

D'var Torah for Parshat Yitro

By Ethan Schmidt

The Jews had left Egypt just seven weeks before and were on a journey to Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah. The Torah says,

וַיֵּסְעוּ מִרֶפְדִּים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנֶה בְּמִדְבַּר וַיַּחֲזֶה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹגֵד הַהָר:

They traveled from Rephidim, and they came to the desert of Sinai, and they camped in the desert, and Israel (he) camped there opposite the mountain.

Rashi notices that when the verse writes about the Jews leaving Rephidim and arriving in the desert, it speaks of them in the plural:

וַיֵּסְעוּ... וַיָּבֹאוּ... וַיַּחֲנֶה...

They traveled...they came...they camped...

But when the verse writes about the Jews arriving at Mount Sinai, it switches to speak about them in the singular:

וַיַּחֲזֶה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל...

And Israel (grammatically singular) camped...

Here is how Rashi explains the switch:

ויחן שם ישראל: כאיש אחד בלב אחד, אבל שאר כל החניות בתרעומת ובמחלוקת:

(The nation of) Israel camped there as one man with one heart, but all the other encampments has complaints and with strife.

Rashi explains that arriving at Mount Sinai inspired them to feel unified because they were about to receive the Torah. They realized that they needed to unite as one to help each other keep the Torah. Also, their goal became to serve God, not to serve their own interests. This stopped each person from being selfish.

This experience was similar to what happens on a sports team with a good coach. I play on a hockey team that has this kind of spirit. We realize that we need to play together and help each other if we want to win or achieve our goal. Each player can only make the “right play” if his own personal interests are not important. We see the team as a unit that works together for only two purposes: to score goals and to prevent the other team from doing so.

The Children of Israel realized that to achieve the goal of a nation serving God through the teachings of the Torah, they needed to be like a team that works together and helps each other.