



# The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Shemot

Parshat Yitro

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## Keeping Open Minds

By Aliza Klinger

There is an argument in the Talmudic tractate of *Zevachim* regarding the order of events in this week's *parsha*: Did the events occur in the order they were transcribed (first *Yitro* advised *Moshe* to appoint a court system, and then the Torah was given to the Jewish people)? Or were these events written out of order (the Jewish people actually received the Torah first, and only then did *Yitro* advise *Moshe* about setting up a court system)?

The second option, in some ways, makes more sense. Why would *Yitro* share detailed opinions about how the courts of law should be set up if the laws had not yet been given? However, if it is true that these stories are presented in a different order than they actually occurred, what was the purpose in switching the order? What is God's message to us, the readers of the Torah?

*Why would Yitro share detailed opinions about how the courts of law should be set up if the laws had not yet been given?*

The *Or HaChayim*, a commentary written by 18<sup>th</sup>-century Rabbi, Chayim ben Attar, suggests that if you posit that the order was switched, the story describing *Yitro*'s advice was placed first to teach us that wisdom that comes even from individuals who are not Jewish, as exemplified by *Yitro*'s brilliant idea.

ונראה כי טעם הדבר הוא להראות ה' את בני ישראל הדור ההוא  
וכל דור ודור כי יש באומות גדולים בהבנה ובהשכלה, וצא ולמד מהשכלת  
יתרו בעצתו

*It appears that the reason for all this is that God wanted to show the Jewish people already at that time and for all future generations that*

*there are great people who are intelligent and wise to be found amongst the nations of the world.*

So, just as we are about to read the story of the Jews receiving the Torah, reminding us of our status as the *am hanivchar*, the chosen nation, God reminds us to remain humble and open-minded.

Chosenness does not mean that we are better or smarter and know more than everyone else. It simply means that we have been tasked with being a light onto the nations and representing the values of God to the world.

We need to be open to incorporating all knowledge and wisdom that can be found in our world in order to carry out that sacred mission.

*Just as we are about to read the story of the Jews receiving the Torah ... God reminds us to remain humble and open minded*

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*Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?  
Please contact Steve Smith at [LivingTorahFund@gmail.com](mailto:LivingTorahFund@gmail.com)*



**The Collective Conversation** is a project of the Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund

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