

PARSHAT YITRO
22 SHIVAT 5781/04 FEBRUARY 2021



Anochi of Mount Sinai

Painting by Yehoshua Wiseman

“The Rabbis teach that encapsulated in this first word are all the vast entirety of the Torah.”

THE VOICE OUT OF THE DARKNESS

1. Yitro took Zipporah, the wife of Moses...and her two sons...

The text sings the praise of Yitro, for he was settled in the honor of the world, when his heart moved him to go out into the wilderness, a place of *tohu*, to hear words of Torah. (Rashi to 18:5; Midrash Mechilta)

2. וַיִּנְעוּ (Exodus 20:15).

..they fell back...

נָוַע -to quiver, waver, tremble

Movement in this context means only trembling. (Rashi, based on Midrash Mechilta)

The Torah was given in dread and fear and trembling and shuddering. (Talmud, Berachot 22a)

3. When you heard the *voice out of the darkness*, while the mountain was burning in fire, you came close to me...and said, “God our God has shown us His Glory and we have heard His *voice out of the fire*; we have seen this day that though God speaks with a human being, that person may live. Now why should we die, if this great fire consumes us; if we hear the voice of God our God any longer, we shall die. For who that is all-flesh has heard the *voice of the living God* speak out of the fire, as we have, and lived?” (Deuteronomy 5:20-23)
4. Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come only in order to test (*nasot*) you.” (Exodus 20:17)

In order to exalt you, to elevate you throughout the world....*Nasot* is an expression of elevation and greatness... (Rashi to 20:17)

It is human spiritual greatness that is God’s purpose in revealing Godself, the ability to endure hardship through the immense amplification of inner resources. (Avivah Zornberg on Haamek Davar)

5. The Talmud affirms the prophetic and verbal origin of the Revelation, but lays more emphasis on *the voice of the person listening*...A human being is not a mere receiver of sublime messages. A human being is, at the same time, the person to whom the word is said, and the one through whom there is a Revelation. A human being is the site of transcendence. (Emmanuel Levinas, “Revelation” emphasis added)