

## **This Week In Torah *Yitro***

My friend, Eric LeCompte of JubileeUSA, was in town lobbying for a piece of legislation just the other day. When we discussed strategy, he simply mapped out 3 simple steps to prioritize with whom he was going to meet: check out the bios of legislators who have something in their past that might make them receptive to the bill, set up an appointment in order to educate them on the need for this piece of legislation, and then empower/encourage them to advocate for it as a co-sponsor or at least top pledge to vote for it. Simple? In reality, it is far more complicated than that—but that is lobbying in a nutshell: know who you can reach out to, educate them, and get them to support the bill.

Moses' selection to lead the people and bring them the Torah worked in a similar manner. According to 16<sup>th</sup> Century Italian Rabbi Ovadia Sforno, Moses' name is an indication of his potential abilities. He noted that unlike Isaac and Jacob, who got their names after the reason was established in Torah, but Moses is named prior to the rationale. Sforno noted that this was a prophecy; an indication of his future ability. Add to this the classic Midrash that stated that the Burning Bush was burning for years before anyone noticed—Moses' keen insight and his prophetic ability made him stop and notice that the bush was burning but unconsumed. Then the final rationale for why Moses was selected appeared in a midrash that showed Moses' compassion. As a shepherd to Yitro's flock, one of the flock—a young kid—wandered off in search of water. When Moses followed and saw that the kid was thirsty, he realized that the kid must also be tired and so he carried him back on his shoulders. With this, Moses demonstrated his ability to serve, his intellectual ability to perceive, and his compassion to act.

Moses' leadership traits and those needed to lobby are themes and variations of each other! But what about us? We are not Moses nor are many of us elected to legislate in government. Where can we turn for similar traits?

In this week's *parasha*, we see it in the end of chapter 19 as it leads thru the revelation of the Decalogue and to end of the *parasha* where the Israelites are instructed not to build an altar of hewn stones nor should they build an altar with steps on it.

- a. First part of the process is the people must be willing to receive [in Hebrew, *kabbalah*]. For 3 days, the people prepare—washing themselves and their clothes, abstaining from sexual encounters, and knowing where to stand at the base of the mountain.
- b. Second step is the one filled with great drama. As the mountain is surrounded with smoke, thunder and lightning—Moses receives Torah; God’s presence is revealed to the people thru the sanctity of Divine utterances, words that must be cherished as well as words that can be studied for eternity.
- c. The third step appears at the end of the *sedra*, Exodus 20:21-23 states “Make for Me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you. And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones; for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them. Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it.” God encourages... better yet, commands... the Israelites to keep the focus on God and not on their handiwork or on themselves. Sacred encounters must be directed solely toward God!

Through this 3 step process mapped out in Torah, we see a similar model that a lobbyist brings to the Capital and that our Rabbis perceived God used to bring Moses into his sacred leadership role to that which the Israelites experienced to receive and understand the importance of the covenantal relationship: willingness thru preparation, education thru revelation, and application thru directed effort. Whether one is elected to office or called to a greater purpose or seeking significant meaning to living, these 3 steps appear before us with clarity if we just open our eyes to the potential.

A lobbyist makes a living out of it.

Moses created a people from it

We can find incredible meaning by doing it.