



Carnegie Shul Chatter

February 4, 2021



Zoom in for Services

We invite you to join in our abbreviated Shabbos service, beginning at 10 am and lasting for approximately an hour, by clicking this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88434873908?pwd=K0s0amU5Vv93MHFOSURlWFpURnc5Zz09>

Find the Birnbaum siddur at: <https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo-hashiddur-hashalem-by-paltiel-birnbaum-1949/>

Jews for Jews

In his commentary on this week's parashah, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks mentions, "the principle that later became known as the idea that *kol Yisrael arevin zeh ba-zeh*, "All Israelites are responsible for one another."

There was a time when that principle was sacrosanct for Jews. Our people were philanthropists who put the well-being of their fellow Jews first and foremost. Leaders of our Pittsburgh Jewish community included men like Henry Kaufmann, who established the Irene Kauffmann Settlement to help Jews in need during the depression, Herman Feinberg, David Shapira, and others who contributed much of their wealth to help their fellow Jews through Jewish agencies such as the Jewish Federation.

Today, however, many Jews have spread their contributions to charitable causes outside of the Jewish sphere. While giving to any charity is certainly a mitzvah, it is important that we not forget the principle of *kol Yisrael arevin zeh ba-zeh*, "All Israelites are responsible for one another."

Jews need to take care of one another, especially in a time when anti-Semitism is on the rise. When God made his covenant with us, when he gave us the Ten Commandments, he set us apart from all other people. We are different. God intended for it to be that way. We cannot forget that, and we can't forget that we are responsible for one another.

Yitro in a Nutshell

Exodus 18:1-20:23

Below is this week's Parshah in a Nutshell from chabad.org.

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, hears of the great miracles which G-d performed for the people of Israel, and comes from Midian to the Israelite camp, bringing with him Moses' wife and two sons. Jethro advises Moses to appoint a hierarchy of magistrates and judges to assist him in the task of governing and administering justice to the people.

The Children of Israel camp opposite Mount Sinai, where they are told that G-d has chosen them to be His "kingdom of priests" and "holy nation." The people respond by proclaiming, "All that G-d has spoken, we shall do."



On the sixth day of the third month (Sivan), seven weeks after the Exodus, the entire nation of Israel assembles at the foot of Mount Sinai. G-d descends on the mountain amidst thunder, lightning, billows of smoke and the blast of the shofar, and summons Moses to ascend.

G-d proclaims the Ten Commandments, commanding the people of Israel to believe in G-d, not to worship idols or take G-d's name in vain, to keep the Shabbat, honor their parents, and not to murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness or covet another's property. The people cry out to Moses that the revelation is too intense for them to bear, begging him to receive the Torah from G-d and convey it to them.



Lessons in Leadership

Last week, in the sidebar to the Chatter, I wrote about Moses and Joshua and their leadership that was thrust upon them. In this week's parsha, Yitro, we learn about Moses's father-in-law, Yitro, who, according to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "gives Moses his first lesson in leadership."

Here is an article from aish.com with Rabbi Sacks's reflections on this week's parshah:

A Nation of Leaders

Yitro (Exodus 18-20)

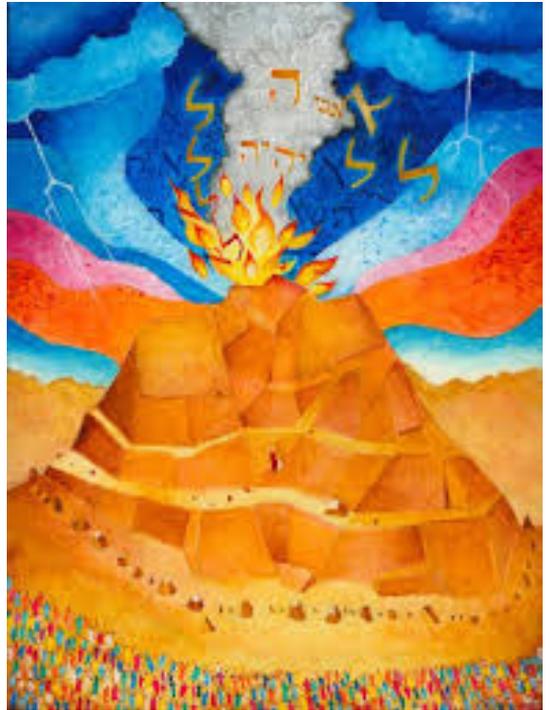
by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Jan 31, 2021

This week's parsha consists of two episodes that seem to constitute a study in contrasts. The first is in chapter 18. Yitro, Moses' father-in-law and a Midianite Priest, gives Moses his first lesson in leadership. In the second episode, the prime mover is God Himself who, at Mount Sinai, makes a covenant with the Israelites in an unprecedented and unrepeated epiphany. For the first and only time in history God appears to an entire people, making a covenant with them and giving them the world's most famous brief code of ethics, the Ten Commandments.

What can there be in common between the practical advice of a Midianite and the timeless words of Revelation itself? There is an intended contrast here and it is an important one. The forms and structures of governance are not specifically Jewish. They are part of chochmah, the universal wisdom of humankind. Jews have known many forms of leadership: by Prophets, Elders, Judges and Kings; by the Nasi in Israel under Roman rule and the Resh Galuta in Babylon; by town councils (shiva tuvei ha-ir) and various forms of oligarchy; and by other structures up to and including the democratically elected Knesset. The forms of government are not eternal truths, nor are they exclusive to Israel. In fact, the Torah says about monarchy that a time will come when the people say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," – the only case in the entire Torah in which Israel are commanded (or permitted) to imitate other nations. There is nothing specifically Jewish about political structures.

What is specifically Jewish, however, is the principle of the covenant at Sinai, that Israel is the chosen people, the only nation whose sole ultimate king and legislator is God Himself. "He has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws, Halleluyah." (Psalm 147:19-20) What the covenant at Sinai established for the first time was the moral limits of power. All human authority is delegated



authority, subject to the overarching moral imperatives of the Torah itself. This side of heaven there is no absolute power. That is what has always set Judaism apart from the empires of the ancient world and the secular nationalisms of the West. So Israel can learn practical politics from a Midianite but it must learn the limits of politics from God Himself.

Despite the contrast, however, there is one theme in common to both episodes, to Yitro and to the revelation at Sinai, namely the delegation, distribution and democratisation of leadership. Only God can rule alone.

The theme is introduced by Yitro. He arrives to visit his son-in-law and finds him leading alone. He says, “What you are doing is not good.” (Ex. 18:17) This is one of only two instances in the whole Torah in which the words *lo tov*, “not good”, appear. The other is in Genesis (2:18), where God says, “It is not good [lo tov] for man to be alone.” We cannot lead alone. We cannot live alone. To be alone is not good.

Yitro proposes delegation:

You must be the people’s representative before God and bring their disputes to Him. Teach them His decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as Judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. (Ex. 18:19-22)

This is a significant devolution. It means that among every thousand Israelites, there are 131 leaders (one head of a thousand, ten heads of a hundred, twenty heads of fifty and a hundred head of tens). One in every eight adult male Israelites was expected to undertake some form of leadership role.

In the next chapter, prior to the revelation at Mount Sinai, God commands Moses to propose a covenant with the Israelites. In the course of this, God articulates what is in effect the mission statement of the Jewish people:

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation.’ (Ex. 19:4-6)

This is a very striking statement. Every nation had its priests. In the book of Genesis, we encounter Malkizedek, Abraham’s contemporary, described as “a priest of the most high God.” (Gen. 14:18) The story of Joseph mentions the Egyptian priests, whose land was not nationalised. (Gen. 47:22) Yitro was a Midianite priest. In the ancient world there was nothing distinctive about priesthood. Every nation had its priests and holy men. What was distinctive about Israel was that it was to become a nation every one of whose members was to be a priest; each of whose citizens was called on to be holy.



I vividly recall standing with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz in the General Assembly of the United Nations in August 2000 at a unique gathering of two thousand religious leaders representing all the major faiths in the world. I pointed out that even in that distinguished company we were different. We were almost the only religious leaders wearing suits. All the others wore robes of office. It is an almost universal phenomenon that priests and holy people wear distinctive garments to indicate that they are set apart (the core meaning of the word kadosh, "holy"). In post-biblical Judaism there were no robes of office because everyone was expected to be holy (Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle, called Jews "a nation of philosophers," reflecting the same idea.).

Yet in what sense were Jews ever a Kingdom of Priests? The Kohanim were an elite within the nation, members of the tribe of Levi, descendants of Aaron the first High Priest. There never was a full democratisation of keter kehunah, the crown of Priesthood.

Faced with this problem, the commentators offer two solutions. The word Kohanim, "Priests," may mean "princes" or "leaders" (Rashi, Rashbam). Or it may mean "servants" (Ibn Ezra, Ramban). But this is precisely the point. The Israelites were called on to be a nation of servant-leaders. They were the people called on, by virtue of the covenant, to accept responsibility not only for themselves and their families, but for the moral-spiritual state of the nation as a whole. This is the principle that later became known as the idea that kol Yisrael arevin zeh b'zeh, "All Israelites are responsible for one another." (Shavuot 39a) Jews were the people who did not leave leadership to a single individual, however holy or exalted, or to an elite. Instead, every one of them was expected to be both a prince and a servant; that is to say, every one of whom was called on to be a leader. Never was leadership more profoundly democratised.

That is what made Jews historically hard to lead. As Chaim Weizmann, first President of Israel, famously said, "I head a nation of a million presidents."

The Lord may be our shepherd, but no Jew was ever a sheep. At the same time, this is what led Jews to have an impact on the world out of all proportion to their numbers. Jews constitute only the tiniest fragment – one fifth of one per cent of the population of the world – but they make up an extraordinarily high percentage of leaders in any given field of human endeavour.

