



[Search All Issues](#)

[Community Directory](#)

February 13, 2004/Shevat 21 5764, Vol. 56, No. 21

The first convert

Torah study

RABBI ZVI HOLLAND
Yitro/Exodus 18:1-20:23

STORIES IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURES

[Crossing religious lines](#)
[Continuing education](#)
[Parenting Jewishly](#)

COMMUNITY

[Men's Night Out](#)
[Synagogue among Red Rocks](#)
[Federation giving grows](#)

HEALTH

[Desert Mountain cagers](#)

NATION

[Bush embracing Sharon proposals](#)

WORLD

[Israel girls for The Hague](#)

ISRAEL

[Kalkilya 'fence'](#)
[Palestinians fight Gaza withdrawal](#)

OPINION

[Editorial - Jewish inoculation](#)
[Commentary - From flings to troths](#)
[Commentary - Visit to another Israel](#)
[In the Mail - Letters to the Editor](#)

ARTS

[Shlock 'n' roll](#)

BUSINESS

[People on the move](#)

SINGLES COLUMN

[Navigating dating](#)

COMING UP

[This Week](#)

MILESTONES

[Births](#)
[B'nai Mitzvah](#)
[Obituaries](#)

SENIORS

[Events](#)

SINGLES

[Datebook](#)

EDUCATION

[Day schools promote education](#)

TORAH STUDY

[The first convert](#)

Ten plagues in Egypt, the splitting of the sea, the miraculous victory over Amalek and the revelation on Sinai were all earth-shattering events with international impact. Imagine if they would occur in today's world. The faithful would arrive in droves; people from all walks of life would travel at great expense to become a part of the Jewish people.

But as it happens, the Torah tells us about only one. When Yitro heard about the Exodus and the unequivocal way in which God revealed His relationship with the Jewish people, Yitro alone came. Joining the Jewish people was a commitment that transcended a spiritual one; it was a tremendous physical sacrifice. The desert was not a comfortable place to live and the Jewish people had no homeland.

But Yitro came. Yitro was the exception.


What could have inspired a person who was a prominent religious leader to renounce his very identity to follow the truth? We need to realize that the Jewish people were at that time not a nation that had survived millennia; rather, they were a band of escaped slaves with no food, water or shelter.

There are two hints in the text, which reveal some of Yitro's personal qualities. The first, "Jethro (Yitro) priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, how the Lord had brought Israel out from Egypt." (Exodus 18:1) Why is Yitro identified as "priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law"? What is the significance of this dual title?

Rashi cites the Mechilta (a rabbinic commentary), which explains that this is a juxtaposition of the lofty position Yitro held prior to his joining Israel with his new identity as father-in-law of Moses. Moses, who once would have been identified as Yitro's son-in-law, now has in Yitro's eyes become the primary religious personality. Yitro now identifies himself as Moses' father-in-law.

Humility and truth-seeking are in the roots of his decision. Humility is a true appreciation for greatness, which is grounded in an accurate valuation of self and truth-seeking, which values truth over self at all costs. Yitro, a humble man and genuine seeker of truth, saw the greatness of Moses, and he was willing to reassess his own identity and now views himself as Moses' father-in-law.

We also find another quality in Yitro. "Moses then recounted to his father-in-law everything that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them." (Exodus 18:8)



Yitro's response is unique. "And Jethro rejoiced over all the kindness that the Lord had shown Israel when He delivered them from the Egyptians." (Exodus 18:9)

All of the commentators note that the word used for rejoice, *vayichad*, is never used in any other context to communicate joy. Many commentators explain this as a form of outward physical joy, where he felt joy physically. Here we find the second ingredient in Yitro's greatness, the ability to be profoundly inspired to the point that it infuses our entire being. His humility and truthfulness allowed him to see the glory of God, but only his ability to be completely inspired in his entire totality is what set him aside from the entire world.

We in our lives must aspire to Yitro's qualities if we are to achieve a full self-actualization. We must be humble enough to learn from everyone and be truthful enough to decide what is right. Most importantly, we must be able to be inspired so we can implement what we discover.

Rabbi Zvi Holland is the director of the Phoenix Community Kollel/Aish Hatorah Scottsdale.

[Home](#)