

Torah Portion Preview for Yitro

Shabbat beginning February 11, 2023

Yitro (Jethro, priest of Midian and Moses' father-in-law) tells two stories. The first recounts when Jethro brought Moses' wife and sons to him, Moses was judging disputes of the Israelites' who queued before him from morning to night. Jethro advised Moses not to wear himself out, but to appoint chiefs of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens to handle minor disputes, leaving Moses to teach God's laws and judge the major disputes. The second story was God's direct delivery of the commandments from Mount Sinai as it erupted in thunder, lightning, the loud blast of a horn, smoke, and trembling. The people pleaded in fear for Moses to become God's intermediary and promised to listen just to him.

The commandments tell us that the Jewish people's endurance stems not merely from the need for protection or dominance over neighboring nations, but from our memorable set of fundamental ideals. Jethro showed the ancient human wisdom that even the best practices can cause burnout, but collaboration can accomplish their purposes. One Reform rabbi inspired us to "analyze current religious documents to formulate solutions to interfaith problems." The relationship between Israelite leader Moses and Midianite priest Jethro exemplifies the potential for such interfaith collaborations.