

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Yitro
January 30, 2016

פרשת יתרו
כ' בשבט תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (Exodus) 18:1-20:23

Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, suggests a system for establishing lower courts to settle disputes; Hashem articulates the *Aseret HaDibrot* (Ten Commandments) to the *Bnei Yisrael* amidst fire, smoke, and sounds of the *shofar*.

The author of the book of *Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes), traditionally regarded to have been *Shlomo HaMelech* (King Solomon), wrote *אין כָּל חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ* – *ein kol chadash tachat hashemesh* – there is nothing new under the sun. We can see this maxim come to life in this week's *parasha*.

About 30 years ago, Howard Gardner, a professor of cognition and education at Harvard, developed the theory of "multiple intelligences," which hypothesizes that different people learn through different modalities. The seven original "intelligences" that Gardner originally proposed are summarized below:

Visual-Spatial – think in terms of physical space, as do architects and sailors. Very aware of their environments.

Bodily-Kinesthetic – use the body effectively, like a dancer or a surgeon. Keen sense of body awareness.

Musical – show sensitivity to rhythm and sound. They love music, but they are also sensitive to sounds in their environments.

Interpersonal – understanding, interacting with others. These students learn through interaction. They have many friends, empathy for others, street smarts.

Intrapersonal – understanding one's own interests, goals. These learners tend to shy away from others. They're in tune with their inner feelings; they have wisdom, intuition and motivation, as well as a strong will, confidence and opinions.

Linguistic – using words effectively. These learners have highly developed auditory skills and often think in words. They like reading, playing word games, making up poetry or stories.

Logical-Mathematical – reasoning, calculating. Think conceptually, abstractly and are able to see and explore patterns and relationships. They like to experiment, solve puzzles, ask cosmic questions.

Now let us look at the experience of the *Bnei Yisrael* as they received the *Aseret HaDibrot*, the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai (19: 16-19):

טז וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהִיטּוֹת הַבֶּקָר, וַיְהִי קוֹלֹת וּבְרָקִים וַעֲנַן כָּבֵד עַל-הָהָר, וְקוֹל שֹׁפָר, חֲזָק מְאֹד; וַיִּחַרַד כָּל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּמַחֲנֵה. יז וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱ-לֹהִים, מִן-הַמַּחֲנֵה; וַיִּתְיַצְּבוּ, בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר. יח וְהָרַסִינִי, עֲשׂוֹן כְּלוֹ, מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו. ה', בָּאֵשׁ; וַיַּעַל עֲשָׁנוֹ כְּעֲשָׁן הַכִּבְשָׁן, וַיִּחַרַד כָּל-הָהָר מְאֹד. יט וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר, הוֹלֵךְ וְחֲזָק מְאֹד; מֹשֶׁה יִדְבֵר, וְהָאֱ-לֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְקוֹל.

16 And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount (**visual-spatial**), and the voice of a horn exceeding loud (**musical**); and all the people that were in the camp trembled (**bodily-kinesthetic**). **17** And Moshe brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God (**interpersonal**); and they stood at the nether part of the mount (**intrapersonal**). **18** Now Mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because Hashem descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked

greatly. **19** And when the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder, Moshe spoke (**linguistic**), and God answered him by a voice.

(**Logical-Mathematical** is the entire next chapter, when the Ten Commandments are actually given.)

This episode presents the fundamental revelation in the history of the world. Thirty-three hundred years before Howard Gardner, God understood the varied “intelligences” of the people to whom the Divine Spirit was being revealed and knew that each needed to experience the Revelation in his or her own way in order to integrate and assimilate properly the message of the giving of the Torah being placed before them on that awesome day.

Much of what we learn from the Torah is gleaned from watching what God does and how God functions. This is a case in point. Good educators are aware of the benefits of utilizing different teaching modalities to reach different kinds of learners; our text underscores that this insight has much deeper roots than the ideas of Howard Gardner.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What kind of learner do you think you are primarily? Why did you arrive at this conclusion?
- Which of the events at Mount Sinai described above would have most captured your attention? Why?
- What other kinds of behaviors does God model for us in the Torah?