

Zahava

Zahava bat Devorah u'Micha'el

Parashat Yitro

<http://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.1.18/en/Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, published by JPS?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>

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SUMMARY

This week's Torah reading is *Parashat Yitro*, and I will be reading from *Sefer Shemot*, the Book of Exodus, Chapter 18, Verses 1-3. Soon after the Israelites went out from Egypt, Yitro--Moshe's father-in-law--visited Moshe, Moshe's wife Tziporah, and their two sons. Yitro sees Moshe at work and is concerned that Moshe spends all day leading the people in matters of politics and justice without relying on anyone else for help. Moshe follows Yitro's advice and appoints judges to help him lead the people.

The Israelites went out to the wilderness of Sinai in the third month after leaving Egypt, and they set up camp in front of Mount Sinai. God tells Moshe that the Israelites will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. After sharing this promise with the Israelites they respond, "All that God has spoken we will do." After three days of preparation the Israelites meet God at Mount Sinai surrounded by thunder and lightning, and they are so overwhelmed that they ask Moshe to stand between them and God. Moshe is called to go up to Mount Sinai. The Israelites hear God speak the *aseret hadibrot*, "The Ten Sayings"--often called the Ten Commandments. Then they ask that only Moshe speaks to them, not God, because they do not feel safe hearing God's voice.

QUESTIONS

1) When God is telling Moshe to prepare the Israelites for receiving Torah at Mt. Sinai, God tells Moshe to put a boundary around Mt Sinai and tell the Israelites to keep back and not approach the mountain. Why do you think God might want them to stay away from Mt Sinai? <<Pick 3>>

At first when the verse says that anyone who touches the mountain will die, that sounds kind of harsh. But when the medieval commentator Sforno says that God set boundaries around Mt. Sinai because God knew there would be thunder and smoke and that the mountain would shake it sounds like God cares about us and is trying to protect us.

2) In Jewish tradition, the first of the *Aseret ha-dibrot* (10 Commandments) is, “I am *Adonai* your God who led you out of the land of Egypt to be your God,” but in Christian traditions they don’t include this. Why do you think Jews would include this? <<Pick 3>>

Maybe Jews include, “I am *Adonai* your God who led you out of the land of Egypt” as one of the *Aseret Ha-Dibrot* because coming out of slavery is particularly meaningful to us. We think of the Israelites as our family or distant relatives.

3) The third of the *Aseret Ha-Dibrot* teaches that we should not make idols or even pictures of things in the skies, in the water, or on the land. What do you think God might be trying to tell us with this commandment? <<Pick 3>>

I think that the point of these words isn't really about not making sculptures or drawing. I think the point is that God wants us to be flexible and open to other ideas. Maybe God doesn't want us to get stuck thinking we know everything about a particular thing. God wants us to know that things can change and that our understandings of things can change, too.