

*Parshat Yitro: There is no monopoly on wisdom – February 2, 2013*

I read once a commentary about our Parsha by a very interesting rabbi who was known as the "Or HaChaim" (the "light of life"). Rabi Chaim ibn Attar (his original name) was born in Morocco in 1696 and then he moved to Jerusalem where he died in 1743.

Rabbi Chaim established a yeshiva in Jerusalem and was known for having an isolated life and being devoted to his studies. His regular routine was to go to the basement of the building in which he lived to immerse himself in his Mikva (ritual bath) and then ascend to the upper floor to study and to write his commentary on the Torah.

About our Parsha, Yitro, the Or HaChaim asks a fascinating question: Why precisely the Parsha which is devoted to the most important event in Jewish history (The Revelation of Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments) is named after someone who was not Jewish? Yitro was a priest from Midian, not from the People of Israel!

The Or HaChaim answers in the following way: God is teaching us that the Jewish people do not have a monopoly on wisdom. God places wisdom within a variety of people and we have to find that wisdom in any human being, regardless of the faith or tradition from where she/he comes.

This is an extremely insightful answer to the question and especially taking on account who the Or HaChaim was. He was not known to be a so cosmopolitan person and we can assume he had not many relations with non-Jews. His question is unique in itself; his answer is even more penetrating and worthwhile for us to learn.

Shabat Shalom Umeborach!