



Celebrating 10 Years of Ten Minutes of Torah

Shavuot Study Guide—Parashat Yitro

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This year marks the 10th anniversary of **Ten Minutes of Torah**. Each weekday, over 20,000 subscribers receive an e-mail that brings the Jewish world to them. From Torah commentaries written by scholars to recipes for baking challah, *Ten Minutes of Torah* explores the great variety of Jewish life. Join the many readers of **Ten Minutes of Torah** and subscribe now.

What better time is there to celebrate *Ten Minutes of Torah* than on Shavuot! Like many Jewish holidays, Shavuot has its origins as an agricultural festival. The word *shavuot* means “weeks,” and Shavuot refers to the period of seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot. The timing of the festival marked the end of the spring barley harvest and the beginning of the summer wheat harvest. Our ancestors would bring an offering from their harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem.

After the destruction of the Temple such offerings could no longer be made. Over time, this offering was replaced by reading the Ten Commandments and the Book of Ruth. By the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, Shavuot became associated with the Ten Commandments and the festival became known as *Z'man Matan Torateinu*, the “Time of the Giving of the Law.”

One of the most distinctive customs of Shavuot is *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, an evening-long study session held on the night of Shavuot. *Tikkun* means a “set order” of something and refers to the order in which the texts are read. The custom originated with the mystics of Safed in the 16th century, and today, many Jews stay up all night on Shavuot reading and studying a variety of sacred texts. Traditionally, readings from the Torah and Talmud are included.

Many synagogues hold a *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*. Some host programs that go on all night, culminating in morning services at sunrise. Other congregations gather for a few hours of study. Whether one is planning to attend an all-night session, study for a few hours, join with others, or study on one’s own, Shavuot is a wonderful time to encounter sacred text.

We asked several rabbis on the staff of the Union for Reform Judaism to share their own encounters with our text. Each video explores a different text. Some focus on a commandment. Others challenge a difficult passage, while others grapple with age-old questions.

These videos provide interesting responses to our sacred writings whether you are studying with others or watching these videos on your own. This guide offers a couple of questions to accompany the video, spark conversation, and give the reader an opportunity for further reflection.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President, Union for Reform Judaism

Text—*Parashat Yitro*, Exodus 18:1–20:23

reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/yitro

Summary:

- Yitro brings his daughter Zipporah and her two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to his son-in-law Moses. (18:1–12)
- Moses follows Yitro’s advice and appoints judges to help him lead the people. (18:13–27)
- The Children of Israel camp in front of Mount Sinai. Upon hearing the covenant, the Israelites respond, “All that God has spoken we will do.” (19:1–8)
- After three days of preparation, the Israelites encounter God at Mount Sinai. (19:9–25)
- God gives the Ten Commandments aloud directly to the people. (20:1–14)
- Frightened, the Children of Israel ask Moses to serve as an intermediary between God and them. Moses tells the people not to be afraid. (20:15–18)

Questions:

Rabbi Jacobs suggests that prior to the major Revelation of the Ten Commandments, Moses has his own revelation while speaking with his father-in-law, Yitro. Yitro sees how hard Moses is working, even at the expense of his own family, and he encourages Moses to find a greater balance in his life. Who can we turn to for advice when we need help setting our own priorities? How do we create balance in our own lives?

Our greatest sources of connection come from our encounters with others. How can we ensure that our encounters with family and friends have the potential to be revelatory moments?