

Dear Chavraya,

The first book of the Torah, B'reishit, is characterized by the stories of individuals. In the second book of the Torah, Sh'mot, with the giving of the Torah we come together in common purpose to be a people, a community. A thread of teaching runs throughout Sh'mot that offers guidance in the ways of community, of meeting the challenges of life lived with people. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Yitro*, Moses is given profound advice toward effective communal organization, that beyond the earthy warmth of context is for all of us.

Moses' father-in-law, Yitro, himself a Midianite priest, has arrived for a visit. Observing his son-in-law at work, he must have felt great *nachas*, but he was also filled with concern as he watched Moses. Walking about the Israelite camp, Yitro saw Moses sitting among the people from morning until evening, answering questions, adjudicating disputes, teaching Torah. Responding from his distress, Moses' father-in-law said to him: *What you are doing is not good. You will surely become weary, you, as well as this people that is with you, for this thing is too heavy for you. You cannot carry it out all alone.* Knowing the business well, the elder offered unsolicited advice. He urged Moses to decentralize, to spread responsibility, to empower the people. Having told his father-in-law that the people came to him "to seek God / *lidrosh elokim*," Yitro tells him in effect to let the people be God-seekers in their own right, don't take it away from them. In the absence of such opportunity to grow, the people too will become weary.

In a telling midrash, perhaps reflecting their own challenges, the rabbis amplified Yitro's advice: *"For this thing is too heavy for you." He said to him: 'Observe, a beam when it is still fresh and moist, two or three people get under it and cannot support it. But four or five people get under it and they can support it,' "for this thing is too heavy for you, you cannot carry it out all alone."*

It is Yitro's dual concern that fascinates me in considering the dynamics of community, the wearying of the people as well as Moses. Having offered his advice, we can see Yitro smiling with understanding as he says, *Make the burden easier for yourself and let them bear it with you..., and you and the people will be able to endure, and all this people too, each one of them will come to their place in peace.* Seeing in Yitro's advice the impact even on interpersonal relationships within the community, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Spanish commentator, Ibn Ezra, worries that if disputants stand about waiting to speak only to Moses, rather than with another, or perhaps directly with each other, then *behold, in returning to their tents, the argument between them will be strengthened; but now, no longer dependent on talking only to Moses, each one will come to their place, that is, their tent, in peace.* Following this thread of concern for communal health and healing, we leap through time to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Chassidic rebbe, the M'or Vashemesh, who said on the same verse, *each one will come to their place in peace, that is to say, they will come to grasp tikkun.* Sharing in responsibility and leadership, they will find the means of repair, when in the natural course of communal life repair is needed.

Bringing our individual stories together, as from B'reishit to Sh'mot, we form the story of community. Every community is a microcosm of the world. In the way of our sharing and striving with each other to create something greater is our

own *tikkun* and the *tikkun* of the world. And so may we come to our place in peace.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor