

## **Yitro**

### **Sarai Barzel**

Parshat Yitro tells about Am Yisrael receiving the Torah from G-d at Har Sinai. B'nai Yisrael comes to Har Sinai and stands (parks) at the base of the mountain. Moshe goes up to the top of the mountain and receives a message from G-d to B'nai Yisrael that they are about to establish a covenant and to be an Am Segula (a special people). B'nai Yisrael agrees and Moshe prepares them for receiving the Torah. After three days of preparation, G-d reveals Himself on the mountain with voices and thunder and gives the nation 10 commandments. B'nai Yisrael struggles to handle the experience of the divine revelation. They ask Moshe if he will mediate between them and G-d. Moshe was an Emissary of God, the Emissary for Am, the Emissary for Am Yisrael.

Many times an Emissary or representative is required for a mission that a group of people, or even a nation are not able to do. For example, a youth group leader, a school teacher, captain on the front line or the Prime Minister. Emissaries usually know that they are like that, it is in their blood. From the moment that I heard, when I was 16 that there was a “year of service” in which it was possible to be an Emissary, I knew that I would be one of them. I graduated from High School, postponed my Army Service and fate brought me here, the amazing Hartford community, that has become my second home. I promised myself to do my best in order to bring Israel to you, through culture, programs conversations and especially through me. I believe that for everyone there is a shlichut – a mission, this is my shlichut.

God calls the whole nation to Har Sinai, men and women, with no difference. He wants everyone to receive the Torah and to become a special people. This

is something that we don't see a lot in the Torah. The equality that I found in this synagogue and in this community amazed me. This is one of the things that encouraged me to become a Bat Mitzvah. I come from a background that is called conservative in Israel, and here in America is called Orthodox. Obviously that is why I did not have an Aliyah at the age of Bat Mitzvah; neither did my sister, my mother, my grandmother or any of my girlfriends. Before I arrived here, I had no idea that there were other ways of being Jewish. I wasn't familiar with Reform or Conservative Judaism. From my point of view, you were either religious or secular. This year made me think a lot about the question, "who is a Jew"? I was never interested until I got here. Suddenly, it was very important for me to know what type of Jew I am. I began to investigate. The fact that it is possible to sit in a synagogue, women and men together without separation, the fact that there is such a thing as a woman rabbi, chazzan, that girls read from the Torah – amazed me. Just as men and women received the Torah together at Har Sinai, so too are both boys and girls called to the Torah to become B'nai and B'not Mitzvah.

B'nai Yisrael received the Torah at Har Sinai, the word Si in Hebrew means peak (like a mountain's peak). The receiving of the Torah is a peak for Am Yisrael, an historical peak. I feel that today, when I become a Bat Mitzvah, this is a peak in my shlichut. Today, more than ever, I feel a part of this community and I'm honored to adopt this beautiful custom. It is true that I came to teach, but I realize that I have also learned and I feel that I have gotten tools for life.

The fact that B'nai Yisrael knew that they were Ivrim - Hebrews, but only after they received the Torah did they realize that they were Am Yisrael – the chosen nation – teaches us that sometimes you need one thing or one peak, to make clear to yourself, who you are. I have always known that I am a Jewish Israeli, but I guess I had to have this shlichut, this peak to clarify my Jewish

identity. I feel that I am turning a new page in this subject. When I returned to Israel in February, and I left the airport, I felt different than all the other times I had returned from abroad, a feeling of spiritual elevation, a feeling of pride in my nation, my identity. Never had I felt more Jewish than I feel here. I know that this sounds absurd, because most of the people who are sitting here today are Americans, who feel most Jewish when they are in Israel. For me it is the opposite. In Israel I know that I am Jewish, but it is obvious. Here I feel that you need to practice Judaism, to protect your identity, this is so important, it brings hearts together and that makes the Jewish community the special thing that it is.

I will remember this day for the rest of my life. I define myself as a very liberal person but this celebration of Bat Mitzvah and my experience here this year has made me a more liberal person than I was. And maybe one day, when I have daughters, I will want them to become B'not Mitzvah. I am sure that the experience that I have had this year will help to make me a better person.

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to several people. Thank you to the Federation for supporting the Young Emissary program and for all the good things that you do for us. To Anna Elfenbaum my coordinators for helping me translating my d'var torah, without her..... to Ronny Siegel for hosting my family and helping in every way. Thank you to the Emanuel Synagogue, for letting me become a Bat Mitzvah. Thank you Rabbi Small for supporting me and helping me write my D'var Torah. Toda to Moshe Pinchover for teaching me every week without giving up on me. A lot of thank yous to all my host families, the best host families that there are (Or's are pretty good too!). They support me and always make me feel at home. You are a big part of my success. I now have more than one mom,

more than one dad, more than one sister, two new brothers and more than four grandparents, you're the best!

Todah rabah to my real family, my mother Smadar, my father Yosi, my sister Adva and my brother-in-law Shai, who came all the way from Israel to support me and cheer me on. Ani ohevet otchem. Toda to Sharon Conway, the director of the Young Emissary program - Mama Sharon, I'm lucky that I know you and thank you for being who you are. Toda to my partner Or for everything, I have no words to describe – you are the best and to all my friends, the other emissaries that have made this year so special.

One last thank you to all the people with whom I work , the people that have been with me for the whole way, and who have made this year the biggest adventure that I have ever had. Peace out!