

Parshat Yitro 5777

The weekly portion Yitro or Jethro is perhaps the most important in the Torah, for here - for the first and only time – G-d reveals Himself to the entire nation, bequeathing to them the basic laws by which mankind may live harmoniously – the Ten Commandments.

Yet, curiously, this portion is named, not after Mt. Sinai, the place neither of revelation, nor after Moses, the man of G-d, but, after a man of the desert, the Midianite priest, Jethro. On this point, the Zohar remarks:

“the Torah could not be given to Israel until Jethro, the great and supreme priest of the pagan world confessed his faith in the Holy One”. The essence of Jethro, then, is his integrity. He recognizes truth when he sees it. And he says so. Thus, the Torah names its supreme portion after him.

*And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in that He had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said: 'Blessed be the LORD, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh. Now I **know** that the LORD is greater than all gods (Exod. 9-11).*

In Jethro's confession there is a message, not only for Scriptural exegetes, but for our own time, as well. Jethro recognized the truth of G-d - that the blessing of the covenant would come through *the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel.*

*Now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed, and keep My **covenant**, then ye shall be Mine own treasure from among all peoples; for **all** the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. (Exod. 19:5-6).*

What is this covenant? Is it the Ten Commandments? The promise to Abraham? Both?

*And I will establish My **covenant** between Me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting **covenant**, to be a G-d unto thee*

and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession (Gen. 17:7-8).

And what of the *human rights* of Ishmael and his descendants - the Palestinian quandrum – a question that turns the world topsy-turvy in a turmoil? What is the portion of Ishmael? Does Jethro offer a solution?

*And G-d said: 'Nay, but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish My **covenant** with him for an everlasting **covenant** for his seed after him. **And as for Ishmael**; behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. But My **covenant** will I establish with Isaac (Gen. 17:19-21).*

Ishmael inherited all of North Africa and the Middle East from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. And what of *the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession?* The path of the LORD is straight and “simple”, the labyrinth of falsehood and deception, pride, prejudice and self-interest is endless. When the nations, the cynics, the extremists, the anarchists, the radicals and terrorists recognize this - they too will find peace. And what will their fate be? Their fate will become as the Midianite priest, Jethro. They will inherit the blessing, as Moses said:

*And Moses said unto Hobab [Yitro] the son of Reuel the Midianite , Moses' father-in-law: 'We are journeying unto the **place** of which the LORD said: I will give it you; come thou with us, and **we will do thee good**; for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel...And it shall be, **if thou go with us**, yea, it shall be, that **what good the LORD shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee** (Num. 10: 29, 32)*

Thus, we learn from Jethro what should be the proper response of the nations and peoples of the world to the Jewish People - Israel. When, finally the voices of discontent are no longer, and their sense and spirit ascend to the Midianite priest's level of nobility, then, on that day, they too will inherit the blessing - sought erroneously through subterfuge and violence - that has eluded them for so long