

Shabbat Yitro Shalom



Rahav, Art by Sarah Beth

by Phyllis Chesler

Here comes Yitro, the priest with seven names, come all this way to see his weary son-in-law Moshe. He bows towards and kisses Moshe, although Rashi teaches us that it is unclear “who prostrated himself before whom.” Yitro arrives with his daughter Zipporah, Moshe’s wife, and with Gershom and Eliezer, Moshe’s sons. Yitro does not discuss Moshe’s family with him but, quickly enough, in only 13 verses, he appraises the situation and offers Moshe some good advice: Delegate, lest you wear yourself out.

What does it mean that both Yosef’s father-in-law is an

Egyptian priest (of On) and Moshe's father-in-law is a priest of Midian? It means that both men married out, and while Moshe's sons are lost to us, Yosef's sons become two of the twelve tribes. I'm not sure what this tells us.

What do we learn from the fact that Yitro came once he heard the news? He "rejoiced over all the good that Adonoy had done for Yisrael" (18:9).

His behavior presages that of Rahav, the Canaanite of Jericho, the innkeeper or prostitute who, at great risk, hides and thus saves Joshua's two spies. Like the Egyptian midwives, Shifra and Puah, Rahav chooses to save Israel, God's chosen people. Like Yitro, Rahav has also heard "how Hashem has dried up the water of the Sea of Reeds for you when you came out of Egypt." She knows even more about "what you [Israel subsequently] did to the two Emorite kings across the Jordan—to Sichon and Og—whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard our hearts melted...for Hashem your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth below." ([Joshua](#), 2:10-11).

Some believe that Yitro became a convert and set off to proselytize others in Midian; if so, how sad that he left before the revelation at Sinai—and in the very parsha that bears his name. There is little doubt that Rahav converts to Judaism and plans to join Israel in the Holy Land. The spies give her a "scarlet cord" which is known from the legend of Peretz, King David's ancestor, the twin who "actually came through first." According to the most excellent Tikva Frymer-Kensky, (z"l), in her [Reading the Women of the Bible](#), "the scarlet cord brings Rahav into the august company of the barrier-breakers of David's ancestry."

We also expect to be redeemed through the pagan convert Ruth, who belongs to a country, Moav, forever forbidden to "dwell among God's congregation."

Yitro, Rahav, and Ruth all teach us that the Torah is for

everyone, Jews and non-Jews alike, if only they choose to embrace it. Really, this is a very radical idea.