

# Knesset Israel

## Your Beverlywood Shul

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### Parshat Yitro

By Rabbi Avraham Schefres

Giving and receiving of the Torah, the pinnacle of Jewish life, is in the parsha of Yitro. This event is the culmination of all that happened until now. The story of one believer who grew to a nation of believers and travels from land to land – complete with simchas and disappointments, natural and miraculous events – concludes with a 'ceremony of agreement' in the desert with a production of a book for generations of genealogy and law. The purpose of this book, called Torah, a bestseller of all times, is to be a judicial guide, instruction book or manual of living in the physical world while seeking to connect with the ultimate One in spirituality, G-d. Now that we have the book, how practical are we in using it? There is the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. How do we know when to apply each one?

Having the Torah is the *ikar* (most important) and everything else is mere details of clarification, interpretation, and/or explanation. The explanation of the Torah's meaning begins with Moshe and continues with our rabbis today. Moshe taught and judged Bnei Yisrael from early in the morning until late at night, by himself. His intentions of solving as many disputes as possible were honorable, however, his methodology – as noticed by his father in law, Yitro – could use some help. Yitro approached Moshe and offered some practical advice: dividing the burden of judging and teaching Bnei Yisrael. This advice of establishing a court system would ease the burden of Moshe while enhancing the abilities of others among Bnei Yisrael to learn and judge. Nothing was diminished from the actual laws of the Torah and its intentions. Yitro knew that this method is most practical for the perpetuation of Torah so it could be disseminated to generations beyond Moshe; otherwise, Judaism would cease with the passing of Moshe for lack of understanding the Torah. Moshe was receptive to the concerns of Yitro, accepted the advice and implemented the plan of establishing a court system wherein Moshe would deal primarily with difficult questions or cases. This advice was important enough for this story to be placed right before the receiving of the Torah because this recommendation of Yitro is credited with the most practical way to circulate and propagate the Torah. It is always wise to know how to practically take care of precious 'gifts,' like the Torah, before we get it.

This wonderful guidance comes from Yitro who is an unlikely source. Yitro was a priest of Midian who practiced every religion known to man at the time (Rashi Shemot 18:11- divrei hamatchil "mikol Elokim") and was on the list of top advisors to Paroh (Gemara Sotah 11a). In addition, Yitro did not spend much time with Bnei Yisrael; he came to drop off Moshe's wife

and kids, give the suggestion, and then left back to his homeland. Yes, he was the father in law of Moshe and he did convert to Judaism but in many ways was still the 'outsider.' Yet none of the above prevented Moshe from listening to Yitro.

The story of Yitro offers many beautiful lessons but perhaps the most important one is being realistic in our approach to Torah for the sake of its continuation. An example of this is *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life, on Shabbat; be it for medical or security reasons, where the sensible and right decision to make is to break Shabbat. The Torah itself allows for this as we learn in the words of *Vechai Bahem*, and you shall live by them (Bamidbar 18:5) because the Torah itself is not rigid but practical in its approach. In living a Jewish life, we may run into gray areas concerning the implementation of Hashem's will. In those cases, we may want to think about the most practical solution as well as be open to advice because we may be too close to the situation. When we are not sure, we may want to use the spirit of the law to reach our objective. Since there is no 'one size fits all' in the Torah, how practical we are and when we need to be sensible is personalized. The most valuable benefit of Yitro's advice is that through being practical we can live a functional Torah life and at the same time have an opportunity *lehagdil Torah velehaadirah*, to promote the teachings of Torah and to strengthen them. See you in shul.

### Shabbat Times

#### Erev Shabbat Jan 29, 2015 / 19 Sh'vat, 5776

Candle Lighting.....4:16 pm to 5:02 pm  
Mincha.....5:05 pm

#### Shabbat Day Jan 30, 2015 / 20 Sh'vat, 5776

Shacharit.....9:00 am  
Kiddush.....11:30 am  
Mincha.....4:55 pm  
Havdalah / Shabbat Ends.....6:01 pm

### Happy Birthday

Happy Birthday Rita Wizenfeld! (Jan 29)

### Got a Dvar Torah?

We'd love to publish your Dvar Torah! Please let us know if you'd like to be published.