

Ha Shavuah B' Sha'arey Israel (this week at CSI)

February 12 - 19, 2009

Shevat 18 - 25, 5769



Candle lighting time 6:00 p.m.
Friday February 13

Friday Evening Kabbalat Shabbat Services begin at 6:15 p.m.
Saturday morning Shabbat Services begin at 9:30 a.m.

Parashat Yitro (Torah commentary on pg. 2)
Annual: Exodus 18:1 - 20:23 (Etz Hayim, p. 432)
Triennial: Exodus 19:1 - 20:23 (Etz Hayim, p. 436)
Haftarah: Isaiah 6:1 - 7:6 or 6:1 -13 (Etz Hayim, p. 452)



We wish a Happy Birthday this week to:
Marshall Hutten, Shirley Roobin, and David Frolich
And Happy Anniversary to:
Pam & Markus Hill and Jennifer & Harris Rainbow

This week we remember the Yahrzeit of:
Harry Simmons, Joseph B. Kross, Lena Kemper, Paul Lowin, Daniel Medvin, Nancy Schwartz, Isadore Levine, Louis Avrunin, Esther Haskins Cohen Friedman, Samuel Halprin, Barry Dayne, Morris Tinsky, and Rachel Dreizin

There is NO Sunday School this Sunday for President's Day Weekend

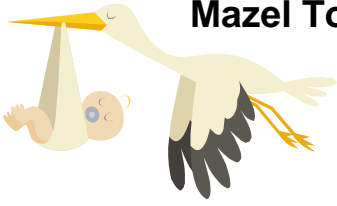
Make your reservations NOW!!

Family Shabbat Dinner Friday February 20
Services will feature the 3rd Grade religious school class
These students have worked very hard and are excited to share what they have learned. Please show them your support.

Dinner - Adults \$10 Religious school students free
Special guest -our ISJL Fellow, Amanda Rainey who will lead a drumming circle after dinner.



**PLEASE PLAN TO ATTEND THE
FEDERATION OF MACON & MIDDLE GEORGIA
ANNUAL MEETING
SUNDAY FEBRUARY 15 4:00 AT CSI**



Mazel Tov to Jennifer and Harris Rainbow on the birth of their daughter Allie Ivey born February 1. And Mazel Tov to grandparents Shelley & Steve Kruger and great grandfather Melvin Kruger



Lunch & Learn meets at Barnes & Noble on Wednesdays at noon



MAKE A NOTE OF THESE UPCOMING EVENTS:

March 1 - Religious school students will be delivering Shaloch Manot baskets

March 8 - Purim Carnival 11:00 – 1:00

March 9 - Purim Family dinner
Megillah Reading {Grease is the word}

March 20-22 -Scholar-in-Residence weekend featuring Dr. James Bowley

There are still two easy ways for you to help Congregation Sha'arey Israel make a little extra money

- 1.visit www.goodsearch.com for your online searches. This won't cost you anything but CSI makes a penny each time to search
2. for all your online shopping needs go to csimacon.org and click on our Amazon.com link.

every time you



CSI earns



Amazon.com announces their new [Amazon Game Downloads](#) store where you can download and play game instantly on your pc.



**Don't forget the CSI Gift Shop for all your gift needs.
Graduations * Weddings * Birthdays * Anniversaries
Lots of great Purim and Passover items!**



Parashat Yitro

This week's commentary was written by Rabbi Daniel S. Nevins, Dean of the Rabbinical School, JTS

Parashat Yitro is a play in three acts, starting with Act I, a backstory in Exodus 18. Moses reunites with his family, notably his wise father-in-law, Yitro (Jethro), who rejoices at the miraculous reunion and then mentors his inexperienced son-in-law in the art of religious leadership. Yitro teaches Moses how to bless God, offer sacrifice, and administer justice among his restive and distressed people.

Act II, chapter 19, describes a dramatic development in which the disorganized refugees assemble into a nation united at the base of a flaming mountain, ready to receive the explosive revelation directly from God. Act III, chapter 20, is the climactic moment of not only the Torah, but all of Jewish life. Indeed, the Decalogue has shaped human culture across time and space in ways that we cannot fathom. The coda of this final act is a call to worship—God instructs Moses to teach the people how to construct the Lord's altar. What other response is possible after what they have heard and seen?

Given this parashah's literary structure of background, development, and climax, it is tempting to skim the opening sections and cut to the great theophany of chapter 20. But doing so would diminish the power of the parashah to address us today. Sinai is not the beginning of our relationship with God, nor is it the end. It is the defining moment, yet the preparation for revelation is a more relevant model for our own meetings with the Divine. One of the preeminent teachers of Torah today is Michael Fishbane, the Nathan Cummings Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Chicago, and a frequent lecturer at JTS. In his new book, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*, Fishbane addresses the process of awakening from the dullness of "habitude" into awareness of the "mysterious vitality of divine effectivity." This emergence is the point of the Torah's prologue—of the narratives of Genesis and of the early life of Moses. In all of these passages, we chart the stirring soul, and perhaps begin to kindle such a stirring within ourselves.

Fishbane writes, "Many lives must be lived before Sinai is possible; and many teachers have to stand in the vastness before God's infinite 'Shall-Be,' pondering its truth and its implications for human life, before Sinai becomes a reality." He notes that one must "sift the deposits of living," registering both the achievements and failings of other people, in order for Sinai to become possible. This sifting is manifest in the passage of Moses from pampered child to zealous youth and then on to resolute and sagacious leader. This transition to leadership culminates in the first act of our parashah.

In chapter 18, Yitro observes with alarm how Moses sits before the people from dawn until dark, instructing them in the ways of God. "You will surely be worn out" by this practice, and do no favors for yourself or your people, he warns Moses. Moses frets that he has no choice—the people want divine instruction, and he is the only qualified judge. But Yitro persists—train a cadre of teachers, and God will be with you. In this way alone will the people "come to its place in peace."

Yitro's counsel is sensible, yet it is also counterintuitive. If the role of Moses is to bring people close to God, and if he is the most qualified teacher, then why shouldn't he do it himself? Yitro's insight is that this monopolization of spiritual leadership actually distances the people from God, since it makes Moses their exclusive mediator. This passage demonstrates the necessity of training a generation of religious leaders—no individual teacher, not even Moses, can suffice to teach the ways of God. It is this basic task of education—of learning from his mentor and creating structures of justice for his people—that sets the stage for revelation. The task of Moses is to help the people "sift the deposits of living" so that they will be ready for Sinai.

Fishbane asserts that it is not only culture and family history that prepares the people for revelation. Act II of our parashah, chapter 19, exposes Moses and the people of Israel to a shocking array of sights and sounds that break the heavy lid of habit and allow access to the hidden treasure that permeates all of reality. The pretext of revelation is also revelation—not

of words or wisdom but of the vastness and power of God in nature. Fishbane describes the effect of this physical turbulence upon the soul of Moses as the "violent vastness passing through the self as an awesome divine truth." Once Moses and the people have experienced the fire, the smoke, the shofar blasts, the bright light, and the ionized air of revelation-only then can they discern the Voice. "The great vastness of world-being is shaped into a sphere of religious instruction and duty for communal life."

Perhaps this is ancient history, a stage through which we need to pass on our way to revelation, but of no further significance? I don't think so, and neither did the ancient Rabbis. Playing on verse 19:2, "on this day they came to the Sinai desert," the Rabbis said that "the words of Torah should be new to you as if they were given on *this very day*" (Midrash *Tanchuma* and Rashi). I would go a step further: prepare yourself well on this day, and on this day you may again receive the Torah.

How to prepare for revelation? Reading Parashat Yitro with the help of Fishbane, it appears that we must prepare for the Voice in two ways—through *culture* and through *nature*. Culture—our experience of learning wisdom from teachers, parents, and ancestors—cultivates the soul. It prepares us with intellectual and moral insights to approach the vastness of divine Truth. Yet nature is also necessary for our encounter with God. We are material beings, embodied and aware of the pleasures and vulnerabilities of our physical state. When we explore places of natural grandeur, unleashing our suppressed sense of awe, then we open ourselves to the vastness of God.

Another way to say this is that the person who wishes to approach God must use the best tools available, studying ancient wisdom and seeking out wonder in the natural world. These two acts, corresponding to chapters 18 and 19 of Yitro, allow a person to take formless feeling and shape it into a set of principles and practices that make communal life possible. Something surprising about this plan is the unusual order. It is common in Jewish life to proceed from awe in nature to meditation on the Torah. This is the format of Psalm 19, and it is also our liturgical model every morning and evening in the blessings before Shema¹. First we find God in the universal rhythms of nature, and then we discern God's guidance in the particular path of Torah and mitzvot. But in Yitro, the order is reversed. First we prepare through education, and then we prepare through awe-inspiring exposure to God's power over nature. Perhaps the discrete ideas of education—the judiciary system designed by Yitro, for example—are fused together by the electricity of awe, and it is at this point that the prophet can discern the Word.

We are not Moses, you and I, but we can study ancient wisdom, and we can experience awe in nature. Combining these experiences, we may come to a new light, a new insight, and a fresh glimpse of God's Truth. We too can stand at Sinai, shaking and humbled by our glorious encounter with eternity.

~~~~~

**For other commentaries on this week's Torah portion check out these sites:**

[Aish.com](http://Aish.com)

[AJU](http://AJU)

[ISJL](http://ISJL)

[MyJewishLearning.com](http://MyJewishLearning.com)

[USCJ Torah Sparks](http://USCJ Torah Sparks)

~~~~~

Contact information:

CSI Board of Governors

President - Marty Koplin - president@csimacon.org

Vice-President - David Frolich - bb217@bellsouth.net

Recording Secretary - Debbie Ziesenhene - debbiez@cox.net

Corresponding Secretary - Jenna Denisar- jennakap@aol.com

Treasurer- Meredith Lipson - treasurer@csimacon.org

Ex-Officio - Shelley Davidson - lawonwheels@cox.net

Rabbi- Rabbi Rachel Bat-Or - rabbi@csimacon.org

