

# Parsha Ponders

Yisro | February 9, 2023 | 20 Shevat 5783

## *The unknown kindnesses<sup>1</sup>*

ויאמר יתרו ברוך יקוק אשר הציל אתכם מיד מצרים ומיד פרעה אשר הציל את-העם מתחת יד-מצרים: עתה ידעתי כי-גדול יקוק מכל-האלקים כי בדבר אשר זדו עליהם

Yisro said: “Blessed is G-d! [The one] Who saved you all from the hands of Egypt and from the hands of Pharaoh. [The one] Who saved the nation from under the grasp of Egypt. Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods, from to the matter that they “zadu” upon the Jews”<sup>2</sup>

One of the first people to declare *Baruch Hashem*, Blessed is G-d, was Yisro, Moshe’s father-in-law<sup>3</sup>. Yisro ends his exclamation of praise by explaining what prompted this outburst<sup>4</sup>. He uses an unusual word and says it is because of the matter that they “zadu” upon the Jews. Rashi says it’s a word which means “evil”. Meaning, *Baruch Hashem* because of the evil that the Egyptians committed against the Jews. This is hard to understand. Onkelos takes a seemingly different approach, and says the word means “thought”. Meaning, *Baruch Hashem* because of what the Egyptians thought to do to the Jews. Can we make sense of this?

There’s a story involving Rav Itzele of Volozhin, who was asked the following question by the Russian Czar. There’s a verse in Psalms which says: הללו את השם כל גוים, all the nations should praise Hashem, שבחו בו כל האומים, all the peoples should laud Him, why? כי גבר עלינו חסדו, for He has exerted upon us His loving kindness<sup>5</sup>. The Czar asked that just because Hashem has showered the Jews with His loving kindness, that’s reason for the non-Jewish nations to praise Him?

Rav Itzele responded that the Jews don’t know all the horrible plans of the antisemites. All the time they plot against us, and Hashem saves us, without out us even knowing about it<sup>6</sup>. What comes out then is the non-Jewish nations who hate us know Hashem’s loving kindness more than the Jews do. They know what they plotted and saw that it couldn’t come to fruition. Therefore, they are obligated to praise and laud G-d for this.

Our Sages tell us<sup>7</sup> that three people were involved in Pharaoh’s initial plot to enslave the Jews: Bilaam, Iyov, and Yisro. Bilaam egged Pharaoh on, Iyov remained silent, and Yisro ran away. Since Yisro was present during these meetings, he alone knew everything that Pharaoh intended to do to the Jews. Even things that didn’t come to fruition. Only he was able to fully appreciate the measure for measure justice of Hashem, that the Egyptians got punished for each and every detail of their plots<sup>8</sup>. The Jews didn’t know the full extent of the justice. Yisro, because he knew all their thoughts, as Onkelos explained, was able to properly bless Hashem. Only he could properly say, *Baruch Hashem*. Good Shabbos

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Chiddushei HaGriz § 99

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 18:10,11

<sup>3</sup> The other two instances that preceded this were Noach (Genesis 9:26) and Eliezer (Ibid 24:27). Interestingly, our Sages rebuke Moshe and the Jews for not exclaiming similarly before Yisro did (Sanhedrin 94a; Mechilta Masechta D’Vayishma § 1)

<sup>4</sup> This seems to be how the Brisker Rav understood the כי of the verse. However, I would have read it to be going on how Hashem is greater than all the gods

<sup>5</sup> Psalms Chapter 117

<sup>6</sup> Another example of this is seen in *parshas Balak*

<sup>7</sup> Sotah 11a; Sanhedrin 106a

<sup>8</sup> See Tosafos to Kiddushin 39b s.v. מחשבה, based on Yerushalmi Peah 1:1