



Shabbat Yitro

17 Shevat 5778 / February 2, 2018

Dear Shir Tikvah:

What if there really was enough time for everything that matters?

Last week I had the opportunity to spend three and a half days in contemplative practice - with 50-some rabbis and cantors from across movements and from around North America. Like a multi-day Shabbat. At first it's really hard to focus on just one thing at a time. My mind insists, "I have too many things to do! Why just eat when I could also be driving somewhere and taking care of a phone call?!" And then I settle in, and begin to marvel at the wonders of "the ordinary" - and reconnect with my true self.

In this week's portion (which also includes a great encounter at Sinai and the revelation of the 10 commandments) Moses' father in law, Jethro (Yitro), hears about Moses and the Israelites' great escape from Egypt. He brings Moses' wife Tziporah and their two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to visit Moses where they are encamped. Jethro watches how Moses spends his day: surrounded by people waiting in line for his attention. Jethro, a priest in his own right, asks Moses,

"What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" Moses replied to his father-in-law, "It is because the people come to me to inquire of God (lidrosh Elohim). When they have a dispute, it comes before me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known the laws and teachings of God." (Exodus 18:14-16)

Jethro goes on to give Moses some loving rebuke for trying to do this all alone, and some coaching about delegation. And then he says, "if you do this [follow my instructions about delegating] - and God commands you to do it - then you can finish, and you and everyone else can go home (el m'komo - lit to one's place) b'shalom (in peace, wholeness, well-being).

Until a beloved elder comes along to set him straight, Moses feels like it's his job alone to be the intermediary between the people and God. Moses passes judgment, interpreting God's will. But that is not one person's job. That is each of our jobs.

This weekend holds many different events that are meaningful for everyone in different ways. Some have trained all season for the Loppett. Some are excited that our city is hosting the Superbowl and all its surrounding events. Some are focused on next Tuesday's caucuses; some are participating in the National Take a Knee Conference and Rally: Race, Police Violence, and the Right to Protest or other social justice actions. Some are staying away from all of it - tending to what needs attention in their own lives.

We all get to decide which things merit our attention. We are reminded in Parshat Yitro that no one can do all the judging and discerning. I was reminded through my meditation retreat that I can really only tend well to one thing, one person, one place, at any given time. And that maybe, when we use our own discernment, with the help of God or our own best selves, we can be focused on exactly what needs our attention.

This Shabbat, may God help us each to discern and judge wisely as to what, for the highest good, merits our attention.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Debra Rappaport