachah*” is required in order to properly fulfill this rule.}

3.

FILLING IN FOR THE *BEIS HAMIKDASH*

A possible explanation: Rambam associates the concept of “four cubits of *halachah*” **here** with *understanding G-dliness* based on the opening of our Sages’ statement: “Since the day the *Beis Hamikdash*¹⁴ was destroyed.” This statement implies that the “four cubits of *halachah*” takes the place of the attainments and influence of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Within the outer precincts of the *Beis Hamikdash*, the Chamber of Hewn Stone was the seat of the High Court, which served as the primary source of the Oral Torah and *halachah*. At the same time, within the *innermost chamber*, the Holy of Holies, was the ark, which held the Tablets (and a Torah scroll), alluding to the innermost part of Torah and secrets of Torah.

From here we learn that the “four cubits of *halachah*,” which takes the place the *Beis Hamikdash* (after its destruction), applies not only to the practical areas of *halachah*, but also to the secrets of Torah, i.e., the study and knowledge of the Creator’s unity.

But this only answers the second question — how we know that **in this context**, “*halachah*” also refers to the knowledge of Hashem, etc. But we still have not clarified why our Sages use the word “*halachah*” *here*, when it is defined differently everywhere else. Also, in general {we must clarify}: How is the entire subject matter discussed above alluded to by the phrase, “four cubits of *halachah*”?

4.

TO KNOW IS TO OBSERVE

The key to clarifying these issues: **Plainly**, the *mitzvos* of {knowledge of} Hashem’s unity and loving Hashem, and the like, are also *halachos*

¹⁴ {i.e., the Holy Temple.}

(including many specific *halachic* details). As Rambam highlights in the beginning of *Mishneh Torah* — which is expressly a book of *halachah* and halachic rulings — these *mitzvos* are the **fundamentals** of Torah, and they consist of “**knowing** (by means of studying “G-dly wisdom”) that there is a Primary Being...” and that “this G-d is One” (Hashem’s unity), etc.

Even the first *halachah* a child observes daily entails the obligation to recite, “*Modeh ani lefanecha Melech...*” {I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King...}, the {morning} blessings, **etc.**

Since “**all** of your actions should be for the sake of Heaven,” “even while you sleep...,” as Rambam elaborates in *Hilchos De’os*,¹⁵ and a person’s {personal} space is four cubits — as we will elaborate soon — “*halachah*” must also be {framed in terms of} “four cubits.”

The 613 *mitzvos*, especially the *mitzvah* that “all of a person’s actions must be done for the sake of Heaven,” were given at *Matan Torah* and apply from that time onward. Meaning, until then, even during the “times of Shem and Ever,” none of them were in force, as Rambam says there.

5.

A PERSON'S EXTENDED PERSONAL SPACE

A (deeper) explanation: Regarding various issues {in Jewish law}, every person has his designated “four cubits,” as derived from the verse,¹⁶ “Let each person remain in his place.” This area is known as “a person’s {personal} space.”

Among the reasons for this {designation of four cubits per person}, the *Gemara*¹⁷ explains, is that a typical man is three cubits tall, and one cubit is added so that he can extend his arms above his head.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos De’os*,” ch. 3.

¹⁶ *Shemos* 16:29 {referring to the laws of Shabbos and traveling beyond city limits}.

¹⁷ *Eruvin* 58a.

¹⁸ In *Eruvin* 58a, Rabbi Yehudah maintains that “A person’s body measures three cubits, and an additional cubit is needed in order to allow him to pick up an object from under his feet and place it under

This seemingly requires clarification: Since three cubits is enough space for a person’s body, including his arms (in their **usual** position), why would his “space” always be considered to be four cubits because of the rare occasion that he lifts his hands above his head, an unusual scenario in which he occupies more space than normal?

6.

REACHING BEYOND YOUR PERSONAL SPACE

To explain: Hashem created a perfect world; *the world was created complete*.¹⁹ Nevertheless, our Sages state that the reason “Hashem created” was “to do” — i.e., to repair. The purpose of Creation is for mankind to affect the world by improving on its original state.

Even in *Gan Eden*, prior to the Sin (of the Tree of Knowledge), which represented the greatest level of perfection within Creation, Adam still had to “**work it** and guard it.”²⁰

Just as this {obligation to improve} applies to Creation in general, it also applies to people.

This is also expressed in a person’s physical space, in the (deeper) definition of above-mentioned “four cubits”: A person (his head, torso, and legs) naturally take up three cubits (these three cubits correspond (and allude) to the three general levels of *head*, *torso*, and *legs*). Naturally, the head — as indicated by its name — is a person’s tallest part and {houses his} highest faculties; beneath it is the torso; and at the lowest level are the legs. This means that naturally, the hands, as they are on either side of the torso, are **lower** than the head.

his **head**,” while Rabbi Meir maintains that “an additional cubit is needed in order to allow him to spread out his hands and feet.” *Tosefta (Eruvin ch. 3, par. 10)* says that a person’s full height with his hands extended comes to four cubits. In any case, a person does not measure four cubits tall to the top of his head; his hands must necessarily be included.

¹⁹ {Paraphrasing} *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 14, par. 7.

²⁰ *Bereishis* 2:15.

The aim of a person's *avodah*²¹ is to elevate himself beyond his natural condition (three cubits), even beyond the highest of his natural faculties — his head, the seat of his intellect. Meaning, his understanding and comprehension should (not remain limited by his “head” and intellect, but should) be immersed in areas more sublime than those of his “head” alone.

This elevation relates specifically to “his hands,” which are emblematic of action. As our Sages state,²² through giving *tzedakah*, a person's brain and heart become refined a thousand times over. Meaning, achieving exalted levels of comprehension, beyond even one's intellect (its created condition), also depends on practical “**action**.” Put differently, (conversely), whatever heights a person reaches must influence and effect practical change.

To accomplish these dual objectives of “wisdom and action,” a person was allotted “**four** cubits” of space (more than the three cubits with which he was created).

7.

RAISING TORAH'S HANDS

Just as this {task of making improvements} applies to the Creation of the world, in general, and of mankind, {in particular}, it also applies to Torah [since everything relating to the world and mankind is derived from Torah]:²³

Torah is a “triple light,”²⁴ divided into three categories: The general sections of *Torah*, *Neviim*, and *Kesuvim* [reflecting how the source and reason behind all of Creation is divided into three grades and divisions, as known].

²¹ {Divine service.}

²² *Torah Or*, beg., elucidated in *Or HaTorah*, “*Bamidbar*,” p. 962 ff.

²³ See beg. of *Berishis Rabbah*.

²⁴ See *Shabbos* 88a; *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 246a.

Through the *avodah* of *teshuvah*, which {essentially} is beyond the limits of Creation, the Jewish people contributed a fourth level to Torah, a “double salvation” within Torah, added through the giving of the second set of tablets.²⁵

More specifically, this {supplementation by the Jewish people} applies to all areas of Torah: There are “three cubits” (three levels) of Torah {interpretation} as Torah is found within the boundaries of creation — i.e., *peshat*,²⁶ *remez*,²⁷ and *derush*,²⁸ comprising the *body* of Torah.²⁹ But the goal of a person’s Torah learning is that through his diligence, “four cubits” should be attained. The fourth “cubit” and level of Torah {interpretation}, which is higher than the stature of the *body* of Torah is the aspect of *sod*³⁰ within Torah, “the *soul* of Torah.”³¹ This is the level that Rambam calls (*ibid.*), “the most sublime of concepts,” since it enables a person to reach the objective — “to picture to his soul Hashem’s {unique} Oneness.”

But still {despite the fourth level being more esoteric}, all four cubits of Torah are called, “four cubits of ***halachah***” [similar to the above discussion about a person’s four cubits, so called for his ability to lift **his hands** above the head]. Because we are only certain that we have {truly} attained the fourth “cubit” — the esoteric part of Torah — when even the aspect of Torah that is beyond nature descends to bind itself with *halachah*, meaning (simply), in a practical ruling.

In fact, specifically because this fourth aspect, the *soul* of Torah, is beyond the confines of Creation, it is more important for it to find expression in *halachah*, influencing also our actions.

²⁵ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 46, par. 1 (end); ch. 47, par. 7. {The second set of tablets was given after the first set was broken due to the sin of the Golden Calf, which was followed by repentance and atonement.}

²⁶ {The plain, straightforward meaning of the text.}

²⁷ {*Remez* is a methodology of exegesis based on hints and allusions in the text, often based on the numerical value of letters.}

²⁸ {*Derush* is more analytical than *pshat*. It is an exegetical method of commentary in which the words of a verse are used as a platform to express an extrinsic idea.}

²⁹ *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 152b.

³⁰ {The deeper, esoteric level of Torah.}

³¹ *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 152b.

8.

RAISING THE HANDS OF THE *BEIS HAMIKDASH*

On this basis we can also understand why {the idea of} *the four cubits of halachah* is associated with “the day the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed”:

Although no place is devoid of Hashem, and the entire earth is filled with His glory, still, the *Shechinah*³² was revealed and dwelled specifically in the *Beis Hamikdash*.³³ From there, it was diffused throughout the entire world. The *Beis Hamikdash* was divided into three general sections:³⁴ the Courtyard; the *Ohel Moed* {the “Tent of Meeting”}, i.e., the Sanctuary; and the Holy of Holies. Although the *Shechinah* was manifest in the entire *Beis Hamikdash*, it was primarily manifest in the Holy of Holies; and within the Holy of Holies itself, it was manifest through the Ark.

For this reason, the Ark was considered to be a fourth level, although it was situated in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* (the third level), because through the Ark, the {esoteric} aspect of Torah beyond the limits of Creation was revealed. {This level that transcended the limits of Creation was expressed in} the “Ark’s {physical} space was not {measurable when taking} the measurement {of the Holy of Holies}.”³⁵ This served as an open manifestation of “Hashem’s unity.”³⁶

Despite this {fourth level being associated with Torah — “wisdom”}, even this most sublime level was associated with “action”: Consider that the *Beis Hamikdash* and all its utensils were the handiwork of people. Additionally, the service of the *kohanim* within the *Beis Hamikdash* itself,

³² {Hashem’s Presence.}

³³ See *Tanya*, ch. 51 ff.; the Alter Rebbe’s *Siddur*, p. 98d.

³⁴ {Each physical section possessed its own distinct “level” of the *Shechinah*’s indwelling, as will be elucidated.}

³⁵ *Yoma* 21a; *Bava Basra* 99b. See *Yoma* loc. cit., which explains that this miracle was categorically different from the other ten miracles that occurred in the Temple. {The Holy of Holies was 10 cubits wide, and the Ark, which stood in the center of the Holy of Holies, had a length of 2.5 cubits. Yet, when measuring from the sides of the Ark to the wall, one would find five cubits on each side. Thus, the physical space itself sustained a supranatural existence.}

³⁶ See *Hemshech* 5666, p. 227 ff.

including the {service associated with} Ark inside the *Kodesh Hakodashim* — the blood sprinklings on *Yom Kippur* — were actions performed by people.³⁷

9.

BRINGING TORAH DOWN

In general terms, this {esoteric} addition to Torah was attained with the second tablets, given as a result of the Jews first repenting {for their sin of the Golden Calf} [and similarly, by toiling,³⁸ “diligently analyzing words of wisdom, anxious to fully understand the words,” by which every Jew can reach the concealed essence of Torah].

The same can be said about all parts of Torah. For the the fourth aspect, the *sod* of Torah, was revealed mainly in recent generations, and will be fully realized in the Coming Times³⁹ with the revelation of Moshiach’s insights to Torah, a product of the Jewish people’s *avodah* and toil throughout the exile.

Nevertheless, we know that there will never be a second *Matan Torah*, since the Torah in entirety was already “given” at *Matan Torah*.⁴⁰ Only its emergence and revelation will come later through *avodah* and toil.

Although generally, all of Torah was included in the **Ten Commandments** heard at *Matan Torah*, nonetheless, the esoteric part of Torah, in particular, the soul of Torah, was drawn down by Hashem descending on Mt. Sinai.⁴¹ That is, Torah was revealed, as it was prior to Creation, not only in speech via the Ten Commandments, but in action, when Hashem, so to speak, “**descended** on Mt. Sinai.” Even understood

³⁷ {Part of the *Kohen Gadol*’s service on Yom Kippur in the Holy of Holies was to sprinkle the blood of the offerings several times toward the Ark}.

³⁸ *Zohar*, vol. 1, p. 13ob.

³⁹ {*Le’asid lavo*, referring to the times of Moshiach.}

⁴⁰ *Sefer HaMaamarim 5709*, discourse entitled, “*Yayomer Moshe*,” ch. 6.

⁴¹ *Shemos* 19:20.

simply — the explanation of this descent and revelation is known as the *Workings of the Chariot*⁴² — this is part of the *sod* {esoteric} part of Torah.

Using Rambam’s terminology above: Both elements were present at *Matan Torah* — Torah’s “wisdom,” with all of its components including *sod* of Torah, a revelation of Hashem’s unity;⁴³ and this wisdom connects to “action” (not only do most of the Ten Commandments enjoin concrete action, but additionally) — “Hashem descended on Mt. Sinai.”

But this had to be prefaced by Hashem telling Moshe, “Ascend to Hashem,”⁴⁴ implying that as created beings, the Jewish people had to distance themselves from their earthly limitation. As the Sages state {regarding *Matan Torah*},⁴⁵ “Let those of the lower realms ascend to the upper realms.”

10.

YISRO’S ARRIVAL ENABLES MATAN TORAH

With all the above in mind, the questions raised above (in section 1) are clarified:

As known, the *Zohar* maintains that the Torah could only have been given after Yisro had arrived {at the Jewish encampment in the desert} and had converted.⁴⁶ So Yisro’s arrival was a necessary preparation for *Matan Torah*.

That is why the Torah refers to him **here** as “Yisro” (and why the entire *parshah* is also named after him and not “*Shabbos Matan Torah*,”

⁴² {*Ma’aseh Merkavah* in the Hebrew original.}

⁴³ See *Tanya*, ch. 36.

⁴⁴ *Shemos* 24:1.

⁴⁵ *Midrash Tanchuma* “*Va’era*,” ch. 15. {Describing the events at Mt. Sinai, when Hashem descended on the mountain, enabling the Jews to spiritually elevate themselves.}

⁴⁶ *Zohar*, “*Yisro*,” 67b, 68a; see *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5709, discourse entitled, “*Yayomer Moshe*,” ch. 6; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 11, p. 75 ff.

even as an additional name, similar to *Shabbos Shirah*,⁴⁷ and the like), because the entire content and purpose of *Matan Torah* can be “found” in this name, *Yisro*:

“Yisro” is comprised of two names: **Yeser** {connoting “addition”}, hinting that a *parshah* was added to the Torah⁴⁸ on his account, and **Yisro**, which was made by adding the letter “vav” to his name when he began observing *mitzvos*.

As discussed above, the name *Yisro* represents perfection in both “wisdom” and “action” as initiated at *Matan Torah*. As a preparation for *Matan Torah*, Yisro first achieved these two types of perfection himself.

11.

BEYOND PERFECTION

On this basis, we can understand the Torah’s subsequent wording, “(Yisro) the *priest of Midian* (heard).” One interpretation of this epithet is a “priest for idolatry.”⁴⁹ This seemingly contradicts the {Torah’s} praise of Yisro!

The explanation is:

The appellation “**priest** of Midian” has two connotations: a) a {government} minister, or b) a priest who serves idolatry.

These two definitions of “priest” align with Yisro’s two general occupations (prior to converting):

⁴⁷ {The *Shabbos* of *parshas Beshalach* is often called this name, a reference to the “song” (*shirah*) the Jews offered after the Splitting of the Sea, chronicled in that *parshah*.}

⁴⁸ *Mechilta; Tanchuma*, “Yisro,” par. 4; Rashi’s commentary at the beg. of our *parshah*. {Yisro recommends that Moshe create a hierarchical judicial system; this passage (*parshah*) is recorded in the Torah.}

⁴⁹ *Mechilta* on our verse; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 1, par. 32.

- a) “Priest,” meaning, “{government} minister” — Yisro was esteemed and respected by the gentile nations. His primary function as a minister was to manage the nation’s daily affairs and implement the king’s orders. In this role, Yisro achieved virtue in **action** (in Midian).
- b) “Priest,” meaning, “a priest of idolatry” — This indicates Yisro’s greatness and esteem in his knowledge and comprehension, as our Sages say (as quoted by Rashi), Yisro was **familiar** with every form of idolatry in the world.

Being “**familiar**” with idolatry, especially in the context of our discussion, denotes (as explained in *Zohar*) attaining a superior level of understanding of (Midianite) wisdom. This wisdom was based on their erroneous understanding. As Rambam⁵⁰ elaborates: “In the days of Enosh...,” explaining that people believed that since Hashem created the stars, constellations, and spheres, and He gave them the ability to conduct the world, these entities must therefore be glorified, praised, and honored.

Yisro’s familiarity “with **every** form of idolatry in the world” implies that he had knowledge of, and familiarity with, all the intermediaries in all of the {supernal} worlds. His error as priest of Midian was in failing to recognize that these intermediaries have no independent existence whatsoever, and that one must not consider them to be independent existences.

The Torah emphasizes that “Yisro... the priest of Midian heard” to indicate that within the realm of impurity, Yisro had achieved perfection in both “wisdom and action.” Nevertheless, he **heard**⁵¹ and **came** and converted, thereby, transforming both of these perfected abilities into the realm of holiness. {His names allude to this transformation:} “Yeser” {“addition”} — a *parshah* was added to **Torah** on his account, exemplifying his perfection in wisdom to the extent that he recognized that “Hashem is

⁵⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, beg. of “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*.”

⁵¹ {“*Derhert*” in the original Yiddish, implying a sense of hearing strong enough to be internalized, and causing a person to act.}

greater than all deities.” Yisro’s perfection regarding {his understanding of} Hashem’s unity means that he recognized that “all deities” and intermediaries have no {autonomous} authority or power; they are merely “axes with which to chop.”⁵² And the name “Yisro” alludes to the fulfilment of *mitzvos*, the ultimate perfection in **action**.

12.

PERFECT WISDOM AND ACTION

Since the purpose of *Matan Torah* was (as discussed at length elsewhere) rescinding the decree,⁵³ it allowed “those of the lower realms to ascend to the upper realms.” People were then enabled to advance beyond their limitations as created beings and elevate themselves higher into the spiritual realms. Clearly, then, this also applied to Yisro’s personal spiritual service (since his arrival {at the Jewish encampment} served as a preparation for *Matan Torah*): He had to go beyond his own limitations.

Rashi highlights this change in Yisro by the nuanced wording of his question, “What news did he {Yisro} hear that caused him **to come** (rather than saying, *come to convert*)?” : The **Torah** explains what motivated Yisro to eventually convert — he heard, “all that Hashem had done for Moshe and for Israel His people...” But Rashi asks, “What news did he hear that caused him **to come**?” Yisro had heard what Hashem had done while still in Midian, so he could have remained in Midian and converted **there**. What caused him to **come** — to leave his limitations to the extent that he journeyed to a desert waste, a desolate place?⁵⁴

To address this question, Rashi clarifies: {Yisro heard of} “The Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek.” The Splitting of the Sea was brought about by Hashem’s command,⁵⁵ “Let them travel” — “action.” The war with Amalek was caused by a deficiency in {the Jewish people’s}

⁵² {Just like a craftsman should be credited for his work, not the tools he uses for the job.}

⁵³ {Keeping the spiritual and the physical realms separate.}

⁵⁴ See *Mechilta* and Rashi’s commentary on *Shemos* 18:5.

⁵⁵ *Shemos* 14:15 {Telling Moshe that the Jews should enter the sea}.

“wisdom,” when they had asked, “Is Hashem among us or not?”⁵⁶ Even the Jewish victory in their war against Amalek was a result of Jews “raising their eyes **on High**”⁵⁷ — wisdom. With these two events, Yisro “heard”⁵⁸ that he needed to prepare himself, through *avodah*, to go beyond his innate limitations.

Splitting of the Sea: As known, the purpose of the Splitting of the Sea was to transform the sea to dry land. This is emblematic of nullifying the limitations and barriers between concealment (sea) and revelation (dry land), as elucidated elsewhere.⁵⁹ This transformation served as a preparation for *Matan Torah*, the substance of which was, “Let those of the lower realms ascend to the upper realms....”

The war with Amalek: The *kelipah*⁶⁰ of Amalek represents coolness {*kerirus*}, “they happened upon you {*korcha*}⁶¹ on the way.”⁶² Coolness primarily opposes *avodah* that is not limited by reason and understanding. A subtle level of the *kelipah* of Amalek agrees that Hashem must be served; however, it cannot consent for a person to leave his limitations, to go beyond reason and understanding. This is what the war with Amalek entailed {on a spiritual level} — breaking this *kelipah* that cools off a person’s ardor for serving Hashem unrestrained by {the inherent limits of} reason and understanding.

What Yisro “heard” about these two events — the Splitting of the Sea and the war with Amalek — motivated him to **come**. “He came” connotes Yisro going beyond his limitations, forgoing his honored position as “priest of Midian,” and arriving in a desolate desert, etc., in order to convert. His

⁵⁶ *Shemos* 17:7.

⁵⁷ See *Rosh Hashanah* 29a (in the *Mishnah*).

⁵⁸ {“*Derhert*” in the original Yiddish, implying a sense of hearing strong enough to be internalized, and causing a person to act.}

⁵⁹ See *Torah Or* and *Likkutei Torah* (index entry for “*Kerias Yam Suf*”); *Sha’ar HaEmunah*, ch. 54; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5631, “*Hemshech VeHecherim*,” p. 5.

⁶⁰ {*Kelipah* translates literally as “a shell” or “a peel.” The term refers to anything that conceals, and thus opposes G-dliness, just as a shell or a peel conceals the fruit within.}

⁶¹{The Hebrew is “*karcha*” literally meaning “happened upon you,” but it is etymologically similar to “cooled you down.” Chassidus talks about Amalek attempting to cool down the Jewish people’s enthusiasm, replacing it with indifference and apathy.}

⁶² *Devarim* 25:18.

arrival helped to lay the groundwork for *Matan Torah*, when the decree was nullified, etc., so that those in the lower realms could ascend to the upper realms.

-Based on talks delivered on *Yud Shevat* and *Shabbos parshas Yisro*, 5724 (1964)