The mission of **Torah Is Geshmack** is to bring out the richness and enjoyment of Torah for everyone, and in doing so bring them closer to Hashem.

פרשת יתרו תשפ״ו

The ירידה of "I Know Better"

Dovid Kopel

The Torah says:

> וַיַּרְא חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה לָעָם... מַדּוּעַ אַתָּה יוֹשֵׁב לְבַדֶּךָ וְכָל־הָעָם נִצָּב עָלֶיךָ מִן בֹּקֶר עַד עָרֶב (שמות יח:יד)

Yisro saw everything Moshe was doing for the people... and he said: Why do you sit alone while the entire nation stands over you from morning until evening?

Yisro saw Moshe judging the nation alone and challenged the system.

On the surface, it sounds like a practical fix. Moshe is overwhelmed; the people are waiting; appoint judges and share the burden.

My Rebbe, HaRav Nochum Lansky שליט״א used to quote the Rosh Yeshiva HaRav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg zt"l. It was due to the ירידה (*downfall*) of יתרו that led to the appointment of שופטים (*judges*), which led to the need for מלכים (*kings*), which ultimately led to עבודה זרה (*idol worship*).

The basis of this opinion, I believe was based on this approach as he never brought any sources to explain this concept.

The Torah introduces Yisro with a word that defines his position:

"וישמע יתרו"

("And Yisro heard.")

Rashi asks:

"מה שמועה שמע ובא?"

("What report did he hear that made him come?")

And answers:

"קריעת ים סוף ומלחמת עמלק"

("The splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek.")

He heard — but he wasn't *inside*.

And that matters, because the first step of the ירידה isn't the logistics of creating a system of שופטים. The first step is subtler: it's the entry of a mindset that says, "From what I see, this isn't right," even when you don't fully know what you're looking at.

Later, when Moshe recounts the appointment of judges in Devarim, the people respond:

> טוֹב הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת (דברים א:יד)

The thing you said to do is good.

And Rashi says something astonishing: they should have answered differently. They should have said:

"ממך או מתלמידך — ממי נאה ללמוד, רבינו משה?"

("Moshe our teacher, from whom is it more fitting to learn — from you or from your student?")

And the implication is: from you, Moshe, because:

"נצטערת עליה"

("You expended yourself / suffered for it [to acquire the Torah]")

That Rashi captures the ירידה: not that judges are "bad," but that once people are willing to step away from Moshe's direct leadership, it becomes easier to step away again later — to replace depth with convenience, closeness with distance, פנימיות with "what looks right from the outside."

That's how small shifts become big ones. Once a nation becomes comfortable saying "this setup isn't right" based on an external glance, the next steps can follow: we want different leadership; we want what others have; we want a king like the nations around us. The structure might be kosher; the attitude can still be dangerous.

Torah was never meant to be "easy." We live in a society that tries to make everything frictionless. And honestly, I like easy too—sometimes it's wonderful, and sometimes it even helps us keep mitzvos better. There are times when making observance easier is a real עליה. But there are other times when "easy" jeopardizes the quality of what's truly there, because it strips out the יגיעה (*effort*) that builds a person.

There's one level of making things easier—like buying pre-made פתילות (*wicks*) instead of making them from cotton, or purchasing tzitzis strings instead of spinning threads yourself. And then there's a deeper kind of "easy," where a person would rather write a big check than get their hands dirty, rather outsource everything than build anything inside themselves. But being a Jew is work. It's called "עבודת ה׳" (service of Hashem) for a reason. It won't always be easy—yet if you're doing it right, it will be great:

> דְּרָכֶיהָ דַרְכֵי נֹעַם (משלי ג:יז)
>
> *Its ways are ways of pleasantness.*

I once heard a sharp point from מרן הגר״א פלדמן שליט״א (*Maran HaRav Aharon Feldman shlit"a*). I was learning with him at the time, and he asked me to pull a certain sefer off the shelf. Then he said that today we have קובץ מפרשים (*large bound collections*) with all the relevant mefarshim gathered in one place. You don't have to hunt, compare, and track them down. And he said: it takes *some* of the יגיעה out of it. Of course, if you need help learning Torah or doing mitzvos, there is no shame at all—no בית מדרש (*study hall*) is complete without a שואל ומשיב (*someone who answers questions*). But the question is: did you try first? Did you put in the effort?

And that's the subtle ירידה here. The direct connection from משה רבינו to כלל ישראל (*the Jewish people*) was slightly eroded by the שופטים—that immediate, unfiltered link the nation had to Moshe. They didn't *need* an intermediary at all; and once there is an intermediary, even if it's effective, you've already come down a level.

And that brings me to a question I've always asked:

On one hand, Chazal tell us:

> והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות (אבות א:ו)
>
> *Judge every person favorably.*

On the other hand, the Torah commands:

> לֹא תִשְׂנָא אֶת אָחִיךָ בִּלְבָבֶךָ הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עֲמִיתֶךָ וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֵטְא (ויקרא יט:יז)
>
> *You shall surely rebuke your fellow.*

And we live with responsibility for each other:

> כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה (שבועות לט ע"א)
>
> *All Yidden are responsible for one another.*

So how can I correct someone if I'm always supposed to judge them favorably?

The answer is: the correction must come with the humility of "וישמע" (he heard) — not the certainty of "וירא" (he saw).

Meaning: I'm not Hashem. I don't have the full picture. I'm always, in some way, outside another person's inner world. All I truly know is what I saw.

So if I have to say something, it should sound like this:

"I may be missing context. I'm not claiming to know your intentions. But from what I saw, it looked like something might be wrong — and because I care, and because we're responsible for each other, I wanted to bring it up in a way that can help."

That is the דרך that allows both mitzvos to coexist:

- "דן לכף זכות"

("Judge favorably")

means I don't label the person, I don't assume motives, and I don't speak as if my perspective is absolute.

- "הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכִיחַ"

("You shall surely rebuke")

means I still don't ignore what appears harmful; love and responsibility require action.

- Humility is the difference between advice that builds and critique that causes ירידה.

And now we've come full circle: the ירידה began when someone "from the outside" looked in and spoke with too much certainty. The תיקון is to speak — when we must — with the awareness that we don't fully know.

יהי רצון (*May it be Hashem's will*) that we are zocheh to truly understand our fellow, to give the right advice at the right time and in the right way, to build rather than weaken. And through clarity, humility, and אהבת ישראל (*love of our fellow Jew*), may we be zocheh to the true Melech — מלך המשיח (*the Messianic king*) — and to see כבוד ה׳ (*Hashem's glory*) revealed in this world.

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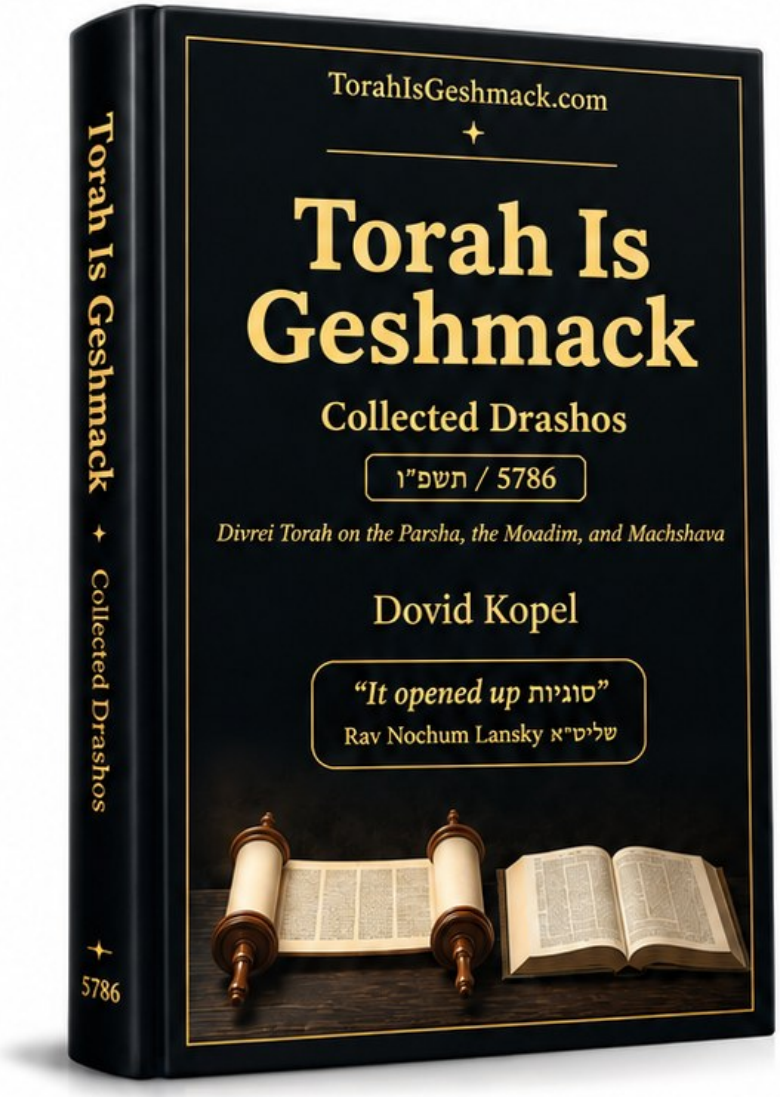
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